

NEW ENGLAND THEATRE IN REVIEW

MARTHA SCHMOYER LOMONACO, *Editor*

Survival of the Fittest

At the close of my introductory essay in *NETIR 2022*, I expressed my hope to entitle this year's essay, *Our American Theatre Post-COVID*, as if somehow getting beyond the pandemic might mean not only survival—all *NETIR* theatres thankfully pulled through—but that theatre across the country would return to some semblance of stability. I am happy to report that New England regional theatres are surviving and many are even thriving as witnessed by successful 2022-23 seasons. They produced major musicals that had been deferred due to COVID (Huntington Stage, Trinity Rep) and musicals because that's part of their cachet (A.R.T., Barrington Stage); tackled big productions of ambitious, lengthy straight plays (Huntington Stage, Trinity Rep); returned to a robust production season (Barrington Stage, The Gamm, Hartford Stage, Portland Stage, Shakespeare & Co.) or full, albeit newly abbreviated, seasons (A.R.T., Yale Rep); and launched world premieres of new plays (Barrington Stage, Hartford Stage, Trinity Rep, Yale Rep). Among the survivors is Long Wharf, which officially abandoned its brick and mortar theatre complex last season in favor of itinerant performances throughout the city of New Haven—see Karl Ruling's review for details—and Vermont Stage, which just hired a new executive director to promote both fundraising and new audiences.

Outside of New England, however, resident repertory theatres, both regionally and in New York City, are in a state of crisis. New York City's Public Theater, arguably the most important venue for launching important new work in the United States, just laid off 19 percent of its staff, cancelled its annual Under the Radar Festival, and reduced programming at its Astor Place building from 11 shows pre-COVID to just five next season. The Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles, part of Center Theater Group, sent shockwaves throughout the theatre world by its recent announcement to "pause" future productions for an indeterminate time. The Humana Festival of New American Plays at Actors Theatre of Louisville, one of the foremost regional incubators for play development, which began in 1977, cancelled its 2022 season and has not yet announced whether it will resume in 2023. American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco, Dallas Theater Center, Oregon

Shakespeare Festival, and Steppenwolf Theatre in Chicago have all announced significant cutbacks to budgets and programming, and many more theatres are undertaking similar measures to keep their doors open. Charles McNulty, a *Los Angeles Times* critic still reeling from the Taper announcement, contends that the COVID-19 pandemic didn't just shut down theatres for 18 months, it "broke the theater-going habit":

Regional theaters are having a particularly hard time putting back the pieces of their audiences. Subscriptions have long been a fundamental element of the nonprofit theater business plan. But surfeited with at-home entertainment options, former subscribers are preferring the flexibility of single-ticket sales. Why sign up for a season when you can pick and choose what you really want to see?¹

Teresa Eyring, Executive Director of Theatre Communications Group, the national organization for theatre, contended that "it's a very complicated time for our theatres," on National Public Radio's *Marketplace Morning Report*. "These organizations had, in general, closed earlier than a lot of other businesses and had to open later for various reasons," she said. "It's been a bit more difficult for our sector to rebalance." If there isn't a sizable increase in subscription and ticket sales, she predicts that more regional theatres may be forced to downsize or close altogether.²

Back in New England, not only do our principal regional houses seem to be faring well, but also the smaller, less regionally well-known but vital independent theatres of Greater Boston, Massachusetts. Paul Fallon, our reviewer at the Huntington, made a proposal we couldn't refuse: to profile and review one show each at five distinguished little theatres, including Boston Playwrights' Theatre, Lyric Stage, and Speakeasy Stage, all in Boston; Central Square Theater in Cambridge; and New Repertory Theatre in Watertown. We are especially happy to have New Repertory Theatre back in business since I announced their unhappy demise due to "fiscal challenges and COVID-related uncertainty" in *NETIR 2021*. If they can bounce back so quickly, let's take this as a hopeful sign that other theatres can do likewise.

1 <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/newsletter/2023-07-01/essential-arts-theaters-in-crisis-essential-arts-arts-culture>

2 <https://www.marketplace.org/2023/07/11/regional-theaters-arent-bouncing-back/>

I want to thank our indefatigable reviewers who nobly carried on during very weird pandemic-laden seasons to enjoy the fruits of revived 2022-23 seasons: Paul E. Fallon, Megan Grumbling, Christopher Hoyt, Stephen Kuehler, David Ledoux, Jan Mason, Steven Otfinoski, Karl G. Ruling, and Angela Sweigart-Gallagher. We bid fond farewell to both of our Rhode Island-based reviewers, Chris Hoyt and David Ledoux, and look forward to welcoming their successors in next year's edition. Thanks to you, our readers, new and returning; you have an open invitation to respond to what is presented here or recommend other New England theatres that we ought to review. Please get in touch with me, martilomonaco@optonline.net.

AMERICAN REPERTORY THEATER

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS, 2022-2023

Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992 Anna Deavere Smith (28 Aug. – 24 Sept.)

Life of Pi Lolita Chakrabarti, adapted from the novel by Yann Martell (4 Dec. – 29 Jan.)

The Wife of Willesten Zadie Smith, adapted from Chaucer's "Wife of Bath" (25 Feb. – 18 Mar.)

Evita Tim Rice (book and lyrics) and Andrew Lloyd Webber (music) (17 May – 16 July)

The American Repertory Theater's 2022-2023 season was marked by the appointments of two Black administrators, presumably spurred in part by the company's stated commitment to centering anti-racism. Kelvin Dinkins, Jr., formerly the General Manager of Yale Repertory Theater, became A.R.T.'s new Executive Director; and Dayron J. Miles was appointed as Associate Artistic Director, having led A.R.T.'s community engagement initiatives and having piloted a program in arts organization management for BIPOC participants.

The season was also notable for a reduction in programming: after many years of presenting five or six shows on its main stage, A.R.T. offered only four productions at the Loeb Drama Center in 2022-23, and it has announced a four-show season again for 2023-24. Also, the A.R.T. relinquished Oberon, its smaller venue in Harvard Square, where it had presented or hosted many experimental or alternative shows for nearly 20 years. The second stage had become too costly, given its lengthy closure during the pandemic and the uncertainties of resuming in-person performances in the small space. Pandemic precautions continued at the mainstage house, especially mandatory masking for all staff and audience members; but in late February 2023,



Leah Barsky and Martin Almiron in *Evita*. Photo: Emilio Madrid

the mask requirement was lifted, as it had already been at most theatres and museums in the Boston area.

The season opened with *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, Anna Deavere Smith's collage of interviews taken in the wake of the uprising that followed the acquittal of four white police officers who were accused of violating Rodney King's civil rights. Smith has revised her original one-person show for performance by five actors, each of whom takes on multiple roles with quick changes of costume and vocal style. As delivered by the expert and engaging cast, the speeches were angry, stirring, funny, and heartbreaking. Sometimes this mix of reactions appears in a single character, like the Korean liquor store owner who empathizes with the Black rioters even as she feels outraged by their destruction of Korean-owned businesses. Some commentators are at a remove, offering academic reflections, while others give firsthand observations of King's beating and the riots. A new monologue added by Smith compares the King beating and the 1992 riots with the murder of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020. Admirably, the A.R.T. brought Smith's powerful montage of voices to a wider audience by collaborating with a local foundation that provided 1,000 free tickets to public high school students and 1,500 tickets for \$5 to people with low incomes.

In the next production, *Life of Pi*, social critique took a back seat to spectacular staging: life-size animal puppets (designed by Finn Caldwell and Nick Barnes, with movement directed by Mr. Caldwell) manipulated by teams of handlers; Andrzej Goulding's video projections that transformed the stage into a stormy sea or a star-filled sky; and a vivid musical score by Andrew T. Mackay. The stage floor was a marvel of moving parts that lifted, lowered, and rotated Pi's lifeboat. While the stagecraft dazzled, Adi Dixit's performance as Pi fell flat, stuck in a limited vocal and emotional range that substituted mere shouting for the extremes of despair and exultation that the character is supposed to experience. As Pi's father, Rajesh Bose also yelled his lines throughout. Other actors, fortunately, displayed more nuance, and the themes of Yann Martel's novel—the psychological uses of storytelling and the possibility of peaceful cohabitation by ostensible enemies—were well brought out in Lolita Chakrabarti's adaptation. Having already achieved great success in England, the production moved on from Cambridge to Broadway, where it won three Tony Awards for scenic, lighting, and sound design.

Another English import, Zadie Smith's *The Wife of Willesden*, was also an adaptation, in this case of Chaucer's tale of the Wife of Bath, transposed to a

contemporary London bar. As *Alvita, the Wife*, Clare Perkins brought off her demanding role with great vitality and relish. Her lengthy prologue extols women's equality, sovereignty, and sexuality against the unnatural constraints imposed by church and social custom. *Alvita*, who has been married five times, goes so far as to insist that the husband's body is the property of his wife. Like Chaucer's original, Zadie Smith's *Wife* has its longeurs, which the production attempted to relieve with disco music, dancing, and twinkling colored lights in the mirrored bar shelves. Despite these strategies, and occasional flashes of wit in the script, for this viewer the question kept arising: What is new or revelatory about this play? Other than translating Chaucer's story to contemporary language and setting, what is the play meant to do? The answer never became clear.

Another bold woman, this time from history, brought the season to a close. The revival of *Evita*, which the A.R.T. co-produced with the Shakespeare Theatre Company of Washington, D.C., shared its heroine's instincts about the value of presentation: "The people adore me," Eva Perón sings, "so Christian Dior me." So, the show was dressed to the nines not only with lavish costumes by Alejo Vietti but also with spectacular lighting (Bradley King) and gleaming, gliding set pieces (Jason Sherwood). Tango-flavored dances by Emily Maltby and Valeria Solomonoff kept a big ensemble sinuously busy. But over and above all the fancy dressing—even the huge, flower-decked staircase on which Eva sings "Don't Cry for Me, Argentina"—was Eva herself, as commandingly embodied by Shereen Pimentel. The role is so vocally demanding that Broadway and West End productions have given their *Evitas* matinees off. If Ms. Pimentel's clarion soprano sometimes became stressed to the point of stridency, her lower tones were warm but just as fierce. As Che, the musical's narrator and conscience, lyric tenor Omar Lopez-Cepero brought both plangency and sarcasm to his running commentary. Like a political poster, *Evita* paints Eva's story in the broadest strokes; a show that's about creating a public image is itself all externality, flash, spectacle. In the end, it's just a chronicle of the short, sad life of a famous person, but when the sound and fury are as attractively mounted as they are in this *Evita*, they're hard to forget.

Stephen Kuehler
Harvard University

BARRINGTON STAGE

PITTSFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS, 2022

Andy Warhol in Iran Brent Askari (2–25 Jun.)***Ain't Misbehavin'*** Fats Waller, Richard Maltby, Jr. and Murray Horwitz (16 Jun. – 9 July)***ABCD*** May Treuhaft-Ali (1 – 23 July)***Anna in the Tropics*** Nilo Cruz (1–30 July)***A Little Night Music*** Stephen Sondheim and Hugh Wheeler (6 – 28 Aug.)***Waiting for Godot*** Samuel Beckett (19 Aug. – 4 Sept.)***All of Me*** Laura Winters (21 Sept. – 9 Oct.)

The 2022 season at BSC started off with continuing strict Covid protocols. Patrons were asked to show their vaccination cards and were required to wear masks. These requirements were later relaxed, although open seating, with patrons spaced at a safe distance from each other, continued for much of the season.

The company presented its third musical revue in three years with *Ain't Misbehavin'*, the 1978 Tony Award-winning tribute to songwriter/performer Fats Waller. Directed and choreographed by Jeffrey L. Page, this revival was a crowd pleaser that featured Raul Abrego's impressive recreation of Harlem's Savoy Ballroom and the colorful costumes of Oana Botez. The cast of three women and two men worked like a well-oiled machine in the ensemble numbers and each shone in the solo numbers. Maiesha McQueen was a five-foot powerhouse, while the kinetic Jarvis B. Manning, Jr. squeezed every ounce of slinkiness out of "The Viper's Drag/The Reefer Song."

The season's second musical, *A Little Night Music*, is one of the crown jewels in the Sondheim oeuvre. Scenic designer Yoon Bae's sparse set was dominated by a summer gazebo that unfolded into a magical forest where three set of lovers followed their destiny. The cast was near perfect, from the five-person Greek chorus that commented on the action to Broadway veterans Emily Skinner and Mary Beth Piel, who were outstanding as the world weary Desiree and her imperious mother. The six-person orchestra played the waltz-like score to perfection from the character-defining triptych to the compelling eleventh-hour gems, "Send in the Clowns" and "The Miller's Son." Another beautifully executed Sondheim revival at BSC and a fitting swan song for departing founding artistic director Julianne Boyd, who retired at season's end.

After more than two years, the St. Germain Stage reopened with the first of



The players enter the enchanted woods of *A Little Night Music*. Photo: Daniel Rader

three world premieres, *Andy Warhol in Iran*, which dramatizes a little known episode in the artist's life when he visited Tehran to earn a commission to paint the Shah's wife. A revolutionary attempted to kidnap Warhol in his hotel room to draw attention to his cause, a probably fictional event. Henry Stram was beguiling as Warhol, right down to his white wig. His opening and closing monologues said more about art, commerce, and social activism than the frantic action that took place between them. Askari is reaching for big ideas on these issues, but the encounter with the inept revolutionary Farhad (Nima Rakhshanifar) was played mostly for laughs.

A more successful world premiere was May Treuhaft-Ali's *ABCD*, a tale of two high schools—one white and privileged, the other urban, Black, and Latine. Set in the “No Child Left Behind” era, it shows how administrators and faculty in the poor school and students in the privileged one both turn to cheating to achieve their goals. The key players were Bilal, an Iraqi student (Justin Ahdoot) who finds acceptance among his white peers by giving them the answers on a test and Ellis, a dedicated Black teacher (Melvin Abston) at the urban school who sees altering test scores as the only way for his students to get ahead. Equally fine was Maribel Martinez as Ellis's colleague whose conscience parted company with his and Chavez Ravine as a teacher who understood Bilal's dilemma but was powerless to help him. The play's dynamism was enhanced by a revolving set that turned a locker-filled school hallway into a classroom and a faculty office.

The cultural enrichment of adult workers in a 1929 Tampa cigar factory is the subject of the Pulitzer-Prize-winning *Anna in the Tropics*, given a handsome production on the Boyd-Quinson Stage with a gifted Latine cast. The Anna of the title is Anna Karenina, heroine of the Tolstoy novel that is read by a new lector to the workers. The silken-tongued Juan (a quietly charismatic Alex Rodriguez) worked his way into the minds and hearts of several women, including the unhappy wife Conchita, played with passion by Marina Pires, and her hyperkinetic younger sister Marela, an irresistible Gabriela Saker. Alexi Cruz was heartbreaking as the tormented co-owner of the factory whose aversion for the new reader was both professional and personal. Christopher Vergara's colorful costumes added flavor and sensuousness, especially the dark Russian garb that transformed sister Marela from a lovesick schoolgirl into Tolstoy's heroine with tragic results.

Another literary classic, Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, was brought to life by director Joe Calarco. Scenic designer Luciana Steconci's fantastical tree reached out its limbs like tentacles into the audience, connecting it to the events on stage. The threat of impending doom was alleviated by humor, captured in the lead performances of Mark H. Dold, as the pragmatic and intellectual DiDi, and his fellow tramp, the more down-to-earth GoGo (Kevin Isola). Isola's attempts to remove a pair of recalcitrant boots was a master class in physical comedy, while Dold's vain attempts to find solid ground in a world of shifting landscapes were compelling. Their ragged brotherhood was in sharp contrast to the master-slave relationship of Pozzo (Christopher Innvar) and the ironically named Lucky (Max Wolkowitz). Innvar perfectly captured Pozzo's vulnerability lurking beneath his bravado surface and Wolkowitz's "thinking" monologue was a highlight of the evening.

BSC ended its season with a heartfelt valentine of a play, *All of Me*, by Laura Winters that deservedly won the Burnam New Play Award. The beguiling and unlikely romance of Lucy and Alfonso, two disabled young adults, was played out on portable computers with the text-to-speak program known as AAC (altered and augmentative communication), ably assisted by sound designer Matt Otto. The two leads, a wisecracking Madison Ferris and a thoughtful Danny J. Gomez, were indeed disabled—she with MS and he paralyzed from the waist down. The couple were surrounded by family members who had their own issues, most notably her mother (Leah Hocking), struggling with her own disability, and his upscale mother (Maggie Bofill), whose smothering love was as much a burden for her son as his

disability. The dramatic high point was when Lucy made good on her promise to sing at her sister's wedding. It proved an act of undaunted courage for both character and actress, who recently was the first wheelchair user to play a lead role on Broadway.

On August 3, BSC announced its new artistic director, Alan Paul, formerly associate artistic director of Washington's Shakespeare Theater Company, who will launch the 2023 season.

Steven Otfinoski
Fairfield University

THE SANDRA FEINSTEIN-GAMM THEATRE (THE GAMM)

WARWICK, RHODE ISLAND, 2022-23

Describe the Night Rajiv Joseph (15 Sept. – 9 Oct.)

Sweat Lynn Nottage (3 Nov. – 27 Nov.)

It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play Joe Landry (9 Dec.– 24 Dec.)

Faith Healer Brian Friel (12 Jan. – 29 Jan.)

Bad Jews Joshua Harmon (2 Mar. – 26 Mar.)

The Children Lucy Kirkwood (27 Apr. – 14 May)

Season 38 of The Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theatre (The Gamm) was the first six-show season since before the COVID-19 pandemic, featuring five productions and the annual holiday favorite, *It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play*. From Russia to the Rust Belt, New York City to Great Britain, the entire season looked back at the last century, examining how our memories define who we are and what we believe.

The season opened with perhaps the strongest production of the year, Rajiv Joseph's *Describe the Night*. Joseph does a masterful job of pulling together the threads of 90 years of Russian history and illuminates how questions of truth continue to degrade our culture. Jeff Church played a very convincing Vladimir Putin, and the rest of the cast delivered as well under Gamm Artistic Director Tony Estrella's direction. There was a captivating energy with the production, and given the war in Ukraine, this was a timely and important season opener.

Despite the overall energy and pacing of the production, several moments stood out as foreshadowing of the season to come. In The Gamm's weaker moments, actors often resort to a general energetic mood and "talk at" each



Gabrielle McCauley and Jeff Church in *Describe the Night*. Photo: Cat Laine

other, rather than truly communicate an active and richly explored subtext. This occurred often in *Describe the Night*, but luckily several strong performances and an intriguing script corrected for it. Another issue in Gamm productions is that the design elements and the overall use of the space are often not effectively integrated into the overall storytelling with the actors, staging, and the text. Just one example of this was at a climactic moment of the play when pieces of the back wall of Michael McGarty's set fell down in an explosion. The play demanded a big risky moment, and the idea behind The Gamm's execution had the potential to be thrilling. Is there anything better than sitting in a theatre and seeing an impossible moment unfold? Imagine seeing actual destruction: seemingly dangerous, uncontrollable, yet somehow crafted safely in a beautiful artistic composition right before your eyes. This was the idea and the potential of this moment, and yet a few small pieces of wall that looked too perfectly manicured fell to the floor with a thud that was partially covered with a recorded blast that shook the theatre. The execution of the choice did not go far enough, and the result did not have the intended impact that the production was attempting and the text was demanding.

With the echoes of a strong but flawed season opener still in the air, The Gamm took us next to a working-class bar in Reading, Pennsylvania with Lynn Nottage's Pulitzer Prize winning play, *Sweat*. The text remarkably exposes the very personal and human consequences of larger political and economic forces in the early 2000's. Jessica Hill Kidd's detailed scenic design captured the authentic blue-collar-bar atmosphere of the play, and with a promising cast and solid text this was the perfect recipe for an invigorating evening of theatre. This production demonstrated, through its absence, the necessity of actors and director working together to construct layers of subtext. Even a text as wonderful as Nottage's needs this collaboration, and as evidenced by a fidgety audience, and actors pushing through superficially crafted line readings, The Gamm did not deliver.

The new year brought with it a positive step forward with a hazy and lyrically poetic production of Brian Friel's *Faith Healer*. Gamm regular Donnlá Hughes made her U.S. directing debut with this production, and *Faith Healer* benefited from her ear, her understanding of character, and her nuanced sense of storytelling. Patrick Lynch's simple set and Dawn Chiang's beautiful lighting created just the right atmosphere for the play. The cast captured the uncertainty of characters attempting to define their past, and as the audience

listened to each character's version of the same story, we also began to feel the disquieting notion that we too are all on some fundamental level in the dark.

Joshua Harmon's *Bad Jews* was next up for The Gamm. Patrick Lynch's set put us in the studio apartment of Jonah (Hillel Rosenshine) on the Upper West Side of Manhattan in 2012 where cousins fight over a family heirloom after their grandfather's funeral. Overall, the production was spirited and fun, but here we saw another example of The Gamm sometimes having issues in bringing production elements together in union with text, staging, and actors. There is a bathroom referenced in the play, and characters retreat there to escape the family fighting that unfolds several times while the other characters talk about them. Lynch and director, Tony Estrella, decided to have half of the bathroom, complete with toilet, visible to the audience even when the door was closed. This negated any sense of secrecy, as we saw characters not in fact "go to the bathroom" but disappear, no doubt to the green-room, for some reason. Furthermore, other scenes suffered because it created a cramped and non-optimal use of the set because so much real estate was dedicated to an irrelevant toilet. We never see the bathroom used as a place from which the characters eavesdrop, and we never see the toilet used; something of "Chekhov's Gun" comes to mind here.

Closing out The Gamm's season was Lucy Kirkwood's dark and deeply troubling play, *The Children*. Steve Kidd's Gamm Directing debut contained several specific and thoughtful details throughout the production. His direction refreshingly captured the nuanced behavior of the characters in the space very well. Though there were issues with the overall arc of the characters' journeys (what do we take away from such unlikeable characters acting like children?), the cast had good chemistry, and the play explored some very terrifying issues that are key to all of our survival.

Season 39 looks promising, starting off with *Topdog/Underdog* by Suzan-Lori Parks, followed by *Hangmen* by Martin McDonagh, then *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* by Edward Albee, after that, William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, and finally *Doubt: A Parable* by John Patrick Shanley. Next year has the potential to be a great one for The Gamm, offering a line-up of excellent plays with endless possibilities for exploration and risk.

David Ledoux
Bristol Community College

Greater Boston's Independent Theatres

2022-23 Season

This compendium provides a glimpse into five of Boston's independent theatre companies, with highlights of a representative production from each company's season.

SPEAKEASY STAGE COMPANY

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS, 2022-23

Heroes of the Fourth Turning Will Arbery (9 Sept. – 8 Oct.)

English Sanaz Toossi (21 Oct. – 19 Nov.)

Fairview Jackie Sibblies Drury (17 Feb. – 11 Mar.)

Wild Goose Dreams Hansol Jung (17 Mar. – 8 Apr.)

The Prom Chad Beguelin, Bobo Martin, Matthew Sklar (5 May – 10 Jun)

Speakeasy Stage Company's 32nd season exemplified its moniker, "Boston's Home for the Bold." Producing Artistic Director Paul Daigneault's strategy of bringing recent New York plays to Boston was on full display by producing the 2020 Drama Desk Best Play as well as the 2019 and 2022 Pulitzer Prize winners for Drama.

One production that resonated profoundly was *Fairview* (2019 Pulitzer Prize). The opening third plays like the sit-com it pretends to be: a Huxtable-like Black family enacting their foibles with charm and humor. Until mother faints in anticipation of a family birthday party. Portion Two. Voiceovers (Who? From where?) debate the merits and ethics of selecting a race of choice while the actors mime the entire opening sequence. The dissonance between disembodied words and silly antics is jarring. Portion Three. The voices become sleuths, infiltrating the stage, invading the planned party. Chaos, horror, slapstick, until the high-school daughter, portrayed by the amazing Victoria Omoregie, takes control with the central question: What constitutes a fair view of another? Any further commentary would spoil the conclusion of this inventive play, so well produced by Speakeasy.



Victoria Omoregie in *Fairview* at Speakeasy Stage Company. photo by Nile Scott Studios

CENTRAL SQUARE THEATER

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS, 2022-23

Ada and the Engine Lauren Gunderson (22 Sept. – 23 Oct.)***The Chinese Lady*** Lloyd Suh (10 Nov. – 11 Dec.)***Alma*** Benjamin Benne (23 Feb– 26 Mar.)***Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes Part 1—Millennium******Approaches*** Tony Kushner (20 Apr. – 28 May)

Central Square Theater (CST) opened in 2008 with a clear mission, “Theater Vital to Our Community,” and unrivaled commitment to collaboration. CST is the permanent home of two previously nomadic theater companies: The Nora, which mentors female artists and supports exploration of gender and feminism; and Underground Railway Theater, which creates accessible theater of social content. The CST umbrella also includes Catalyst Collaborative @ MIT, the nation’s only on-going partnership between a theater company and world-class research institute; and The Front Porch Arts Collective, a Black-owned non-profit that trumpets underrepresented voices.

Ada and the Machine illustrates CST’s unique mix of voices. Ada Lovelace was a nineteenth century mathematician, as well as daughter of royal scamp, Lord Byron. The 170-seat black box was configured with two sets of grandstands facing a long yet narrow play space. At one end: a grand piano which Ada played with mathematical precision. At the other: the messy desk of Charles Babbage, a renowned mathematician who developed a theoretical model for a “computing machine.” Ada matches the numerically brilliant Babbage in calculating, and then transcends him by envisioning greater possibilities for large-scale computing, extending even to the creation of music. Victorian Society—represented by Ada’s marriage-driven mother and her well-meaning yet out-witted husband—cannot comprehend the cerebral *pas de deux* between this beautiful pair of minds.

BOSTON PLAYWRIGHTS’ THEATRE

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS, 2022-23

Eat Your Young J. C. Pankratz (6 – 16 Oct.)***Sävë thë Whälës, etc.*** David L. Caruso (3 – 13 Nov.)***OTP*** Elise Wien (8 – 18 Dec.)

Jado Jehad Fatima A. Maan (16–26 Feb.)

Alligator-a-Phobia in 3D! Jay Eddy (6–16 Apr.)

Boston Playwrights' Theatre (BPT) has a simple mission: to produce new plays. Founded by Nobel Prize for Literature winner Derek Walcott over forty years ago, BPT produces a full season of new plays every year as the performance arm of Boston University's MFA program in playwriting. Kate Snodgrass came to the helm in 2007, and midwived (her term) almost 100 new plays into existence before retiring last year. This was the first season for Artistic Director Megan Sandberg-Zakian and Associate Professor of the Practice of Playwriting, Nathan Alan Davis.

Eat Your Young pitted four teenage women assigned to wilderness therapy against a pair of rather hapless counselors, until greater forces of man and nature—and farce—begged the question: who here actually needs therapy? To the ones who best cope, comes freedom.

2023 marked the silver anniversary of The Boston Theater Marathon, another important contribution BPT makes to Boston's theatre scene: 50 different plays produced by 50 different companies in one day!

NEW REPERTORY THEATRE

WATERTOWN, MASSACHUSETTS, 2023

The Normal Heart Larry Kramer (21 Jun–9 July)

The New Repertory Theatre (New Rep) is a case study in reinvention. Founded in 1984, New Rep produced plays in various locales until 2004, when it became resident company at the Charles Mosesian Theater in Watertown. It produced up to a dozen plays annually in Mosesian's 339-seat mainstage, 100-seat black box, and with touring productions until 2020, when a combination of forces forced New Rep to close.

Within a year, a new New Rep emerged, with a commitment to portraying underrepresented voices. Since then, New Rep has produced theatrical pieces, one-person shows, concerts, dance, and plays out-of-doors. It also supports new work through the New Rep/New Voices Theatre Festival, and Pipeline Project Residencies. In June 2023, New Rep produced its first multiple week run of a play since the pandemic.

The Normal Heart, Larry Kramer's diatribe against literally everyone

during the emerging AIDS epidemic, is a fitting debut for the revitalized New Rep. Mosesian's black box, pared to a mere fifty seats, draws the audience into the intimate love story, then entraps us to endure the (many) impassioned speeches: no one escapes our collective complicity in ignoring the gay plague. Dylan C. Wack as Ned Weeks headed the uniformly excellent cast, while Will McGarrahan's second act monologue as Mickey Marcus was one of the finest performances anywhere this season.

LYRIC STAGE COMPANY OF BOSTON

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 2022-23

Fabulation or, The Re-education of Undine Lynn Nottage (16 Sept. – 9 Oct.)

The Play that Goes Wrong Henry Lewis, Jonathan Sayer & Henry Shields (11 Nov. – 18 Dec.)

Preludes Dave Malloy (6 Jan. – 5 Feb.)

The Great Leap Lauren Yee (24 Feb. – 19 Mar.)

Sister Act Alan Menken, Glenn Slater, Bill and Cheri Steinkellner, Douglas Carter Beane (7 Apr. – 14 May)

Rooted Deborah Zoe Laufer (2 – 25 Jun)

Lyric Stage calls itself “your theatrical home” which is exactly how it feels. The 234-seat theatrical gem at 140 Clarendon Street has been Lyric's home for over thirty years: large enough for complex staging, yet intimate enough for the audience to feel close to the actors. Longtime Artistic Director Spiro Veloudos was as famous for his hilarious pre-show introductions as for the 65 productions he directed. Current Executive Director, Matt Chapuran, continues Spiro's spirit, delivering a warm welcome and chatting up patrons during intermission. Besides its healthy subscriber base, Lyric also offers an array of discounts to students, under-30's, veterans, and seniors to make theatre available to all. The Lyric truly does feel like live theatre: at home.

On a cold winter night, the writer's block that Rachmaninoff suffers in *Preludes* felt immediate. The production, directed by Artistic Director Courtney O'Connor, nested a series of confusions: 19th century characters on a set reminiscent of a 1980's hotel lobby, tossing out 21st century references. Two actors split the creative versus blocked Rachmaninoff, while a single actor (again, the marvelous Will McGarrahan) portrayed all the titans of Russia. Original songs wove in and out of “Rach's” familiar melodies. The

audience's confusion about this lost composer seemed purposeful. By the excellent second act, we abandoned all doubts, stopped trying to fit every puzzle piece, sat back, enjoyed the music and the action . . . and felt at home.

Paul E. Fallon

Cambridge, Massachusetts

HARTFORD STAGE

HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT, 2022-2023

The Mousetrap by Agatha Christie (13 Oct. – 6 Nov.)

It's A Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play adapted by Joe Landry (25 Nov. – 24 Dec.)

Espejos: Clean by Christine Quintana (12 Jan. – 5 Feb.)

The Art of Burning by Kate Snodgrass (2-26 Mar.)

The Winter's Tale by William Shakespeare (13 Apr. – 7 May)

Trouble in Mind by Alice Childress (25 May – 18 Jun.)

There was a little something for everyone in Hartford Stage's 2022-23 season that included plays by Alice Childress, Agatha Christie, William Shakespeare, and two world premieres. As the artistic team asserts in their bi-lingual statement on Equity and Anti-Racism, "We strive to create a culture where everyone sees themselves, their styles, their culture, and their humanity reflected and appreciated in all the work we do."

The theatre's commitment to diversity and inclusion was apparent in its artistic choices. Four of the six playwrights were women, two of whom were women of color. The female artistic director directed two shows; three more were directed by women, one of whom is a person of color; and the sole male director was also a person of color. The choice of material, including the theatre's first bilingual play, along with the continued practice of multicultural casting, manifested the theatre's commitment, reflecting their words in deeds.

Hartford Stage included open-captioned performances for patrons who are deaf or have hearing loss, and audio-described performances for patrons who are blind or have low vision for each show. Although fully returned to live performance, in order to accommodate medically vulnerable audience members, they offered one "mask required" performance for each show in the 2022-23 season ("mask required" performances have also been scheduled for next season), and the theatre made ventilation improvements in response

to Covid-19 concerns. Despite society's return to normal business following three years of pandemic ups and downs, it seems that audiences have not fully returned to the theatre, as many performances were undersold throughout the year.

The season opened with Agatha Christie's popular crowd pleaser *The Mousetrap*. Touted as the "longest running play in British history" (68 years before COVID gave it a hiatus), this production provided a farcical, enjoyable, and suspense-filled evening at the theatre. The strong ensemble cast was deftly directed by Jackson Gay. Riw Rakkulchon's detailed set and Fabian Fidel Aguilar's expressive costumes brought this whodunnit to vivid life, to the enjoyment of Hartford audiences.

Hartford Stage reprised last season's pared-down holiday offering, Joe Landry's *It's A Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play*, this time with local legend Godfrey L. Simmons Jr. in the role of George Bailey. Simmons is Artistic Director of political theatre collective HartBeat Ensemble, and as a self-proclaimed "artist-activist" he brought a commanding power to the role. As an African-American, Simmons's moving performance illuminated new facets of the character and story.

Hartford Stage has a long history of supporting new work, producing over 70 world premieres in its first 50 years. This season they added two new plays to that list: the bilingual *Espejos: Clean* by Christine Quintana, and *The Art of Burning* by Kate Snodgrass.

Espejos: Clean, a co-production with Syracuse Stage, was a play presented in Spanish and English with Spanish and English supertitles. Set in Cancun, Mexico, this two-hander thrusts the Hotel Housekeeping Manager Adriana, played by Emma Ramos, together with Sarah, played by Kate Abbruzzese, a bridesmaid in town for her sister's destination wedding. Concurrent monologues interspersed with scenes wove the stories of these disparate characters together, resulting in what Artistic Director Melia Bensussen called "cross-cultural misperceptions and internal reckonings."¹ Directed by Melissa Crespo, the production boasted an all-female production team including designers and stage management.

The next new play this season was *The Art of Burning* by Kate Snodgrass (a co-production of the Huntington Theatre in Boston where the show

1 <https://www.broadwayworld.com/connecticut/article/Kate-Abbruzzese-and-Emma-Ramos-to-Star-in-ESPEJOS-CLEAN-at-Hartford-Stage-20221221>



Kate Abbruzzese in *Espejos: Clean*. Photo: T. Charles Erickson.

premiered). *The Art of Burning* wove together a contemporary story of divorce with references to the ancient Greek play *Medea* in a modern exploration of women's rage. At the center of the play is Patricia, played by Adrienne Krstansky, who is fighting her soon-to-be-ex-husband Jason, played by Rom Barkhordar, for custody of their teenaged daughter. The *Medea* reference is ultimately a red herring, but the unsettling play challenges the audience to grapple with their own assumptions and their ability to judge character. The artistic leadership should be commended for their commitment to developing new works, and in particular the work of female playwrights.

Shakespeare's "problem play" *The Winter's Tale* was the fifth play of the season. Director Melia Bensussen incorporated live music into the production, setting Act I in the early 1900's, with the second half set in the 1920's. The first half of the play lagged, which is typical with this challenging text, but the magic of the second half simply worked. The choice to replace the bear with a sound cue for the famous line "Exit, pursued by a bear" was one of the more perplexing and disappointing moments in this production, but Bensussen deftly mixed darkness with light in her take on this enduring play.

Alice Childress's *Trouble in Mind* rounded out the six-play season with the meta-theatrical story of an acting troupe putting on a play. Written in 1955, the storyline follows a group of black and white actors rehearsing a play with a message of social change. The black actors press for revisions to the script, saying the story is watered down and full of stereotypes. The white director argues that the world isn't ready for the truth, and he challenges them to not let perfection be the enemy of good enough. The themes are sadly relevant today, and it was a strong choice for the season, exposing Hartford audiences to a lesser-known script that still packs a punch. Michael Rogers as Sheldon Forrester, the sage elder of the group, gave a tour-de-force performance in one of the show's darkest monologues that will not soon be forgotten.

Next season, the theatre's 60th, includes classics *Pride and Prejudice*, *All My Sons* and a return of *A Christmas Carol* (to be directed by former Artistic Director Michael Wilson), along with newer works *The Hot-Wing King*, *2.5 Minute Ride*, and another world premiere, *Simona's Search*. It will be exciting to see them launch into their next decade.

Jan Mason

Western Connecticut State University

THE HUNTINGTON

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS, 2022-23

Sing Street Edna Walsh, Gary Clark & John Carney (26 Aug. – 2 Oct.)***Joe Turner's Come and Gone*** August Wilson (14 Oct. – 13 Nov.)***The Art of Burning*** Kate Snodgrass (13 Jan. – 12 Feb.)***K-I-S-S-I-N-G*** Lenelle Moïse (3 Mar. – 2 Apr.)***Clyde's*** Lynn Nottage (31 Mar. – 30 Apr.)***Joy & Pandemic*** Taylor Mac (21 Apr – 21 May)***The Lehman Trilogy*** Stefano Massini (13 Jun – 16 July)

The Huntington rocketed out of the COVID-19 pandemic with a 2022-23 season of exuberant live performances played to appreciative—and packed—audiences at the company's two theatres. This marked the first season under Artistic Director Loretta Greco, the final season for longtime Managing Director Michael Maso, as well as the inaugural performances in the newly refurbished Huntington Theatre. The main stage restoration is splendid, and retains so much original character, one senses the ghosts of performances past hovering amidst the glistening gold leaf letters above the proscenium: "To Hold as 'Twere the Mirror up to Nature" (*Hamlet*, Act 3, Scene 2).

This season's productions preserved the exactitude and polish we expect from this premier company, with a few fresh twists. The first twist was *Sing Street*, a musical set in 1982 Dublin about a teen from a comically dysfunctional family who starts a band to win friends, impress a girl, and kick life back into his disillusioned older brother. The casual set, the diverse casting (which bore no relation to 1980's Ireland), and the notched-up volume within Calderwood Pavilion's Wimberly Theater made *Sing Street* feel more like a Broadway-bound production from that company across the Charles River than usual Huntington fare. No matter. What *Sing Street* lacked in depth it more than compensated for in energy and joy: the audience loved it! The incredible choreography of the plaid couch alone was worth seeing the show.

In October, the opening night of The Huntington's newly renovated namesake theatre was a grand celebration that coincided with a revival of the second play of August Wilson's century cycle, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*. The play premiered at The Huntington in 1986 and sparked a 19-year collaboration between the playwright and the company, who worked together on seven of his ten century-cycle plays. Before the performance Managing Director Michael Maso, Artistic Director Loretta Greco, Boston Mayor



Sharmarke Yusef and Regan Sims in *K-I-S-S-I-N-G*. Photo: T. Charles Erickson

Michelle Wu, and August Wilson's widow, Constanza Romero, addressed the audience and unveiled a plaque dedicating the lobby of the renovated theatre in honor of Wilson. The formalities were followed by an inspired revival of this powerful play. The set, costumes, cast, timing, and energy: every aspect of the production was breathtaking. The everyday strivings of folks sharing a boarding house in 1911 drew the audience into their lives and made us care about them, so that when August Wilson's language grew epistolary and poetic, we went willingly, gratefully, on a journey in search of meaning and restoration. It was a most fitting play to inaugurate the new, yet old, theatre.

The only pandemic-related hiccup in The Huntington's season came on the heels of *Joe Turner's* success. The company had to postpone *Bhangin' It*, a musical based on a Bangra dance team, due to supply chain delays in manufacturing and receiving critical equipment for the show's effects. New production dates have not been set.

Despite the austere set and the clipped language of divorce, anger and recrimination singed the Calderwood Pavilion stage in *The Art of Burning*. This co-production with Hartford Stage teamed Boston playwright and longtime head of Boston Playwrights' Theatre, Kate Snodgrass, with director Melia Bensussen and a fiery cast of mostly local actors. Adrienne Krstansky was a standout as Patricia, a Modernist painter who flips the terms of divorce at the moment of final signing when a wrinkle arises: has her daughter disappeared?

The unexpected delight of the season was *K-I-S-S-I-N-G*, produced in collaboration with The Front Porch Collaborative at the Wimberly Theater. Playwright Lenelle Moïse, a former Huntington Playwright Fellow, created characters that are fresh, theatrical, yet real. The sweet tale of a talented high school student from the projects navigating between two "token Black" prep school brothers engaged the audience from the intense opening scene, and then blossomed with humor and human insight.

Clyde's is a sandwich shop at a truck stop in Pennsylvania, though we're relegated to the kitchen, which is operated by a group of former felons. They're happy to have a job, even if somewhat abused by the crafty owner who's aware they have few other options. The Huntington's co-production with Berkeley Repertory Theatre was full of sass and bizarre sandwich combinations. Playwright Lynn Nottage credits the genesis of *Clyde's* from interviewing formerly incarcerated people while investigating material for *Sweat* (produced at The Huntington February 2020). Which makes sense, as

Clyde's is lighter fare than its galvanizing, Pulitzer Prize winning, cousin.

When Michael Maso's retirement was officially announced in early 2023, the entire Boston Arts community took note. Maso led The Huntington since its founding in 1982, shepherding a university theatre into a Tony Award-winning phenomenon, with two top-notch performance spaces, a vibrant playwright fellows' program, and a wide range of community outreach endeavors. The Huntington board plans to name Maso's successor this summer.

In the meantime, new Artistic Director Loretta Greco directed her first Huntington production, the world premiere of *Joy & Pandemic*. Ms. Greco has a long affiliation with playwright Taylor Mac, who set the play in Philadelphia circa Spanish-flu 1918—and a generation later. It's a fitting parallel to our own pandemic time, but the resonance runs deeper by exploring primary mother/daughter relationships set a generation apart.

The Lehman Trilogy was added to the season to compensate for *Bhangin' It*, though there was nothing "stand-in" about the production. The Tony Award-winning Best Play of 2022 is a three-act marathon that chronicles 164 years of American capitalism through the prism of three immigrant brothers over three generations (plus the unrelated vultures who bring it all down). The play is a tour de force. Director Carey Perloff's production rose to the material in every respect. The set, the lighting, the acting, the ceaseless push to acquire more zeros after any dollar amount, saturated the audience with the power, potential, and excesses of our economic system. The slaves, laborers, and our physical environment—so depleted by the system—have no direct voice in the proceedings yet their pain is palpable. In glorifying one of the titanic families of American capitalism, *The Lehman Trilogy* ultimately condemns the entire system.

Unlike Lehman Brothers, The Huntington is robust and thriving. The company moves towards its 2023-2024 season on solid footing.

Paul E. Fallon
Cambridge, Massachusetts

LONG WHARF THEATRE
NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT, 2022-23

Black Trans Women at the Center Andrea Jenkins, Bl3ssing Oshun Ra, Danielle Davis,
Davia Spain (3 Aug. – 6 Aug. 2023, on-line)

Dignity, Always Dignity Zack Fine, Bryce Pinkham, Rona Siddiqui, Kyra Traber (10 & 11 Sept. 2022, 222 Sargent Drive)

Jelly's Last Jam Susan Birkenhead, Luther Henderson, Jelly Roll Morton, George C. Wolfe (17 & 18 Sept. 2022, 222 Sargent Drive, a concert singing)

Home(coming): Farewell + Block Party (14 & 15 Oct. 2022, 222 Sargent Drive & Audubon Street)

Flying Bird's Diary Melissa Tantaquidgeon Zobel (22 & 23 Oct. 2022, 222 Sargent Drive)

Live from the Edge UNIVERSES (27 Apr. – 21 May 2023, Space Ballroom)

Audra McDonald: A Concert for Long Wharf Theatre (15 May 2023, Lyman Center at Southern Connecticut State University)

I AM: Muslim/American Aaliyah Miller (7, 9, 11, 19, 20 June 2023, screenings & discussions at venues across Southern Connecticut)

Kristina Wong For Public Office (24 & 25 June 2023, Yale's University Theatre)

Long Wharf Theatre became an itinerant theatre in 2022-23, with an evolving schedule of performances at different venues delivered via different media. Seven of the shows listed above were announced at the start of the season in 2022, but one was rescheduled, one added, and one changed. The Audra McDonald concert was first announced as a benefit reading of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*. This flexible programming and locations fit Long Wharf's mission statement: "Long Wharf Theatre is dedicated to producing boundary-breaking theatre with and for its many, kaleidoscopic communities."

Long Wharf Theatre's lease on the warehouse space it had occupied since 1965 at the New Haven Food Terminal was expensive to operate and difficult to access for people who do not drive, being separated from most of New Haven by railroad yards and highways, with poor bus service at night. Long Wharf's "theatre for everyone" vision fails if "everyone" is only people with cars.

This season's shows had very short runs, which made it difficult for me to see many of them, but what I saw was thought-provoking and congruent with Long Wharf's claim to be "creating an American theatre that embraces storytelling as a means for producing societal change" (<https://longwharf.org/about/>) even if they were not fully mounted productions.

Dignity, Always Dignity, was a work in progress. It's a musical, but on September 11 there was no music. It ran one hour and ended with an incomplete script. The audience was told we were seeing "a snapshot in time" of the



Asia Mark of UNIVERSES performing *Live from the Edge* at the Space Ballroom. Photo: T. Charles Erickson

development process. Staging was minimal: two people with music stands and microphones on the flat theatre floor, with colored stage lights but no lighting cues. Rona Siddiqui, the composer, read the stage directions. The setting was described as an island being inundated by rising waters. Bryce Pinkham, the performer, played the one human character and manipulated a puppet. The puppet was a child questioning why people had not done more about climate change, and then Death, whom the performer tried to distract with promises of fame. The show was a meditation on climate change and our individual and collective responsibilities. A post-show discussion featured climate activists Adrian Huq and Alex Rodriguez talking about what we personally can do to combat climate change, and what sea level rise means to the New Haven community. The tides will flood the Food Terminal's parking lot outside the theatre twice a day.

Home(coming): Farewell + Block Party was a celebration. The Farewell part was a party on Sargent Drive, a tour of the theatre facilities, and a Farewell Ceremony on the Claire Tow Stage. The next day the celebration moved to Audubon Street, where the Long Wharf Theatre administrative offices were moving to be on the same street with other non-profit arts organizations. It was an afternoon of speeches, musical performances, open house tours of arts group spaces, dancing, and food trucks.

Flying Bird's Diary was billed as a play reading. Staging was minimal: ten music stands in a row for the performers on the Claire Tow Stage and one stand upstage. It was a story about the life of Flying Bird (1827-1908), also known as Fidelity Fielding. Considered the last native speaker of the Mohegan Pequot language, she was a medicine woman, carrying out traditional rituals and medicinal practices. The diary of the title was several books in which Flying Bird had recorded traditions and the Pequot language. These came into the possession of Frank Speck, of European descent, who had grown up in southeastern Connecticut and who spoke Mohegan. Later, as a student of anthropology at Columbia University, he was encouraged by his professors to gather information about the Mohegan language and culture. The diaries with Fidelity's notes came into his possession. Some were lost in a fire, but the remaining diaries stayed in his possession until his death in 1950. In 2020, Cornell University returned the diaries to the Mohegan Tribe.

Before she died in 1908, Fidelity taught Mohegan traditions to Gladys Tantaquidgeon, who in turn passed this traditional knowledge on to the

playwright, Melissa Tantaquidgeon Zobel. *Flying Bird's Diary* has won 25 competitions as a screenplay and stage play; I found it relied heavily on narrative and less on enactment to tell the story of Flying Bird's life and the fate of the diaries, but it gave me a personal view of Mohegan history—and I liked the stories about the Makiawisug, the little people, spirits who live among the rocks of Mohegan Hill.

Live from the Edge was presented at the Space Ballroom, an all-ages music venue in Hamden, CT near the Lake Whitney Open Space. It was created by UNIVERSES, an artistic collective headed by Steven Sapp and Mildred Ruiz-Sapp, who have been Long Wharf Theatre's Mellon Foundation Playwrights in Residence since 2020. It was performed on an end-stage in the ballroom, with no scenery other than black curtains, stools, music stands, and microphones, with some small color-changing moving lights just out of arm's reach above. It was a potpourri of poetry, rap, and song. Some of it was simply fun, such as the poem based on the ABCs, and some of it was more pointed, but all of it was clever and thought-provoking.

Audra McDonald: A Concert for Long Wharf Theatre was performed before a large audience on the thrust stage of the Lyman Center at Southern Connecticut State University. Accompanied by Andy Einhorn, Audra McDonald sang beautifully, sometimes with the audience signing along. She also offered a few comments on current politics from the stage; art at Long Wharf is not a bubble sealed off from the outside world. There also were short pre-show performances by students from the Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School in New Haven—connecting with the larger New Haven arts community.

Next season has been announced as "Theatre of Possibility." The season will start with a live-streamed festival of plays highlighting LGBTQIA and BIPOC stories. In November, the theatre will present a show based on *The Year of Magical Thinking* by Joan Didion, featuring the actress, Kathleen Chalfant. Long Wharf Theatre is partnering with TheaterWorks Hartford to produce Martyna Majok's *Sanctuary City*. Additional productions are to be announced.

Karl G. Ruling
Milford, Connecticut

PORTLAND STAGE COMPANY

PORTLAND, MAINE, 2022-23

Smoke on the Mountain Connie Ray; conceived by Alan Bailey; musical arrangements by Mike Craver and Mark Hardwick. Co-produced with Maine State Music Theatre (2 Aug. – 28 Aug. in person; 17 Aug. – 11 Sept. pre-recorded streaming on-demand)

The Great Leap Lauren Yee. Co-produced with the Hangar Theatre Company (14 Sept. – 2 Oct in person)

Sherlock Holmes: The Final Adventure Steven Dietz, based on the original 1899 play by William Gillette and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (26 Oct. – 20 Nov in person; 10 Nov. – 4 Dec. pre-recorded streaming on-demand)

A Tuna Christmas Ed Howard, Joe Sears, & Jaston Williams (30 Nov. – 24 Dec. in person)

Sweet Goats and Blueberry Señoritas Richard Blanco and Vanessa Garcia (25 Jan. – 12 Feb. in-person; 8 Feb. – 26 Feb. pre-recorded streaming on-demand)

How I Learned What I Learned August Wilson, co-conceived by Todd Kreidler (1 Mar – 19 Mar. in person)

The Cake Bekah Brunstetter (5 Apr. – 23 Apr. in person)

The 2022-23 season found Portland Stage Company returning to larger casts and all in-person viewing, with options for digital viewing slowly being phased out. To accommodate patrons' preferences and needs, the third week of each production was designated as masks-required performances, with masks recommended for the rest of each run. Over this year, the theater also orchestrated its \$6.4 million "Making An Entrance Capital Campaign," for facility renovations, which will bear fruit in the coming 2023-24 season.

In the summer of 2022, PSC continued its recent tradition of co-producing a musical with Maine State Music Theatre; this year's offering was *Smoke on the Mountain*, a bluegrass jukebox show set in a Saturday Night Gospel Sing at a church in the Smoky Mountains of 1938.

The theatre's first regular-season show of the fall was Lauren Yee's *The Great Leap*, a comedic drama about basketball and U.S.-China relations in the 1980s, and navigating themes of politics, family, and the collective vs. the individual. Ray Yamamoto was wiry and electric as Manford, an ambitious 17-year-old Chinese American orphan and point-guard who's dying to play in the 1985 "friendship game" in China, under the coaching of wry and profane Saul (Jim Shankman). Natsu Onoda Power directed a sharp-eyed and briskly paced production, with set design by Anita Stewart that deftly synthesized the sport with larger issues.

From there, PSC pivoted to a classic, with *Sherlock Holmes: The Final Adventure*, in which playwright Steven Dietz amiably mashed up two of the most famous Holmes stories, “A Scandal in Bohemia” and “The Final Problem.” Kevin R. Free directed a witty, very game production, graced with impeccable Victorian stylings and costumes, a surprisingly affable and wistful Holmes (Ezra Barnes), a Watson (Brian Lee Huynh) who is equal parts devoted and exasperated with his ingenious friend, and delightfully demonic giggles from Tom Ford’s Professor Moriarty.

For its holiday show, PSC made the uncharacteristic choice to forego earnestness in favor of satire with a Christmas installment of the *Greater Tuna* two-hander franchise: *A Tuna Christmas* that poked holiday fun at homophobia, Christian extremism, gun lust, and book banning. Nathaniel P. Claridad and Tom Ford gave protean performances, most particularly in Ford’s nuanced, empathetic Bertha, a book burner with complexity. Though the show inflicted some tonal whiplash between pathos and satire under Julia Gibson’s direction, its ultimate value of humanity resonated with the holidays.

Its first PSC show of 2023 brought to the stage the first play written by renowned Cuban American Maine poet Richard Blanco, in collaboration with playwright Vanessa Garcia. Young baker and Maine transplant Beatriz (Ashley Alvarez) struggles to translate Cuban American baking to rural Maine, but she and her eclectic neighbors enrich each other’s lives in sweet and myriad ways. The cast gave intimate and big-hearted performances in this paean to forgiveness and community.

The company’s next show was a one-man autobiography of a theatre giant: August Wilson’s *How I Learned What I Learned*, an exploration of the playwright’s trajectory and what it was to be Black in America and in theatre. Lance E. Nichols starred in a production directed by Jade King Carroll.

As its regular-season mainstage closer, PSC presented another meditation on community and difference (and baking): In *The Cake*, conservative Southern cake-maker Della (Sam Rosentrater) agonizes when she’s asked to make a wedding cake for her young friend Jen (Eileen Hanley) and her fiancée Macy (Echaka Agba), a smart young Black woman from New York. Guided by curiosity about rather than rage against bigotry, and with an archly confectionary set, *The Cake* embraced complexity and compassion.

Portland Stage also continued its Studio Series, presenting staged readings and discussions of Michèle Aldin Kushner’s *Iceberg Effect*, about climate science and gender bias, and Monica Wood’s *Saint Dad*, which will open the



Sam Rosentrater in *The Cake*. Photo: No Umbrella Media, LLC.

2023 season on the Mainstage. And this spring saw PSC's 34th annual *Little Festival of the Unexpected*, featuring live readings of *The Page Turners*, by Mallory Jane Weiss, and Benjamin Benne's *Manning*—which will also appear as a full production on the Mainstage in the 2023-24 season.

Portland Stage continues to vocally support anti-racism and the decolonization of the arts and public spaces. The theatre's land acknowledgement encourages theatregoers to connect with Wabanaki REACH (a Maine organization that advocates for the self-determination of the Indigenous peoples in what is now called Maine) and also acknowledges Maine's historical involvement in the slave trade.

This summer, renovations funded by 2022's capital campaign will take place in the theatre, including a state-of-the-art elevator, enhanced lobby and patron gathering places, and a new marquee. A grand reveal of the improvements is slated to open the fall 2023 season.

That next season will open with *Saint Dad*, a new comedy by beloved local writer Monica Wood, and will go on to feature some high-profile shows, including Heidi Schreck's *What the Constitution Means to Me*, Lynn Nottage's *Clyde's*, and Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*, as well as the premiere of Benjamin Benne's *Manning* and a return to a full-cast *A Christmas Carol*, with ensembles of local youth back on stage to herald the spirit of the season.

Megan Grumbling

Southern Maine Community College
University of New England

SHAKESPEARE & COMPANY

LENOX, MASSACHUSETTS, 2022

The Approach Mark O'Rowe (5 – 29 May)

An Iliad Lisa Peterson and Denis O'Hare (3 June – 3 July)

Much Ado About Nothing William Shakespeare (2 July – 14 Aug.)

A Walk in the Woods Lee Blessing (15 July – 4 Sept.)

Hymn Lolita Chakrabarti (22 July – 28 Aug.)

Measure for Measure William Shakespeare (19 Aug. – 18 Sept.)

Golden Leaf Ragtime Blues Charles Smith (23 Sept. – 30 Oct.)

Shakespeare & Co. opened its 45th season with *The Approach* by Irish playwright Mark O'Rowe. Three friends, two at a time, meet for coffee in a Dublin

neighborhood. Two are sisters (Michelle Joyner and Elizabeth Aspenlieder), long estranged over a man they both loved. Cara (Nicole Ansari) is the old friend and intermediary who eventually brings the two sisters to a reconciliation. The timeline is tenuous, the backstory vague and the final resolution uncertain. And while these old friends talk up a storm about the man who weaved in and out of their lives and the petty details of daily life, it was what remained unsaid that was most captivating in this deceptively simple play, tightly directed by Tina Packer and Mark Farrell.

Social, political, and racial issues were foremost in this post-COVID season at Shakespeare. Lee Blessing's *A Walk in the Woods*, appropriately staged in the woodsy Roman Garden Theatre, may have appeared to be a Cold War curio, when two superpowers controlled the world and thought, however mistakenly, that they could bring about global peace. Yet beneath the humor and humanity of this production, there was an underlying clear-headed realism of how difficult such goals are to achieve in any age. These Geneva woods were strangely ominous—the jagged trunks of Devon Drohan's set design were the real remnants of an ash tree felled by a storm, according to director James Warwick's program notes. Two of the company's finest veterans, Allyn Burrows and Jonathan Epstein, sparred and bonded as the American and Russian negotiators, John Honeyman and Andrey Botvinnik. Epstein as the playful, world weary Russian had the plum part and made the most of Botvinnik's wit and the deep cynicism that underlined it. But Burrows's earnest, idealistic American had a power of his own, as he tried to iron out an arms proposal that was doomed to failure.

Hymn had an arresting opening. Two Black men, whose lives were fated to become entwined, stood facing each other over a table holding a bottle of booze and a Bible. As a metronome ticked ominously, each man seized the object before them and turned away. The symbolism was rich. One of the men, Benny ("ranney"), who soon learns that they are half-brothers, starts out as a lost soul who eventually finds himself. The other, Gil (Kevin Craig), more solidly established in life, loses his way. Benny's final tribute at Gil's funeral needed more heightened language to make its point and the soulful singing of Bill Withers wasn't enough of a substitute.

Heightened language soared from an adaptation of Homer's *Iliad* and the season's two Shakespeare comedies. The poet in Lisa Peterson and Denis O'Hare's *An Iliad* isn't Homer but actress MaConnia Chesser, who delivered the oft-told tale on a cluttered backstage with little more than her physical



Claudio (Vaughn Pole) pleads for help from his sister Isabella (Nehassaiu deGannes) in a tense scene from "Measure for Measure." (Photo by Daniel Rader)

presence, booming voice, and a metal pipe that served as a sword. The title is purposely *An Iliad*, putting the Trojan War into the context of all wars. The point was driven home when Chesser's poet reeled off a litany of human-kind's folly, from Homer's war to Putin's.

As Kelly Galvin pointed out in her director's notes to her sparkling production of *Much Ado About Nothing*, the "nothing" of the title is a pun on 'noting,' as in seeing and spying. And spying on others becomes the engine that drives the two-pronged plot. The uniformly fine cast was led by Tamara Hickey's tomboyish Beatrice, whose verbal bouts with L. James's Benedick were the comic highlight of this production, along with Caroline Calkins's half-pint constable Dogberry and his clownish subordinate Verges, an unrecognizable Gina Fonseca, who doubled as the wronged Hero. The raucous comedy gives way in Act IV to, in Galvin's words, a "strain of darkness," as Claudio (an

earnest Gregory Boover) accuses his bride-to-be of infidelity. The miscreants are unmasked and the lovers, both pairs, reunite in a celebratory dance, the perfect ending to a delightful production that indeed showed there was “much ado” here.

If *Much Ado* is a comedy dappled with shadows, *Measure for Measure* is one drenched in darkness. After mounting an outdoor workshop production last summer, director Alice Reagan moved the full production indoors to the Tina Packer Playhouse. She set the play in 1950s Harlem, well evoked by a jittery jazz score by sound designer Caroline Eng and a noirish urban set by Edward T. Morris, anchored by a lonely lamppost. The effective opening depicted events before the play started—the betrayal of a lover and the consummation of another romance, both having major consequences for the central characters. The Harlem setting was effectively brought to life by Charls Sedgwick Hall’s street savvy Lucio, who stole every scene he was in. In a double role, Nehassaiu deGannes was Pompey the pimp and the eloquent heroine, Isabella, who had to choose between saving her virginity or her brother’s life, the choice given her by the corrupt official Angelo (David Gow). Reagan’s decision to make the mysterious Duke, who manipulates the other characters with an almost God-like power, female was intriguing, but Ariel Bock, a fine actress and Shakespeare veteran, didn’t seem comfortable in the role. Yet thanks to deGannes, Gow and Ally Farzetta as his wronged fiancée Mariana, the climactic scene, arguably one of Shakespeare’s most compelling, brought this tragic-tinged comedy to a thoughtful and satisfying conclusion.

Golden Leaf Ragtime Blues, the season’s final offering, centered on another Pompey (Glenn Barrett), the curmudgeonly half of a vaudeville comedy team who had lost his partner Ollie (Kevin G. Coleman) and his purpose for living. His estranged daughter Marsha (Kristen Moriarty), a social worker, enters with her charge, a sullen Black teen named Jet (Logan Slater). When Marsha leaves, the mismatched two bond with a predictability as obvious as one of Pompey and Ollie’s corny jokes. If there is anything substantive about this play it is Jet’s life as a foster care kid and his speech about an imaginary home that he’s never had.

In an innovative move to address those patrons still concerned about COVID-19, the company presented a selection of mask-required performances to accommodate them, which it plans to continue next season. In August, founder Tina Packer was awarded the Ellen Stewart Career

Achievement Award in Professional Theatre by the Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE).

Steven Otfinoski
Fairfield University

TRINITY REPERTORY THEATRE COMPANY
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND, 2022-23

The Inheritance Part 1 Matthew López (1 Sept.–5 Nov.)

The Inheritance Part 2 Matthew López (22 Sept.–6 Nov.)

A Christmas Carol Charles Dickens (3 Nov.–1 Jan.)

By the Queen Drawn by William Shakespeare by Whitney White (12 Jan.–12 Feb. world premiere)

The Inferior Sex Jacqueline E. Lawton (16 Mar.–16 Apr. world premiere)

Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street Music & Lyrics Stephen Sondheim,
Book by Hugh Wheeler (25 May – 25 June)

The 2022-23 season was Trinity Repertory Theatre Company's 59th and they produced a remarkable body of work that provided a range of human experiences on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. They also lost two of their most important artistic visionaries midway through the season: Adrian Hall, founding artistic director from 1964 – 1989, who died February 4th, and Eugene Lee, Tony Award-winning resident scenic designer from 1967 – 2023, who died February 7th. These two lifelong friends and collaborators helped shape the crafts of performance and design, leaving a legacy that has had lasting impact not only on Trinity, but on the American theatre writ large.

The 2020 Tony Award-winning play *The Inheritance* by Matthew López was an epic two-part production that followed three generations of gay men as they navigated their world through the AIDS crisis, the legalization of gay marriage, and the presidential election of 2016. Director Joe Wilson Jr. led this masterpiece of theatre with the sensitivity and earnestness that the subject required. He staged the play on an extensive midcentury modern set designed by Michael McGarty and activated the exuberant ensemble into the visual texture of each moment. The performances were powerful, with most actors playing multiple roles that adeptly connected the intergenerational characters. Stephen Thorne's portrayal of Morgan and Walter was extraordinary—a true master class of performance. Thorne's interactions with Eric



Jack Dwyer and Stephen Thorne in *The Inheritance*. Photo: Mark Turek

Glass, played by Jack Dwyer, were some of the most beautiful and touching moments as he recounted his experience caring for men in their final days as they died from AIDS. The power and importance of this play cannot be overstated: it is poignant, necessary, beautiful, and so incredibly human.

The 46th annual production of *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens was notable this year with Phyllis Kay playing Ebenezer Scrooge; the last time a woman played Scrooge was 2003. The production, reimagined yearly, continues to be foundational for Trinity Rep's producing seasons.

The world premiere of *By the Queen* "drawn by William Shakespeare and written by Whitney White" was a fascinating play that connected three eras of Queen Margret from Shakespeare's *Henry VI Parts 1-3* and *Richard III*. The story was told from a liminal space where each era of Margret's story existed together, creating an immersive experience for the audience, some of whom were seated on stage in a cabaret style with a restaurant aesthetic. The exploration into the character was performed by Fiona Marie Maguire as Margret 1, the young provincial princess; Rachel Christopher as Margret 2, the fierce Queen of England; and Paula Plum as Margret 3, the exiled widow. Paula Plum's performance as Margret 3 was especially powerful: charismatic, reflective, and empowering as she grappled with Margret's complicated history. Extrapolating Queen Margret's characters from the Shakespearean

canon and giving them agency to tell their stories independently was brilliant and thought-provoking.

The world premiere of *The Inferior Sex* by Jacqueline E. Lawton was an inspirational highlight of the season. The creative team and cast were entirely made up of women under the direction of Tatyana-Marie Carlo, who expertly steered the narrative through the challenges women faced in the summer of 1972. Shirley Chisholm, the first African American woman running for president and played by Jackie Davis, functioned as our beacon while a group of women debated the future of their new magazine for “feminists who love fashion.” Davis’s performance was a powerful demonstration of Chisholm’s leadership as she drove the narrative and offered up action, honesty, and hope through the challenges of inequity, race, and gender. Geri-Nikole Love played Gwen, the upstart journalist who was brought on to broaden the magazine’s appeal to Black women and follow Chisholm to write a story about her campaign. Love’s performance was driven, passionate, and genuine in a way that was completely relatable for Trinity’s audiences. Sandra Rollins, who played executive editor Rachel Dulude, brought an understated sense of balance to her performance despite the character’s power and privilege. The authenticity of the performances and the message of equal rights for all told with a glorious amount of humor made for an extremely relevant and significant production.

Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street was the final show of the season as well as the final scenic design of longtime resident designer Eugene Lee. Director Curt Columbus’s production concept of incarceration, reintegration, and justice was captured marvelously with Lee’s multi-tiered scaffold-type revolve that was reminiscent of a jail cell block. Originally slated for the ’19 –’20 season, there was a lot of anticipation and expectation behind the production and the excitement of opening night was palpable. The show’s trademark diabolical sense of humor was captured through performances that were inventive, gritty, and appropriately ominous. Erick Pinnick’s Sweeney Todd was deep and introverted and often his character choices were hard to interpret until he met Rachel Warren’s Mrs. Lovett, whose bold and hilarious work struck a perfect balance. The production lacked a sense of urgency at times and locating the barbershop on the second floor of the revolve undermined the visual impact of the storytelling. The murders, which utilized color-changing sequins to represent blood, were humorous and stylized but a bit anticlimactic. Despite

some questions about the concept and aesthetic, this production was a tremendous success for the company, now joyfully able to fully produce a musical post-pandemic.

Trinity Rep's 60th season will be *The Good John Proctor* by Talene Monahon, *Becky Nurse of Salem* by Sarah Ruhl, *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens, *La Broa' (Broad Street)* by Orlando Hernández, *Fences* by August Wilson, and *La Cage Aux Folles*, music and lyrics by Jerry Herman, book by Harvey Fierstein.

Christopher R. Hoyt
Moses Brown School

VERMONT STAGE

BURLINGTON, VERMONT, 2022-2023

Women in Jeopardy Wendy MacLeod (10 Aug. – 21 Aug. at Isham Family Farm in Williston)

The Pittman Painters Lee Hall (28 Sept. – 10 Oct.)

Airness Chelsea Marcantel (8 Mar. – 26 Mar.)

Venus in Fur David Ives (26 Apr. – 14 May)

Bakeoff: True West (14 Jun. – 18 Jun.)

I was not able to attend most of this year's season but will return next year. I would like to note for the historic record that Vermont Stage has shifted its management structure with the recent hiring of Noah Blocker-Glynn as an Executive Director for the company, a position that previously had not existed. Given Blocker-Glynn's background primarily as a choral conductor and academic administrator at the Hartt School in Hartford, Connecticut, this hire seems like an odd choice for a theatre focused on contemporary theatre and straight plays. However, the hire seems to be a sign that Vermont Stage's board of directors is hoping to expand the company's fundraising efforts in the coming year.

In an article for the *Burlington Free Press* published in September, Brent Hallenbeck quotes Blocker-Glynn, who suggests he was brought on specifically to focus on bringing audiences back to the theatre after the COVID-19 pandemic. He also sets as a goal to expand Vermont Stage's existing audience by convincing the community that the company is not "inaccessible or stuffy," and to focus on expanding fundraising and grant writing

since artistic director Cristina Alicea and her small staff lacked the “bodies and bandwidth” to take on some tasks an executive director can perform.¹

Hopefully, this new hire will prove a prudent financial choice rather than an additional undue expense at a time when the company is still recovering from the pandemic. Artistic Director Cristina Alicea remains in her role and has already announced Vermont Stage’s 29th season.

Angela Sweigart-Gallagher

St. Lawrence University

YALE REPERTORY THEATRE

NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT, 2022-23

Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf? Edward Albee (6 – 29 Oct.)

The Brightest Thing in the World Leah Nanako Winkler (25 Nov. – 17 Dec., world premiere)

Mojada: A Medea in Los Angeles Luis Alfaro (10 Mar. – 1 Apr.)

the ripple, the wave that carried me home Christina Anderson (28 Apr. – 20 May)

This was Yale Rep’s first full season of plays—even at the reduced number of four, which is the new normal—since 2018-19. Ever cautious, the Rep continued to require audiences to wear masks for the entire season, and this policy may well extend into the future. It also has not resumed its long tradition of splendid opening night parties at a fancy local restaurant, to which the entire audience is cordially invited, in deference to COVID safety. Artistic Director James Bundy tried to make up for this at the final opening of the season when immediately after the show he and Managing Director Florie Seery brought the entire production company to the stage to receive kudos, gifts, and more audience applause.

The season opened with a brilliant production of Edward Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* directed by Bundy and featuring four equally fine actors—René Augesen, Dan Donohue, Nate Janis, and Emma Pfitzer Price—who collectively created a tour-de-force ensemble inhabiting a splendidly claustrophobic period set designed by Michael Urbino and lit by Jiahao (Neil) Qiu. In his program note, Bundy delights in introducing this American

1 Hallenbeck, Brent. “Vermont Theater Companies Announce Changes and Fresh Productions for Fall,” *Burlington Free Press* (Burlington, VT), Sept. 29, 2022.



Alma Martinez and Camila Moreno in *Mojada: A Medea in Los Angeles*. Photo: Joan Marcus

classic to a new generation of theatregoers; he notes that this production is the first professional staging of the play in Connecticut in 40 years. The Content Advisory in the playbill is seemingly aimed at these new audiences who may find the early-1960s' misogyny and racism endemic to both text and action shocking and frankly, even for those of us who know the play well, it *was* shocking—wonderfully so—even to this jaded reviewer who was astonished at how much punch a 60-year-old modernist play can pack. There is further warning of “specific language and slurs that are anti-AAPI, anti-Arab, and anti-Latinx” and “the action of the play contains acts of orientalism and the fetishization of Asian cultures.” Apologies aside, the production captured the gritty mid-twentieth century realism of Albee’s powerful portrayal of the American Dream gone wrong, replete with zinging repartee and unfettered physical performances that underscored both the absurdity and violence of these drunken, debauched, and deeply unhappy characters. It was a grim reminder that life in America really hasn’t changed very much in the past 60 years.

In another celebration of Yale Rep’s slowly coming back post-pandemic, it produced its first world premiere play since 2019: *The Brightest Thing in the World*, by Japanese- American playwright Leah Nanako Winkler, which was

commissioned and developed by Yale's new play development program, the Binger Center for New Theatre. She sets her play in her American hometown, Lexington, Kentucky, in the throes of the opioid epidemic, dramatizing how three ordinary women deal with the painful cycle of addiction and recovery. Lane, the central character, is both a recovering addict and a gifted baker, and we meet her in the café where she whips up delicious pastries to delight her customers, one of whom, Steph, becomes her live-in lover. Displayed on the "Specials" board are the fictional pastries with real-life descriptors of life in Lexington. "Fruit Loop Doughnuts" celebrate the city's friendly climate for "LGBQIA+ folks" by paying homage to the area downtown known as the "Fruit Loop" boasting "a walkable area of queer-friendly bars, restaurants, and shops." The third character, Della, is Lane's older sister who helps the couple navigate the difficulties of a love relationship crowded out by the addiction that eventually kills Lane.

Yale's riveting production of *Mojada*, Luis Alfaro's Latine interpretation of Euripides' *Medea*, replete with the *deus ex machina* moment of Medea's final exit from the top of the skene (here, a Boyle Heights, Los Angeles rooftop) as a magnificent bird in flight. Vibrant staging enhanced the two extended memory sequences: the first, the tale of the family's migration from Mexico via human traffickers and the second, Medea's harrowing story of killing her twin brother when, after their father's death, he treats Medea, her husband, and their son as inherited property rather than beloved family. The period set, which recreated the old Victorian houses that became the dilapidated refuges for Mexican migrants in Los Angeles, was beautifully realized with significant touches, such as the thick orange extension cord extending through the open front window to power Medea's sewing machine in the front yard. The set also gave a nod to current events and Trump's U.S.-Mexico border wall which, at its highest point, extends 27 feet, the same height as the highest walls on stage. The actors—Camila Moreno as Medea supported by Alma Martinez, Romar Fernandez, Alejandro Hernández, Nancy Rodríguez, and Mónica Sánchez—all gave vibrant performances.

The alluring title of the final offering—*the ripple, the wave that carried me home*—did not deliver as a work of theatre but proved a fascinating piece of African American history about white resistance to integrated swimming pools in the middle west. The production dramaturg did due diligence in researching similarly racist practices right here in Connecticut, where predominantly privileged white communities restricted access to swimming

pools and beaches with intricate and clever subterfuges. The set, cleverly designed to become a swimming pool in the final scene, created an amorphous, cavernous space for the majority of the play, which the best efforts of the actors couldn't navigate. The playwright also set the final scenes of the play during the 1992 Los Angeles riots fueled by the exoneration of the LAPD officers who mercilessly beat Rodney King the year before; this was a major topic of discussion for the principal characters, three Black women. Again, the history lessons offered, with potent linkages of the acts of racism and violence experienced by Black people both on and off the stage, were palpable but a dramatic urgency was missing.

Next season's varied offerings include Sanaz Toossi's, *Wish You Were Here*; the world premiere of *The Salvagers* by Harrison David Rivers; Caryl Churchill's *Escaped Alone*; and *The Far Country* by Lloyd Suh.

Martha Schmoyer LoMonaco, *emerita*
Fairfield University

