



A CONTEMPORARY THEATRE in association with
MARIN THEATRE COMPANY presents

HOTTER THAN EGYPT

By Yussef El Guindi

Directed By John Langs

Dramaturged by Nakissa Etemad

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January/February 2022

Volume 17, No. 2

In This Issue

Encore Media Group acknowledges that we are on the lands of the Duwamish People, and their other Coast Salish relations—past and present. We recognize that these lands are unceded and we support the Duwamish Tribe in their struggle to gain Federal Tribal Recognition. We honor with gratitude the land itself. This acknowledgement does not take the place of authentic relationships with Indigenous communities, which we seek to build. We hope that this step of honoring these lands, and the First People of Seattle who remain their stewards, will help us become better neighbors to the Duwamish Tribe and all the people who have called the Pacific Northwest home since time immemorial.

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and Community.**

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Encore Stages is an Encore arts program that features stories about our local arts community alongside information about performances. Encore Stages is a publication of Encore Media Group. We also publish specialty publications, including the SIFF Guide and Catalog, Official Seattle Pride Guide, and Seattle Art Dealers' SADA. Learn more at encorespotlight.com.

Encore Stages features the following organizations:



Book-It Repertory Theatre: What It Was Then, What It Is Now, and Preparations for the Future



For over 30 years, Book-It Repertory Theatre—located in The Armory building at Seattle Center, just underneath the iconic Space Needle—has been transforming “great literature into great theatre, through simple and sensitive production.” This process serves another part of their mission: “To inspire our audiences to read.”

With about 150 adaptations to its credit, Book-It Repertory Theatre is clearly dedicated to its mission. The nonprofit organization educates youth on literature and theatre through this process. Not only do they provide students the resources to produce plays, they also introduce children to famous authors like YuYi Morales, Mem Fox, Derrick Barnes, Jon Scieszka, Patricia Polacco, and many others. Book-It partners with schools and libraries throughout the greater Seattle area offering live performances, workshops, and giving children the opportunity to produce plays. While Book-It has primarily

produced and performed plays in local Seattle venues, they have appeared in Hartford, CT, Portland, OR, Baltimore, MD, and more.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought disruption and change to almost every aspect of our lives, and without a doubt, the arts have been impacted as well. To learn more about Book-It, and how it has been impacted by the pandemic, I met with Gillian Jorgensen, Book-It Repertory Theatre’s education director and long-time arts educator, and Jordi Montes, who has held different positions at Book-It, including tour manager and artistic producer.



Jordi Montes prepares kits for kids.



Jordi Montes in rehearsal for "Koala Lou," an interactive show Book-It will take to classrooms and community spaces.

"...we take books and turn them into plays and perform at schools and libraries around Washington—that's what we did prior to the pandemic. When the pandemic happened, obviously, there was no more of that for the year..."

They talked with me about their careers, being involved in arts education, and their experiences with today's youth during the pandemic. Jorgensen and Montes reflect on what has changed for the organization, what has remained the same, and what they are looking forward to in the future.

"Since the pandemic, a lot has had to change...and we have had to shift. There was stuff that was hard and we were hesitant. We tour shows, we take books and turn them into plays and perform at schools and libraries around Washington—that's what we did prior to the pandemic. When the pandemic happened, obviously, there was no more of that for the year, so we had to shift immensely," described Montes.

She continued to tell me how Book-It had to restructure its programming to fit pandemic needs. Jorgensen and Montes, along with the rest of the team, put together a few different activities via Zoom, like workshops that were creative drama adventures, which are "essentially long-form

improv guided by a teaching artist," Jorgensen explained in an email. "We created acting, writing, visual art, and movement challenges throughout the pandemic," added Montes. They kept the kids busy.

As Book-It slowly brings back in person programming, they wanted to preserve the accessibility that the pandemic produced, so they turned the physical kits into digital ones. Jorgensen admitted in a confidential tone that their programs, in the past, were "inaccessible." She then went on to explain how, historically, the main barriers for Book-It's educational programs were distance and cost. For students further out from cities, the costs of bringing Book-It into their classroom were significantly higher than for districts within cities. Actors traveling out into suburbs creates a heavier cost that ends up being piled onto the school budget, that doesn't have much to spare. It turns out that this option has been really popular, and many school districts are expected to continue using digital

“One of the deepest changes over the last 25 years, going on 30, is that there is a broader sense of student-focused material and the need to have student voices truly included.”

offerings for the sake of convenience and preserving opportunity.

However, Book-It is still hard at work making in-person experiences happen. For example, in-class performances are being offered now. “The whole idea is to bring students back on site,” explained Jorgensen, in a form where one actor visits a group of students in person. “There are a lot of social skills that students are missing,” she added, explaining more about why Book-It is determined to resume in-person programming.

She also added that Book-It wants to vividly present to students that jobs in the arts are a reality. To relay the same message to older students, Book-It is also offering a program called Story-Makers, in which older-aged students write, rehearse, and perform a play in the one hour they have with Book-It. Among their many goals, the organization wants to share and perform stories that students will relate to.

Oftentimes in life, we must think about the past in order to infer how we got to where we are today, and

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Education Director
Gillian Jorgensen and
Tour Manager Jordi
Montes.

“... there has always been this desire to make sure that students feel seen, heard, important, part of the conversation, part of the story ...”

how we can make the best decisions for the future. Jorgensen reflected on how arts education has changed over the course of her 25-year career: “One of the deepest changes over the last 25 years, going on 30, is that there is a broader sense of student-focused material and the need to have student voices truly included.” One way that Jorgensen sees arts educators responding to this need is by more consistently including social-emotional learning in theatre art education.

While this is one important change in theatre arts programs, there has also been a lack of progression in different areas of the industry. “The field is moving along really slowly,” she added. “People aren’t able to stay in the field for that long because it often doesn’t pay well.” Jorgensen described how

theatre and arts education lack new, excited, and driven college graduates that are passionate to enter the field. Many of those graduates are driven away because of the low salary. She mentioned, however, that not all theatres are behind. A handful, including many in Seattle and, Jorgensen specifically mentioned, New Victory Theater in New York City, are “leaders in arts education and opportunities for students.” These organizations are spearheading renewed efforts to make “sure to compensate for art, which is really awesome.”

The pandemic has taken a great toll on students. Part of moving forward is reminding students that they are important and needed. Today’s youth need to be inspired in a way that makes them driven and passionate about what they truly

love to do. These activities that have been categorized as “unnecessary” during the early stages of the pandemic are now coming back, stronger than ever before.

How can we show young people that their passions are really necessary and make a difference in the world? Montes sees one solution in Book-It’s educational programming: “I’ve been working at Book-It for about eight or nine years now, and I feel that there has always been this desire to make sure that students feel seen, heard, important, part of the conversation, part of the story—that we bring stories that they see themselves in. Right now, it’s important for us as we are trying to connect with [kids] in real life.”

The pandemic has put Book-It in situations of having to adapt and improvise. But it did not stump them. They carried out their programs throughout the pandemic and are moving forward into the new year with in-person performances in January. Jorgensen and Montes, like other educators around the world, are dedicated to their work of providing opportunities to children, giving them memorable experiences, and skills to carry them through their lives and future careers. Theatres like Book-It are here to provide our youth with opportunities; they are here to support, and educate the community.

Malak Kassem is a 16-year-old high school senior from New York City. She joined Teentix Newsroom as a writer in September of 2021. She was a writer for three years and editor for one year at NYC Lab School’s paper, The Lab Report. She also has had multiple projects and roles with other organizations, such as 826NYC and Youth Journalism International. She loves to read and write, and plans to major in journalism when she goes to college next year. She loves to travel, cook, and visit museums.

This article was written on special assignment for Encore Stages through the TeenTix Press Corps, a program that promotes critical thinking, communication and information literacy through criticism and journalism practice for teens. TeenTix is a youth empowerment and arts access nonprofit. teentix.org



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Please contact Brianna Hansen to learn more about how we connect art, culture, and community.



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Having a hard time leaving the house when the weather is cold? To keep you entertained during hibernation season, we've found four performances you can watch this winter from the comfort of your home:

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Fannie: The Music and Life of Fannie Lou Hamer

Seattle Rep
Streaming now at SeattleRep.org

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ACT – A Contemporary Theatre
in association with Marin Theatre Company presents

HOTTER THAN EGYPT

A World Premiere Play by Yussef El Guindi

Directed by John Langs
Dramaturged by Nakissa Etemad

January 28 – February 20, 2022

CAST, in order of appearance

Paul Morgan Stetler* – Paul
Wasim No'mani – Seif
Naseem Etemad – Maha
Jen Taylor* – Jean
Ahmad Kamal* – Boatman/Museum Guard/Doorman

UNDERSTUDIES

Ahmad Kamal* – Seif Understudy
Frank Lawler* – Paul Understudy
Nima Rakhshanifar - Boatman/Museum Guard/Doorman
Understudy
Vahishta Vafadari – Maha Understudy
Candace Vance – Jean Understudy

CREATIVE TEAM

Yussef El Guindi* – Playwright
John Langs – Director
Nakissa Etemad – Dramaturg
Carey Wong – Set Designer
Melanie Burgess – Costume Designer
Robert J. Aguilar – Lighting Designer
Johanna Melamed – Sound Designer
Nihan Yesil – Composer
Lynne Soffer – Dialect Coach
Ian Bond – Intimacy and Fight Director
Alanah Pascual – Assistant Director
Charlotte Emrys – Assistant Scenic Designer
Jennifer Oaster – Assistant Costume Designer
Trevor Cushman – Assistant Lighting Designer
Lindsey Welliver* – Core Company Liaison

STAGE MANAGEMENT

Tori Thompson* – Stage Manager
David Hsieh – Production Assistant

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Running Time: This performance runs approximately 1 hour 45 minutes. There will be no intermission.

ASL interpreted performance will be February 17 at 7:30pm.

*Members of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States

*ACT Core Company

Photography, video, or audio recording of this performance by any means whatsoever are strictly prohibited.

Audience members are cordially reminded to silence all electronic devices. Please do not walk on the stage before, during, or after the show. Masks covering the nose and mouth must be worn by all patrons to help prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus.



Directing the *Hotter Than Egypt* World Premiere

A Letter from Director and Artistic Director John Langs

One of the great benefits of having a contemporary theatre in our community is that we, the audience, have a chance to experience the new voices that will shape the culture and the theatre of the tomorrow.

Over the last 55 years, with your generous assistance, ACT has had the opportunity to support these voices as they sharpen and grow. In the strange in-between time during the pandemic, ACT has honed its mission around nurturing the theatre makers of the next generation. We believe that many of these groundbreaking artists are plying their craft right here in our corner of the world. Seattle's voice is unique. We are a region full of incredible talent, deep thinkers, social critics, dynamic entertainers, and if A Contemporary Theatre isn't "all in" in its support of local excellence, then who will be?

Tonight we continue the tradition of creating and present world premieres at ACT and it feels right and befitting our renewed mission that we bring the theatre back to life with Yussef El Guindi's intimate portrait of personal revolution. This is Yussef's fifth outing on our stages, and we have all been celebrating how his work has grown and sharpened in his role as a Core Company artist.

Because we are not alone in our appetite for this work, it's been an honor to serve in collaboration with Marin Theatre Company (MTC). I would like to give a very grateful shout out to Nakissa Etemand, the Associate Artistic Director of MTC for her partnership and fierce advocacy of this work. We are so grateful that this play will reach beyond our stage and into the national conversation as we bring *Hotter than Egypt* to life as a community.

As a director, I wanted to mention how lucky I feel to be invited, once again, to collaborate on my second Yussef play. His characters contain beautiful contradictions. The situations are in turns cringe-inducing, hilarious and heartbreaking. *Hotter Than Egypt* is a tantalizing play for all the senses and invites a nimbleness and intelligence on the part of the creative team and the audience. Yussef creates a world that you can fall into through his very specific lens of cultural collision and his ability to craft situations that give rise to raw humanity. One of the great strengths of any artist is authentic curiosity about the human condition. This quality matched with an audacious spirit and a poet's heart is what separates a good play from a great one.

As the evening goes on the layers come off and we are asked to go on a journey of shedding what we no longer need and burning down to something essential, universal, simple, and human. Tonight, as you sit here in your seat, you are not only a member of the audience and by extension the ACT family, but also a vital contributor to the creation of something brand new. We hope you enjoy the journey. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts for coming back to the theatre!

Warm Regards,

John

"We believe that many of these groundbreaking artists are plying their craft right here in our corner of the world. Seattle's voice is unique. We are a region full of incredible talent, deep thinkers, social critics, dynamic entertainers, and if A Contemporary Theatre isn't "all in" in its support of local excellence, then who will be?"

From this time of reflection ACT is emerging with a renewed commitment to our mission, values, and culture. We are publishing them here to invite conversation and hold ourselves accountable.

OUR MISSION

ACT is a contemporary theatre where artistic ambition and civic engagement unite.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

ACT Theatre acknowledges that the land on which this theatre stands is part of the ancestral homelands of the **Muckleshoot, Suquamish, Duwamish, Snoqualmie, and Tulalip** peoples along the waterways of the **Salish Sea**. We honor the **29 federally recognized sovereign nations** within the state of Washington as well as **the many other unrecognized peoples in this area**.

As we gather and strive to share stories of our world with joy and clarity, **we honor with gratitude the original stewards and storytellers of these lands — past, present, and future**. We value the immense contributions, sacrifices and **resilience of Indigenous People** here, and fully **acknowledge** the profound multi-generational impact that colonization has had on Native people everywhere, including ongoing disparities, racism, and political and social **INVISIBILITY**. **To heal, we need truth and understanding that everyone actively participates in, together.**

This land acknowledgment is one small act in recognizing the importance of continuing to care for the land and acknowledge our important relationship with the original people of this place we call home who are still here. **We are all in relationship to each other.**

WE BELIEVE ACT STATEMENT OF VALUES AND COMMITMENTS

ACT believes in the power of theatre to change lives. For too long, the lives our institution has focused on have been predominantly white and able-bodied. We acknowledge that ACT **has worked inside biased systems that have continued to center only a small group of our global community**. We want our art to be joyful and our work to have a spirit of adventure, so we commit to building thoughtful guardrails to bolster an environment where we can all be brave and buoyant together.

Developed by the ACT Core Company, this statement of values and commitments was created to ensure the well-being of **artists, collaborators, board members, and staff to engage in the spirit of an ever-improving process.**

This document is one action in support of our fight to ensure the well-being of all who come through ACT's doors.

OUR VALUES

We are artist-led and art-centered.

We believe in creating a safe space in which to do dangerous work.

We depend on each other for clear, honest, and responsible communication.

We believe that the building of excellent art is risky and joyful, and takes time.

We strive to ensure that artistic trust is baked into the way we work.



HOTTER THAN EGYPT

By Yusef El Guindi

Directed by John Langs
Dramaturged by Nakissa Etemad

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PATRON INFORMATION

Emergency Evacuation Procedures

In the event of an emergency, please wait for an announcement for further instructions. Ushers will be available for assistance.

Smoking Policy

Smoking is NOT allowed in any part of the theatre or within 25 feet of the entrance.

Firearms Policy

No firearms of any kind are allowed in any part of the theatre.

Food

No outside food or drink is allowed in our building and theatres.

Please note: there will be no concessions available for *Hotter Than Egypt*. Boxed water will be offered for sale: \$2 (credit card only).

Accessibility for 2022 Mainstage Season

ACT offers the Figaro MobiTxt® Closed Captioning System for audience members who are deaf and hard of hearing. This system is offered at all performances in our mainstage theatres. Devices can be requested upon arrival at the theatre. ACT is also equipped with the Williams Sound® Audio Equipment, which amplifies stage sounds with the aid of headsets (ask staff for assistance). American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation is offered on one performance of a play's run: *Hotter Than Egypt* on Thursday, February 17 at 7:30pm, *The Thin Place* on Thursday, April 7 at 7:30pm, *Sweat* on Thursday, May 19 at 7:30pm. Wheelchair seating is also available.

Lost and Found

Email service@acttheatre.org or call 206.292.7676 between 12:00pm and 5:00pm, Tues–Fri.

Address and Website

ACT - A Contemporary Theatre
700 Union Street, Seattle, WA 98101
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www.acttheatre.org

Group Sales

Groups of 10 or more can save on most productions. Group sales are only processed through email; please email groups@acttheatre.org between 12:00pm and 5:00pm, Tues–Fri.

Courtesy around Perfume

Please be considerate and keep personal fragrance to a minimum.

COVID Safety Policy

As required by King County, all patrons 12 and over will be required to provide proof of full vaccination or negative COVID PCR test.

ACT requires masking and verification of full vaccination status (2 doses of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine or 1 dose of the Johnson and Johnson vaccine) or proof of a negative COVID PCR test within 72 hours of arrival at the theatre for a performance.

Children 5–11 are not required to provide proof of Covid-19 vaccination or a negative test result. However, vaccination or a negative PCR test are strongly encouraged.

All patrons regardless of vaccination status or age must be masked (mask covering the nose, mouth and chin) at all times while in the theatre or building.

Please visit acttheatre.org for our complete policy.

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Props Artisan

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Props Artisan

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Douglas Decker
Wigmaker

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Stage Manager

David Hsieh
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*AEA



A Letter from Managing Director **ANITA SHAH**

Welcome Home. Welcome Home. Welcome Home.

I am thrilled to have the opportunity to write to you today as I take on the honor of being ACT's Managing Director. Over the course of the many conversations that led to my being here, I was increasingly impressed with the important and meaningful work that ACT strives to engage in, both on and off the stage. It became clear that this was the right home for me. It is deeply gratifying to join the team and continue to build on the work that began during our time away from all of you.

After an emotional return to the stage and the gift of once again having a live audience fill the theatre with our beloved *A Christmas Carol*, we find ourselves deeply energized. ACT returns this year delighted to be able to do the thing we do best: present innovative, challenging, entertaining, and relevant work.

It is with great humility and gratitude that we recognize the privilege of being here today. We are grateful for your support as we weathered the challenges of being forced to close our doors temporarily. ACT was not idle during this time. In addition to the digital works offered last year, ACT took the opportunity to look within and begin the work of ensuring that we are living our mission and values in everything we do. This work will be ongoing, and we are excited about our audiences joining us on this journey.

That we can open our doors once again is due in large part to all of you, and we can't say it enough — thank you.

The theatre is where we go to see perspectives that differ from our own, to promote social discourse, to laugh, to cry, to be challenged, and to be reminded that we are not alone. The Arts are a vital part of our community, and you are an integral part of their continued survival during these uncertain times.

Hotter Than Egypt brings to the stage our 5th World Premiere with playwright Yussef El Guindi. It is a milestone we could not be prouder of and reaffirms ACT's commitment to create new work, nurture talent, and bring new voices to our collective dialogue. The season is a small but mighty one. We follow *Hotter Than Egypt* with the West Coast premiere of *The Thin Place*, and jubilantly close our season with *Sweat*, the show we were poised to bring to you in March of 2020.

We thank you for being here with us today. One of the many things we learned during the pandemic is that there is no substitute for live performance. There is no substitute for being a part of an ephemeral moment that exists only for those gathered in a particular time and space. Today's moment will never exist again. Your continued generosity ensures that ACT will.

It is my privilege to join ACT at this poignant moment of inflection and renewal. I have been inspired and humbled by the dedication of my colleagues and look forward to being a part of the rich history of this organization.

We can't say it enough. Welcome home.

Best regards,

Anita

"The theatre is where we go to see perspectives that differ from our own, to promote social discourse, to laugh, to cry, to be challenged, and to be reminded that we are not alone."

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**ACT supporters provide the funding
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That Persistence of Vision

An Interview with Yussef El Guindi

Yussef El Guindi is no stranger to ACT — a member of the Core Company, the internationally acclaimed Seattle playwright has premiered 4, now 5, plays here. Read about his take on the playwriting process, from inspiration to development to the excitement of a World Premiere.

Your characters feel so real; even just reading the script, they jump off the page. What do you do to fill out their backstories/lives while planning them?

Thank you for saying that. I don't plan or overthink them, or the play as a whole. Usually, the spur to writing is the aliveness of some characters that nudge their way into my waking life. They hang out with me as I go about my day, getting ever louder and more insistent, presenting me with hints of what they're about, where they are and what they want. Even the latter can be vague. But it's that persistence of vision, if you will, the ever-deeper pulse of that aliveness that finally makes me start typing. Once the writing begins, the journey of the play starts to show itself through the characters. The characters determine the action of the play. It really isn't a conceit when writers say "the characters took over." If they're alive enough, they do. And when that happens, I feel more like a host at a party — where all the attendees seem to have invited themselves — making sure everyone has enough edibles and refreshments and sort of stepping back and letting them do their thing. Stepping in only when I need to, like when a conversation seems to be going on too long, or someone seems to be hogging the conversation to the exclusion of other people I want to hear from; or I may interject a prompt to nudge the direction and mood at certain points.


Both comedic and dramatic tension play huge roles in your work. Why do you think it's important to your work to maintain a balance between both?

I don't really work at this either. I think it's just the way I see the world: as a comedic and tragic crap-show that has funny bits, as well as moments that make you feel awful — sometimes within two breaths of each other. For me, this is true to life in that our lives are neither wholly

tragic nor completely fun-filled affairs. Even those who have the worst luck, have suffered greatly, even they get to have meal breaks, so to speak, and a good laugh, even if it's at their own unfortunate predicament. This is also a very Egyptian thing: to laugh in the face of the worst that life throws at you. Not to would be to succumb to the full weight of all those awful things that come at you, and sink. As one of the characters in the play says, it is indeed a survival tool.

This is the World Premiere of *Hotter Than Egypt!* Are there any parts that stick out to you as particularly magical or difficult about the new play development process?

In terms of difficulty, everything. Every word, beat, scene, the whole arc of the play, the questions you have to ask to get it right, the things you hope it's achieving — most of all, the hope that the play as a whole is greater than the sum of its parts. That it has resonance. That it grabs the minds of the audience in the same way that it grabbed and held you for several months. But the difficulties involved in getting a play and a production right are also what constitutes the magical aspects of the experience — if you do manage to achieve those goals. And here's the other magical part: in the same way characters may often surprise me by the choices they make, I'm frequently surprised by that very resonance I'd hoped for. No writer, or any artist, is ever fully in control of the meanings that may be generated by the work. It's impossible to control all the variables at play. So, there'll be moments both in the writing, and production of a play where I'll feel like I'm being reintroduced to the play in ways I had never imagined. It's a strange thing to be so very intimate with something and then — if you, and everyone else involved in the production has got it right — find yourself seeing it as if for the first time. And being surprised by it.

A close-up portrait of Youssef El Guindi, a man with a beard and mustache, smiling slightly. He is wearing a dark jacket over a patterned sweater. The background is a textured wall with reddish-brown and grey tones.

“ACT has been a godsend for me as a playwright. It came at just the right time in my development. I was getting a lot of productions in small to mid-size theaters, but only one big LORT venue had produced a play of mine at that time. I needed a well-established, decent sized theatre to challenge me to step up my game in terms of playing to a larger, and different kind of audience. What was key here was that first invitation wasn’t the last. It has been a support that has now lasted over 10 years. Hotter Than Egypt will be my fifth production with ACT. Knowing ACT has my back, so to speak, has been a great spur for me to continue writing.” —Yussef El Guindi

Why theatre? Why is a play the way you chose to tell this story? Clearly, your plays are inspired by both international and interpersonal conflict.

Being a child of several cultures, border-bounding, POV readjustments, code-switching and all things one does when entering one unfamiliar territory after another is part of what informs my plays, as it has my life. If you do this long enough, never being able to completely settle, then you find your “home” is nestled between all those places. I sometimes wonder what strengths as a writer I would have if I had been born and raised in one culture. I fantasize that I’d have a stronger comfort level with one language, which

would allow me to be both more specific, and nuanced, and still sound familiar to an audience. Other strengths are acquired from having lived in several countries. But of course, you’re always curious about the experiences/ life you could’ve had.

And regarding why theatre: as much as I enjoy films and TV shows, the latter mediums are more or less glorified “Zoom” experiences for me. We gather in person to tell stories because we have to. It’s a need — emotional, physical. Theatre may limp for a while, audiences may be thin for various reasons, but theatre as a way to share our experiences will always be with us.

Dramaturgy: Where Artistic and Creative Ideas Thrive

By Tess Berger

Hotter Than Egypt is a co-production with Marin Theatre Company. Dramaturg (and Marin Theatre Company Associate Artistic Director) Nakissa Etemad is passionate about the art of dramaturgy.

Dramaturgy exists as an undercurrent throughout almost every part of the theatrical process, building worlds and bringing attention to aspects of a play in different ways from the set, costumes, lights, sound and acting. For this reason, it's one of the least understood facets of theatre. This in no way diminishes its importance.



What is a Dramaturg?

According to *Hotter Than Egypt* Dramaturg Nakissa Etemad, the best way to think about a dramaturg is as “the midwife in the birthing of a play.” She explains, “The dramaturg is the person who focuses on the storytelling, analyzes the play as a piece of literature. We’re the advocate and representative of the playwright, sounding board for playwright and director, a mediator and diplomat. We represent the audience before the audience gets there. We put the play in its context and provide background research that pertains to the characters and world of the play. We’re archeologists and anthropologists, rebuilding a real world on stage. We are also the number one fan of the playwright and the play!”

Nakissa didn’t always know she wanted to be a dramaturg. It wasn’t until she studied abroad as an exchange student in Paris and took critical studies classes that she embraced her love of the theatre. “I saw in Paris that people made careers out of being artists,” she says. When she returned to her undergraduate program at University of California San Diego, Nakissa interviewed for admission into a too-full acting class, and when her professor (also the Associate Artistic Director at San Diego Rep) learned of her classes

and interests, he suggested she’d be a good “dramaturg” and to come work as his literary intern. From there, Nakissa became the dramaturg on the first show he ever directed there, dramaturging professionally at San Diego Rep while going on to get her MFA in Dramaturgy from UCSD.

So what makes a dramaturg? Moving quickly between the artistic and the analytical and living comfortably in the overlap lends itself to the field. Nakissa’s family contributed to her own love for it. “My father was a literal rocket scientist. He was the first Iranian in the American space program (called Mr. Apollo in Iran) — he was an engineer, and I have that brain in me. I love logic, I love structure, I love analysis — I have a very mathematical brain. I also have my mother in me, who’s a multimedia collage artist and painter. I want to be creative, work with people, work from the heart, focus on imagination, but I also love reconstructing the parts that make the whole. Dramaturgy is perfect for how my brain and heart work.”

The Dramaturgy of *Hotter Than Egypt*

One aspect of theatre that heavily involves dramaturgy is the new work development process. As a World Premiere, *Hotter Than Egypt* went through rigorous steps to get to

the version actually performed onstage. It was for the 2020 Colorado New Play Summit that playwright Yussef El Guindi asked Nakissa to dramaturg the development process. The two had known each other for quite a few years (they're fellow Resident Artists of Golden Thread Productions in the Bay Area) before working together on the play, but she'd never dramaturged for him. She says, "I read the play to see if I connected with the material and I loved it after about 3 pages. I love the two cultures coming together. It helps the characters redefine their own identities as well as learn from other people how to live their lives, how to experience things in a new way. I love the passion of the characters and the discovery that each character has — those small moments of connection that show how travel can profoundly change your perspective." In addition to the brilliance of *Hotter Than Egypt* itself, Nakissa was drawn to the play for more personal reasons. "I'm Iranian American, and part of the Middle Eastern diaspora along with Yussef. I want to introduce my culture — Egypt is different from Iran, but similar in a lot of ways — to non-Middle Eastern audience members, and to celebrate it with our own communities. I've always in my life felt a duality of culture, so I've always responded to plays that discuss that. It's a culture clash, a culture collision, but also a culture coming-together, a culture blending."

One of the most exciting parts of the show isn't even part of the show itself: *Hotter Than Egypt* is a co-production

with Marin Theatre Company. Ultimately using the same design, cast, and core creative team, bringing the play to both Seattle and then Marin "extends the life of the World Premiere process and contributes to the legacy of the play." New play development doesn't end until the show

freezes for opening, and even then, as is the magic of live performance, the play is still a bit different every night. Audiences play a huge role in that. Nakissa relates, "Yussef's writing lifts off the page when it's read out loud. He often tells me that he understands the play most when he hears the audience reaction, so to provide him two sets of audiences, two different communities — we're all going to learn so much about the play." *Hotter Than Egypt's* journey will continue from ACT to Marin. "We want to give our company time and space to live longer with the piece, while the staging will be reworked for MTC's proscenium space." It's difficult to maintain the foundation that play development at ACT built for *Hotter Than Egypt* without a great team of collaborators working on it. A hugely important part of the process is that the playwright, director,



Nakissa Etemad

and dramaturg are on the core creative team for both productions. As Nakissa says, "I love the relationship we all have. It's the perfect union." Ultimately, that's the goal of dramaturgy: to create a union of collaboration and build a world where everyone's creative ideas can not only coexist, but thrive together.

Who's Who in *Hotter Than Egypt*

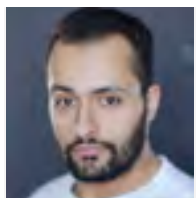
†ACT Core Company
*Member of AEA

CAST



Naseem Etemad
Maha

Naseem Etemad is a Los Angeles based Iranian-American actor who earned her BA from San Francisco State University for Theater Performance. Her credits include several original works often rooted in MENA stories and voices through roles like Maryam in the short film *Strength and Fortune* directed by Eimanne El Zein, Tamer in Boulder CO's Local Theater Company's production of *Wisdom From Everything*, and Samar in The Pear Theater's production of *Veils*. She is a Resident Artist with Golden Thread Productions in San Francisco and has an ongoing ensemble role in the Venture Maidens Dungeons & Dragons Podcast as Fittonia Silvertale.



Ahmad Kamal*
Boatman/Museum Guard/Doorman/Seif Understudy

Ahmad Kamal is delighted to be making his debut at ACT, and to take part in Yussef El Guindi's exciting world premiere! A resident of Washington DC, Ahmad has worked as an actor and fight choreographer with numerous theater companies, including Signature Theatre, Shakespeare Theatre Company, Mosaic Theater Company, Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company, and many more. He holds a BFA from The University of Virginia and an MA from Bristol Old Vic Theatre School.



Frank Lawler*
Paul Understudy

Previously at ACT: *A Christmas Carol*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and *The Pitman Painters*.

Other recent stage credits include *Last Days of the Tsars* (Witness Immersive),

Blackbird (Harlequin), *Jane Eyre* (Book-It) and *Camping with Henry and Tom* (Taproot). Frank has also appeared with Seattle Shakespeare Company, Sound Theatre Company, Seattle Public Theater, Strawberry Theatre Workshop, 14/48, Annex, ArtsWest, Theater Schmeater and Coeur d'Alene Summer Theatre. As a playwright, he co-penned *Holiday of Errors* and *The Elsinore Diaries*. Frank trained with Shakespeare & Company and is a graduate of Harvard University.



Wasim No'mani Seif

Born of immigrated Iraqi parents pursuing their higher

education in theatre, Wasim No'mani spent his developing and formative years meandering through sets, stages and theaters throughout the US with big immigrant dreams of seriously playing pretend for a profession. He currently resides in Los Angeles where he is unemployed as a working actor. Eager and exhilarated to make his third appearance on the ACT stage under the tutelage of John Langs' direction (*Oslo*, *People of the Book*) after a two-year absence due to... well, you already know. He's treaded the boards of various theaters along the Western coast in productions such as: *Water by the Spoonful* and *Happiest Song Plays Last* (Profile Theatre, Portland); *Jesus Hopped the 'A' Train* (CoHo Productions, Portland); *Last Days of Judas Iscariot* (The Hudson Mainstage, Los Angeles); *Buffalo Soldier* (El Portal, Los Angeles). You also may have seen him on the little screen; (FOX'S *Touch*; CBS' *Seal Team*; Paramount's *Yellowstone*; and the largest crowd funded show in history, *The Chosen*). Wasim thanks his friends and family for their unreasonably enduring support and is indebted to the entire ACT family for their warmth and continuing hospitality. He proudly praises Mr. El Guindi for this play and his entire body of work.



Nima Rakhshanifar
Boatman/Museum Guard/Doorman Understudy

Nima is thrilled to be making their Seattle debut by working with ACT. An Iranian-American living in Los Angeles, Nima strives to tell stories that elevate the underrepresented MENASA community. Nima trained at PCPA's Acting Conservatory before embarking on their career. They have appeared in productions by Victory Gardens, Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, and Milwaukee Rep, with credits including *Waiting For Godot*, *Comedy of Errors*, and *A Christmas Carol*. Nima's natural storytelling ability can be traced back to their childhood, when they used to translate films into Farsi for their grandmother. Since then, Nima has been consistently honing their skills, and always embracing new opportunities to touch people's lives through stories.



Paul Morgan Stetler*
Paul

Paul last appeared as John Procter in ACT Theatre's production

of *The Crucible*, directed by John Langs. Other ACT productions include *Female of The Species*, *Eurydice*, *The Trip to Bountiful*, *Born Yesterday*, *Wintertime and Grand Magic*. Additionally, he has appeared in leading roles at *Seattle Repertory Theatre*, *Seattle Shakespeare Company*, *Village Theatre*, *Seattle Children's Theatre*, *New Century Theatre Company* and numerous regional theatres across the country. Paul is the creator and curator of *Letters Aloud*, a literary reading series that has delighted audiences across the country as a way of connecting them to a rapidly disappearing form of communication — the written letter. He holds a BA in English Literature at Cal State Northridge and an MFA in Theatre Arts from Penn State University.



Jen Taylor*

Jean

Jen Taylor (Jean)
Previously at ACT,
Dangerous Liaisons,
Yankee Tavern

and *A Christmas Carol*. Some of Jen's favorite roles include Daisy in *The Adding Machine*, Cathy in *Orange Flower Water*, and Molly in *Holy Days* (New Century Theatre Company), Lily Bart in *House of Mirth* and Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* (Book-It Repertory Theatre), Eliza Doolittle in *Pygmalion* and Beatrice in *Much Ado about Nothing* (Seattle Shakespeare Company), and Roxane in *Cyrano* and Viola in *Twelfth Night* (Portland Center Stage). She is a voice actor in radio, television, audiobooks, and numerous video games. She is perhaps best known as the voice of Cortana in the *Halo* video game series, and the new *Halo* TV show airing soon on Paramount+. Welcome back to the theatre!

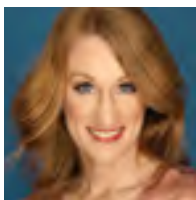


Vahishta Vafadari

Maha Understudy

Vahishta (she/her) is so happy to be back working with ACT,

but this time as an actor. Previously she worked as the Assistant Dialect Coach for the 2019 production of *A Christmas Carol*. Before moving to Seattle, she was based in Chicago and worked across the city. Credits include her Jeff Nominated performance as Anne Lister in *I Know My Own Heart* (Pride Films and Plays), *Top Girls* (Remy Bumppo), *Cyrano* (BoHo Theatre), and *As You Like It* (First Folio). In addition to dialect coaching and designing, Vahishta loves her work as a teaching artist and acting coach. Vahishta received her M.F.A. in Acting from The Theatre School at DePaul University and is represented by The Actors Group.



Candace Vance

Jean Understudy

Candace Vance is thrilled to work

with ACT! She has appeared on many Seattle stages, most notably Taproot Theatre Company (Lady Chiltern in *An Ideal Husband*, Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*, Margaret in *Relativity*, among many others), Seattle Shakespeare Company (Mistress Ford in *Merry Wives of Windsor*), Seattle Children's Theatre (Muriel in *Nicky Somewhere Else*), Seattle Public Theatre (among others: Chloe in *The 13th Of Paris*, Mary in *The Language Archive*, Paula in *My Wonderful Day*, Footlight Award Recipient), Book-It Repertory Theatre, Sandbox Radio, and Repertory Actors Theatre. Ms. Vance has also enjoyed working farther afield, particularly at The Barrow Group (NYC) and internationally as Julieta in the National Tour/Spain of *Romeo y Julieta*, and in *The Quality of Mercy: A Tour of Love Through Shakespeare's Words* in Paris, France. She holds an M.A. (foreign equivalent of M.F.A.) from Rose Bruford College of Theatre/Performance in London. www.candacevance.com

CREATIVE TEAM

Robert J. Aguilar

Lighting Designer

Robert (He/Him) is a Latinx lighting designer, whose previous designs for ACT include *The Year of Magical Thinking*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Wolves*, *Daisy*, and *Alex and Aris*. Other Pacific Northwest credits include: *In the Heights*, *Tiny Beautiful Things*, *Macbeth*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, *I Am My Own Wife*, and *Lizard Boy* (Seattle Rep); *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* and *In the Heights* (Portland Center Stage); *Native Gardens*, *Hir*, *Barbeque*, and *Angels in America* (Intiman Theatre); *Urinetown*, *Little Shop of Horrors* (ACT/The 5th Avenue Theatre); *The Pajama Game*, *How to Succeed...*, and *Jasper in Deadland* (The 5th Avenue Theatre); *Spelling Bee*, *String* (Village Theatre); *Uncle Vanya*, *The Cherry Orchard*, and *The Three Sisters* (The Seagull Project). *Regional credits include Lizard Boy* (TheatreWorks Silicon Valley); *Little Shop of Horrors* and *Marjorie Prime* (Pittsburgh Public); *Susan* (Public Theater UTR), *Full Gallop* (The Old

Globe); *In the Heights*, *Seven Spots on the Sun* (Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park); *In the Heights* (Milwaukee Rep). Film: *The Jinx* and *Dela Holiday Special*, *Potato Dreams of America*. Robert is the lighting director of Seattle Rep. robertjaguilar.com IG: @fake_robert

Ian Bond

Intimacy Director and Fight Choreographer

Ian Bond is a Seattle based fight and intimacy director, actor, and educator. His fight and intimacy direction has been seen at The 5th Avenue Theatre (*Beauty and the Beast*), University of Washington (*Monstrosity*), Washington Ensemble (*Feathers and Teeth*, *Is God Is*), Taproot Theatre (*See How They Run*), The Shattered Glass Project (*Ghosts: An Original Festival of One Act Plays*), Book-It Repertory (*Behold the Dreamers*), Seattle Shakespeare (*Comedy of Errors*), and now, ACT Theatre. He has performed locally with Sound Theatre Company (*Holiday of Errors*), Seattle Children's Theatre (*The Diary of Anne Frank*), Seattle Public Theatre (*Bad Jews*), Taproot Theatre (*Jeeves Intervenes*, *Diana of Dobson's*), Seattle Shakespeare Company (*Titus Andronicus*, *Trilussa and Cressida*), Book-It Repertory Theatre (*American Junkie*, *Jane Eyre*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *Treasure Island*, *Frankenstein*), Washington Ensemble Theatre (*Teh Internet is Serious Business*, *The Things Are Against Us*), The Horse in Motion (*Hamlet*), and ACT (*A Christmas Carol*). Ian is also a co-founder of PNW Theatrical Intimacy, a motion capture artist who recently worked on the hit game *Ghost of Tsushima*, and a professional Game Master specializing in Dungeons & Dragons. www.ianbond.org

Melanie Burgess

Costume Designer

Melanie Burgess is a Seattle based Costume Designer. She has designed costumes for over 170 productions for: ACT, Seattle Opera, Seattle Repertory Theatre, 5th Avenue Theatre, Intiman Theatre, Village Theatre, Seattle Children's Theatre, Seattle Shakespeare

Who's Who in *Hotter Than Egypt*

†ACT Core Company
*Member of AEA

Company, New Century Theatre Company, Seattle Theatre Company, Strawberry Theatre Workshop, Taproot Theatre, ArtsWest, Tacoma Actor's Guild and The Empty Space Theatre. Regionally for: The Guthrie, Cincinnati Playhouse, Denver Center, Arizona Theatre Company, Minneapolis Children's Theatre, Tantrum Theater, Idaho Theatre for Youth, Honolulu Theatre for Youth, and Hawaii Opera. Melanie received her MFA from the University of Washington. She is the recipient of the 1st Gregory Award for Outstanding Costume Design 2010 and again in 2019. She is a professor of Costume Design at Cornish College of the Arts. melanietaylorburgess.com

Yussef El Guindi†

Playwright

Born in Egypt, raised in London and now based in Seattle, Yussef El Guindi's work frequently examines the collision of ethnicities, cultures and politics that face immigrants, Arab-Americans and Muslim Americans in particular. El Guindi holds an MFA in playwriting from Carnegie-Mellon University, and has worked as a playwright at Silk Road Rising, literary manager for Golden Thread Productions, and playwright-in-residence at Duke University. He is the recipient of many honors, including the Steinberg/ATCA New Play Award, the Stranger's Genius Award, and the 2010 Middle East America Distinguished Playwright Award. He recently won the American Blues Theater's Blue Ink Playwriting award for his play *Refugee Rhapsody*. El Guindi's past productions include *People of the Book* at ACT in Seattle; *Language Rooms* at Pony World Theatre in Seattle, and *Broken Nose Theatre* in Chicago; *Hostages* at Radial Theater Project in Seattle; *The Talented Ones* at Artists Repertory Theatre in Portland (Santa Barbara Independent Indy Awards); *Threesome* at Portland Center Stage, ACT, and at 59E59 (winner of a Portland Drammy for Best Original Script); *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World* (2011 Gregory Award) also at ACT, Center Repertory Company at Walnut Creek, CA, and at Mosaic Theater Company (DC).

Our Enemies: Lively Scenes of Love and Combat was produced by Silk Road Rising and won the M. Elizabeth Osborn award. His plays *Back of the Throat* (winner of L.A. Weekly's Excellence in Playwriting Award for 2006), *Pilgrims Musa and Sheri in the New World*, *Jihad Jones and the Kalashnikov Babes*, *Such a Beautiful Voice is Sayeda and Karima's City* have been published by Dramatists Play Service. *Ten Acrobats in an Amazing Leap of Faith*, *Collaborator*, *Threesome*, *The Talented Ones*, and *Hostages* have been published by Broadway Play Publishing Inc. Also upcoming from Broadway Play Publishing Inc. is a collection of short plays entitled *In A Clear Concise Arabic Tongue*. Bloomsbury/ Methuen Drama published *Selected Works by Yussef El Guindi*. Currently a Core Company member at ACT in Seattle.

Nakissa Etemad

Dramaturg

Nakissa Etemad (she/her) is Associate Artistic Director of Marin Theatre Company (MTC) and an Iranian American dramaturg, producer, and French translator specializing in new BIPOC plays and musicals for over 25 years. She is a Resident Artist of Golden Thread Productions, Regional VP Metro Bay Area for Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas (LMDA), and a member of MENA Theater Makers Alliance and the Anti-Racism Task Force of LMDA. She is thrilled to serve as dramaturg on this co-production of her choosing between ACT and MTC of this brilliant new play, which she worked on with El Guindi at the 2020 Colorado New Play Summit. Recent dramaturgy: Heather Raffo's *Noura* (MTC/ Golden Thread), Marcus Gardley's Play On! commission of *King Lear* (Oregon Shakespeare Festival), and recent world premiere productions with Marcus Gardley, Lauren Yee, Marisela Treviño Orta, Margo Hall, and Torange Yeghiazarian. She is a frequent collaborator on Golden Thread's ReOrient Festivals of Short Plays and Bay Area Playwrights Festivals. Former positions: Festival Director for the 5th Annual New America Playwrights Fest, featuring Lynn

Nottage, Naomi Iizuka and Polly Pen (San Jose Rep); Dramaturg and Literary Manager of The Wilma Theater, San Jose Rep, and San Diego Rep, and Exec. VP Freelance of LMDA. Recipient of the 2015 Elliott Hayes Award for Outstanding Achievement in Dramaturgy for The Lark's four-city premieres of Gardley's *the road weeps*, *the well runs dry*. Nakissa dedicates this show to Dr. Galen A. Etemad, the patriarch, inspiration, role model, and guiding light to his family and friends for 99 wonderful years.

David Hsieh

Production Assistant/ACT Casting Associate

David is delighted to be working at ACT on this production in stage management, and as ACT's new Casting Associate. He is a multi-disciplined local theatre artist. David has stage managed *Chinglish & John* at ArtsWest, and *Emboldened* at Freehold. He is the Founding Artistic Director for ReAct Theatre where he has directed the Seattle Premieres of *Salty*, *The White Snake*, *Sex with Strangers*, *The Aliens*, *Yellow Face*, *Rabbit Hole*, *The Shape of Things*, *The Last 5 Years*, *Closer*, *Time Stands Still*, *Schoolhouse Rock Live!* and Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*. He also recently co-directed *Kim's Convenience* at Taproot. Seattle audiences may have seen him performing in shows such as *A Very Die Hard Christmas* and *The Happy Ones* at Seattle Public Theater, *The Brothers K* and *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter & Sweet* at Book-It, or in *Elixir of Love* and *Yardbird* at Seattle Opera. His design work was recently featured in *Washer/Dryer* for SiS Productions (Scenic), and *Head Over Heels* at ArtsWest (Properties). David teaches acting for Freehold Theatre/Lab and will soon be presenting the amazing Comic Psychic Peter Antoniou at the Theatre Off Jackson. He enjoys traveling, bowling and root beer floats.

John Langs

Director

John Langs has served as Artistic Director since 2016. He joined ACT in 2013 as Associate Artistic Director.

Langs' 16-year freelance career afforded him the opportunity to work with many prestigious theatre companies across the country. He has directed productions at Playwrights Horizons, Ensemble Studio Theater, Milwaukee Repertory Theatre, Lookingglass Theater Company in Chicago, Circle X in Los Angeles, The Resident Ensemble, New Century Theatre Company, Washington Ensemble Theatre, and Seattle Shakespeare Company. Langs received his directing degree from the University of North Carolina School of the Arts. Some of his favorite directing credits include *The Shaggs Philosophy of the World* (Los Angeles Drama Critic Circle Award for Best Original Musical), and *Brothers Karamazov* (seven LADCC Awards including Best Production of the year and Best Direction) and directing Kurt Beattie in *King Lear*. Langs received the first annual Seattle Gregory Award honoring excellence in direction for *The Adding Machine*. As a dedicated fan of original work, Langs has shepherded over a dozen projects to their premiere production.

Johanna Melamed

Sound Designer

What a treat to design the sound for *Hotter Than Egypt* for ACT. Recently Johanna designed the sound for eSe Teatro's *Fermin's Giant Book of Dreams* and Book-It Repertory Theatre's *Canterville Ghost*. Other sound designs for Macha Theatre Works, Thalia's Umbrella, Seattle Shakespeare Company and The Checkov Project. Special thanks to Robertson Witmer. Johanna has created multiple sound scores for visual and media artist Barbara Robertson, which have been seen in local museums and galleries, and internationally.

Tori Thompson*

Stage Manager

Tori is happy to be back at ACT Theatre where previously she worked on *A Christmas Carol*, *Pass Over*, *The Year of Magical Thinking*, *The Wolves*, *Skylight*, *The Crucible*, *The Legend of Georgia McBride*, and *The Royale*. Other credits include *As You Like It* (Seattle Rep Public

Works); *Guys & Dolls*, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, *Matilda*, *The 39 Steps* (Village Theatre); *The Holler Sessions*, *Patti & the Kid* (On the Boards); *Festen*, *Tails of Wasps* (New Century Theatre Company); *Blues for Mister Charlie* (The Williams Project); *Waiting for Godot*, *Romeo & Juliet*, *Richard II* (Seattle Shakespeare Company); *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*, and *Slaughterhouse-Five* (Book-It Repertory Theatre).

Carey Wong

Set Designer

Theatre credits include the Seattle Repertory Theatre, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Portland Center Stage, Arizona Theatre Company, Center Stage Baltimore, Syracuse Stage, Intiman, Seattle Children's Theatre, Village Theatre, Mixed Blood Theatre, Prince Music Theater, Hey City Theater and Spain's Nearco Producciones. He has been Resident Designer for Portland Opera, Opera Memphis, and Wildwood Park for the Arts. Opera credits include Seattle Opera, Spoleto Festival USA, New York's Valhalla Wagnerfest, Pittsburgh Opera, Vancouver Opera, San Francisco Opera Center, and the Beijing and Macao Music Festivals. Carey has designed 15 shows for ACT. He was exhibition designer for *Beyond the Gate: A Tale of Portland's Chinatowns* at the Portland Chinatown Museum, where a retrospective of his design work will be on view this spring. Upcoming projects include *Afterwords* at The 5th Avenue Theatre and *Pelleas Et Melisande* at Opera Southwest. BA, Yale College; Yale School of Drama.

Nihan Yesil

Composer

Nihan Yesil is an award-winning composer, sound designer, and multimedia artist for film and stage. She started studying classical music at an early age. After her M.M. in Composition (UMKC Conservatory of Music and Dance), she received her M.F.A. in Sound Design (UMKC Theatre). Her music has been performed in various venues, festivals, and artist residencies across the U.S. and Europe. Some of her

latest work includes *Noura* (Marin Theatre Company), *Kansas City: 1924* (foley editor, Kansas City Actors Theatre, available on Spotify), Turkish blockbuster *Bizim İçin Şampiyon* (available on Netflix). Nihan is very excited to be part of the creative team of this double production by ACT Theatre and Marin Theatre Company.

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Brett Love

People. History. Community.

An Interview with Andrew Lee Creech

Andrew Lee Creech is a Seattle-based playwright and creator of The Legacy Plays Project — “a nine-play, multi-century-spanning cycle meditation on the lives of Black Americans in pivotal moments of American History.” He is currently working on an exciting 3-play commission from ACT and Trial & Error Productions, and is an actor, educator, and content creator. Read about Andrew’s inspiration, the importance of a team, and how storytelling links his occupations together.

How did you become a writer?

There are three answers here. All are integral. The flippant answer: one day, I started calling myself a writer, and so it was true. The fun answer: I’ve always been a writer. At nine-years-old, I had a typewriter and my own Goosebumps-inspired book series called Toxic Terror – writers, don’t bite that title, I might publish them one day. The more nuanced answer: I’m a storyteller who began his career as a performer, telling other people’s stories. After a few years, I had a “come to Jesus” moment: I wanted to see more Black faces in lead protagonist roles. I wanted to see stories about people going through things I and my loved ones go through. I wanted to hear conversations that were being had within my own communities. And, instead of waiting around and hoping for all of those “wants” to someday materialize, I decided to start telling my own stories and making it happen.

You’re based in Seattle – do you pull much inspiration from living in the Pacific Northwest?

I’m absolutely inspired by the PNW. My play Riverwood was written to talk about the gentrification of Seattle neighborhoods and the displacement the communities are facing. As I continue to work and learn and grow, the more Seattle/PNW history I become aware of. There’s a deep history here that needs to be written about. And I love plays and movies set in Seattle. Anytime I see one I let out a little shout of joy! I once heard someone say, “there are too many New York living rooms onstage.” That’s always stuck with me.

What inspires you?

People. History. And my community and support network. People because in doing theatre, I am constantly discovering and rediscovering what it means to be human. To that end, it’s people who inspire me. With all of our hopes and dreams, failings, successes, struggles, courage, joys, fears — all of our shit. History because it doesn’t repeat itself exactly, but it spirals back around again. And each time it spirals, we have an opportunity to learn from it and make different choices — not that we often do... But I still think we have a responsibility to interrogate the past and to document the present for future generations to have next time the spiral comes back around. Lastly, my community and support network. My friends, family, and mentors who always entertain my ideas and offer feedback. The people who come to readings and engage with my work? Who listen compassionately when I have moments of self-doubt? Who send opportunities my way and encourage me to push beyond my comfortability? Who empower me to take up space? They all nurture and inspire my writing.

Why are you excited to work on this commission with ACT?

I have worked with ACT in many capacities throughout the years. I’ve performed in productions on both the main stage and the ACTLab stages. I’ve worked in the ticket office, on the house staff, and I helped pioneer the closed caption system. ACT, in many ways, has felt like my artistic home — a place where I have grown as both a human and

an artist. For that reason alone, I am excited to continue my work and growth here in yet another capacity, as a playwright.

Also, there have been times in my life where I have had to work three jobs plus side hustles to make ends meet as an artist. And when you live that life, you regularly find yourself having to make choices like, “do I sleep and take care of my mental health, which means I lose momentum with my writing or risk missing that grant deadline, or do I try to push through and write, which will leave me depleted tomorrow or make me oversleep and late for work?” An impossible balance that, over time, can cause a lot of damage. It’s an extreme challenge. Especially as a young writer, because when you’re first starting out, the writing of a play is done for free and the money comes from highly sought-after productions, award competitions, grants, or other development opportunities – all of which take extra effort on your part (not to mention, a little luck) to make happen. I’m so grateful for this commission because it flips the script by paying me to write. It invests in me, which in turn, allows me to invest in myself.

Lastly, the big body of work that I’m currently writing is The Legacy Plays Project — a project that is near and dear to me. This is a large, nine-play cycle that will take years to complete. And with this commission, I won’t complete the project, but I’ll be able to keep momentum rolling forward, and I can get done in a few years what would take me maybe twice as long without.

How important is an artistic team when developing new plays, and how do you cultivate one that helps you in the process?

A banging artistic team is crucial when developing new plays. New play development requires different mindsets and skillsets at different points in the play’s life. When a play is in its infancy, it’s all about the text. Say it’s the first workshop. You want collaborators in the room who are compassionate, make strong choices, curious, ask good questions, and are there to interrogate the text in a way that serves the play and the playwright’s vision. I love actors in a new play process because they can be like private

eyes. They can discover things about your characters that you never knew!

In a director, you want a true leader. Someone who can help you identify goals and intended outcomes for the process. Someone who can articulate those goals to the company and who is making sure that we’re always working towards clarity and a stronger, more cohesive play. And I appreciate a director who encourages me to take big swings and reminds me that we are here to discover but won’t hesitate to keep it real with me.

Having artists that you’ve worked well with before is great

for the shorthand communication that develops between you: A+. Having collaborators that understand the assignment and operate with malleability and grace, because in new work, change is frequent: A+.

In addition to being a playwright, you’re also an actor, educator, and content creator. In what ways do all of these paths overlap, and what have you learned from their similarities and differences?



Fantasia Rose

When I create theatre content, all of these paths overlap. I make theatre content that educates, empowers, and incites discussion – all things that social media excels at. I use my acting background to make my videos entertaining to watch, I use my writing skills to articulate my thoughts, and I use my sense of content creation in order to make it flow and to keep it engaging.

Similarities and differences? I’ll give you one. In addition to posting theatre content, I use my platforms to share stories from my life and to make random funny content. When a piece of content does really well, the thing that’s always consistent is a sense of connection between me and the viewer. With content creation and storytelling, it always comes back to “are you connecting with people?” People’s hearts and ears open when they engage with something that they find relatable or authentic. This is always going to be true, no matter the medium. And when the performer/content creator is being authentic and true, the listener/viewer is drawn in. And when the performer/creator isn’t, the listener/viewer is pulled out. There’s so much to say on the similarities and differences of all of these things! Too much! Buy me a beer sometime, we’ll talk.

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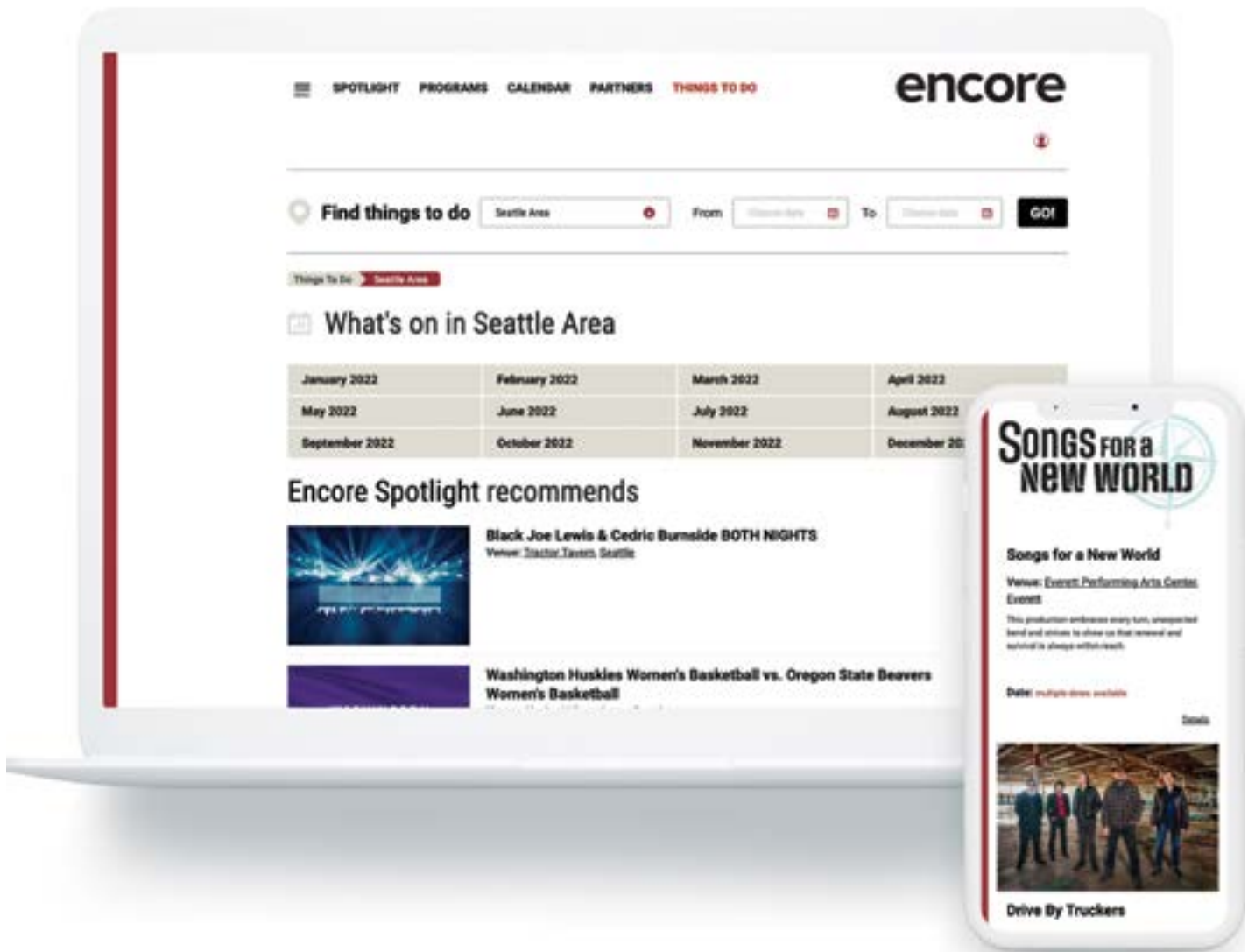
CIARA CAYA



For over 50 years, Encore Media Group has been a provider of print programs for arts and culture organizations with the mission of connecting arts, culture and community. Over our long history, these print programs (like the one you're reading now!) continue to be an important part of our core expertise, but as the digital landscape progresses, we recognize that multiple platforms are absolutely key if we are to continue to connect with you, the patrons, in a relevant and helpful way.

With the goal of making it simple to find events and tickets that are relevant to YOU—not the masses—Encore has partnered with Places Dot, a technology media company that helps get businesses and organizations discovered across digital channels. As a first step, together with Places Dot, we have launched a new digital platform, Things to Do. Designed for locals and visitors alike, it is a powerful search engine to find concerts, theatre, arts, and cultural events in the Greater Seattle Area.

“Encore reaches 1.4 million patrons annually. It is only natural that we continue with our mission and now expand our digital presence, making it easier for audiences to find the latest and greatest in arts and entertainment,” said Paul Heppner, President of Encore. “San Francisco Bay Area and the Greater Seattle Area are home to some of the most vibrant and exciting arts and culture scenes in the country. Thanks to the partnership with Places Dot and their data and AI-powered solutions, we are excited to launch an online



“...we are excited to launch an online discovery tool that provides a new way to explore the many events happening in the region.”

discovery tool that provides a new way to explore the many events happening in the region. As we carefully return to in-person events, arts and culture, we find it the perfect time to launch a new tool to help patrons navigate through the myriad of options now available to them.”

Things to Do is a collaborative events calendar bringing the best of what Encore and Places Dot can offer you. By adding Things to Do to our website, Encore Spotlight, visitors can now find news, interviews, digital programs, AND upcoming events, all in one place.

“In the age of an overwhelming amount of content available online, reaching audiences and cutting through the ‘noise’ is becoming

increasingly difficult,” shared Bruce Amick, Places Dot COO and Co-Founder. “We have developed a suite of solutions aimed at matching customer interests with relevant content, in the right context, at the right time. With near real-time data insights and AI-powered content marketing, Places Dot helps publishers grow their digital business by providing thousands of pages of SEO and mobile-first content focused on things to do in their markets.”

With Places Dot’s digital acumen and Encore’s long partnership with local arts and culture organizations, we are confident that this partnership will provide an outstanding source of information for Greater

"We have developed a suite of solutions aimed at matching customer interests with relevant content, in the right context, at the right time."

Seattle Area residents and visitors, alike. And with arts and culture organizations getting back to in-person events, it's our goal to make that transition as successful as possible and to help these organizations in expanding their digital reach with the powerful event search tool that is Things to Do.

Visit Things to Do to plan your next evening out—you'll find all the best the Greater Seattle Area has to offer. With Things to Do you can search for an event by category, date, or name. Don't know what you're in the mood for? Check out or recommended upcoming events. We've got all the best Things to Do and there's something for everyone.



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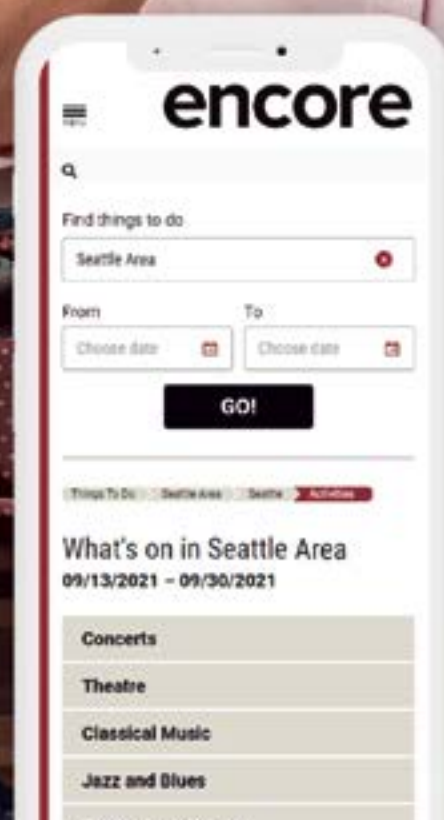
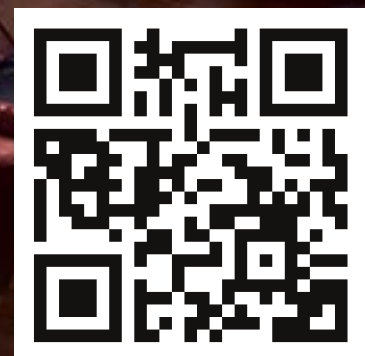
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Intermission Brain Transmission

Why stare at your phone for the hundredth time today when you could treat your brain to this scintillating trivia quiz? Better yet, send us your answer to the bonus question for a chance to win tickets to an upcoming performance.

1 *Whose Live Anyway?* is coming to The Paramount Theatre on January 14. This stage comedy show is based off a television version. In which country did the TV show *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* originate?

- A Australia
- B Canada
- C England
- D United States

2 A.I.M. by Kyle Abraham will perform *An Untitled Love* on February 10 at The Moore Theatre. Artistic Director Kyle Abraham attended the Pittsburgh Creative and Performing Arts School. What other notable alum attended this school?

- A Mac Miller
- B Andy Warhol
- C Billy Porter
- D Frances McDormand

3 *Hotter Than Egypt*, a world premiere by Yussef El Guindi, will play at ACT Theatre starting January 28 to February 20. El Guindi also premiered which play at ACT Theatre in 2019?

- A *Back of the Throat*
- B *People of the Book*
- C *Threesome*
- D *The Talented Ones*

4 Wu Han, Philip Setzer and David Finckel are performing at Meany Center on February 16. The program will feature Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's *Four African Dances*. This 1904 work is played on which instruments?

- A Cello and piano
- B Cello and violin
- C Piano, cello and violin
- D Piano and violin

5 *The Mystery of Irma Vep* is playing at Intiman Theatre from February 8 to 27. This satirical, comedy-horror show was the longest-running play ever produced in which country?

- A Brazil
- B France
- C Norway
- D United States

BONUS

What excites you most about returning to live performances?

Post your answer on social media and tag @encorespotlight with a picture of your Encore program for a chance to win tickets to an upcoming performance!

1) c—The original show premiered in 1988 and ran through 1999.
2) c—Billy Porter.
3) b—El Guindi was also an ACT Core Member in 2018.
4) d—This four-movement work was composed for his friend John Saunders, a violinist.
5) a—Charles Ludlam's most successful play gained this distinction in 2003.

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