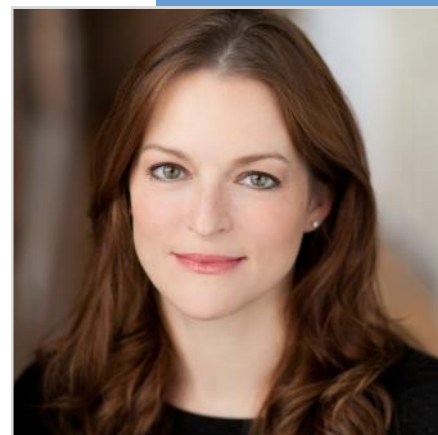




# IMPACT REPORT

2021 - 2022





## Season 36

### *Pursuit of the American Dream*

Thank you for your continued interest and support. We began the fiscal year looking for rental theaters for our first “in-person” productions since the pandemic shutdown. Due to limited venues and scheduling conflicts, we spoke with 15+ facilities. Finally, we found two spaces to serve as host for our nearly sold-out season— 20th anniversary production of *It’s a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!*, the Chicago premiere of *Stand Up If You Are Here Tonight*, and August Wilson’s *Fences*.

Our bittersweet anniversary production of *Wonderful Life* marked the first time without our beloved Ensemble member John Mohrlein as “Clarence / Mr. Potter”. We were blessed to have him read and present in this year’s rehearsals. John gave his whole-hearted approval for his replacement, Artistic Affiliate Joe Dempsey. John and Joe slowly walking to the car after John’s final rehearsal is an indelible image that many of us will always remember.

We returned to in-person performances while grieving, adapting to COVID compliance, learning new institutional rental processes and infrastructure, and doubling our marketing efforts to tell patrons *where* we were performing. Meanwhile, we were quietly looking at real estate, speaking with financial advisors and lenders, producing a 3-show slate and with full auxiliary programming, and chewing our nails to the quick.

This amount of extraordinary stress placed upon an organization would typically yield a shuttering. Instead, our company huddled, leaned into the hurt, and pledged a deeper loyalty and trust in one another. The best surprise of the year? A *three-decade-in-the-making* dream of securing a permanent artistic home had finally been realized.

To meet this moment, it took all the active and emeritus artists, Board members, donors, administrative staff, and patrons who have uplifted and supported us over the years. Board member Kimberlee Herold was an early champion in establishing our permanent venue at 5627 N. Lincoln. Without her enthusiasm and leadership, this property would not be in our possession today.

The year was full of lessons in resiliency, grit, and gratitude. Fortunately, they just hit a little closer to **home**.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Wendy Whiteside". The script is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized 'W' and 'S'.

GWENDOLYN (WENDY) WHITESIDE

Artistic Director



## ABOUT AMERICAN BLUES THEATER

Winner of American Theatre Wing's prestigious National Theatre Company Award, American Blues Theater is a premier arts organization with an intimate environment that patrons, artists, and all Chicagoans call home. **American Blues Theater explores the American identity through the plays it produces and communities it serves.**

American Blues Theater follows guiding values both on and off its stages—**collaboration, courage, inclusive, equity, service, and integrity.**



We are Chicago's **second-oldest professional Equity Ensemble theater**. As of 2022, our theater and artists received 222 Joseph Jefferson Awards and nominations that celebrate excellence in Chicago theater and 44 Black Theatre Alliance Awards. Our artists are honored with Pulitzer Prize nominations, Academy Awards, Golden Globe Awards, Emmy Awards, and numerous other accolades. Our artists work throughout the nation - including Broadway and regional theaters - and loyally return to our stage.

American Blues Theater is committed to developing the classic plays and musicals of tomorrow. More than half of our mainstage productions are world and Chicago premieres. Our new play development consists of a variety of programs – including world and Chicago premieres, the nationally-recognized *Blue Ink Award*, commissions, *The Room* staged readings, *The Garage* concerts, and annual *Ripped Festival* of new short-plays. Our Arts Education offerings include acclaimed programming in Chicago Public School classrooms, artist-led instruction for all ages through *Classes for the Masses*, and being a Chicago-anchor for the national *#ENOUGH: Plays to End Gun Violence* program.

**We believe it is an honor and duty to serve our community.** We raise awareness of other non-profit organizations' commendable causes through creative collaborations. We hold food drives, distribute promotional materials, offer free post-show discussions, provide complimentary tickets, honor military personnel, hold exclusive performances for underserved communities, and raise awareness for children's surgeries.

American Blues Theater is your Chicago home for bold, exceptional, and relevant performances. **Your ticket purchases and donations help us make Chicago *the first city* in all our hearts.**



Cover picture: Ensemble member Audrey Billings & Brandon Dahlquist; Above: Ensemble as of June 30, 2022.







# IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE: LIVE IN CHICAGO!

20th Anniversary Production

NOVEMBER 26, 2021 - DECEMBER 26, 2021

FROM FRANK CAPRA'S "IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE"

DIRECTED BY ARTISTIC DIRECTOR GWENDOLYN WHITESIDE

MUSIC DIRECTED BY ENSEMBLE MEMBER MICHAEL MAHLER

ORIGINAL COMPOSITION BY ENSEMBLE MEMBER AUSTIN COOK

FEATURING ENSEMBLE MEMBERS AUDREY BILLINGS, MANNY BUCKLEY, DARA CAMERON,  
AND MICHAEL MAHLER, ARTISTIC AFFILIATES YUCHI CHIU, JOE DEMPSEY, AND SHAWN GOUDIE,  
AND BRANDON DAHLQUIST

READ THE  
DIGITAL PROGRAM



George Bailey – the Everyman from small town Bedford Falls whose dreams of escape and adventure were stopped by family obligation and civic duty – has fallen onto desperate times. Only a miracle can save him from despair. Filled with original music and classic holiday carols, this warm tale “is the don’t-miss show this holiday season!” (*Chicago Tribune*)

For over 20 years, American Blues has treated audiences to a live retelling of the Frank Capra classic in a 1940s radio broadcast tradition, making *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!* the second longest-running holiday play in Chicago!

## REVIEWS

**“‘It’s a Wonderful Life’ by American Blues Theater is once again live on stage, right where it belongs.”** - *Chicago Tribune*

**“American Blues Theater lassos a miracle.”** - *Chicago Sun-Times*

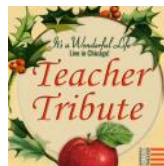
**“Lively cast, peerless designers, and clever direction.”** - *Chicagoland Musical Theatre*

**“A true holiday gem.”** - *BroadwayWorld*

**“A must see holiday classic.”** - *Splash Magazine*

## COMMUNITY SERVICE

We honor one teacher per performance with a “Teacher Tribute”. We proudly partner with NAMI Chicago, USO, and U.S. Dept. of Veteran Affairs. We offer complimentary tickets to CPS teachers, the American Foundation of Suicide Prevention (IL chapter), and American Indian Center.



**American  
Foundation  
for Suicide  
Prevention**

# 23

PERFORMANCES



# 22

ARTISTS



# 3,173

PATRONS



WATCH THE TRAILER

Pictured on previous page: Manny Buckley. Pictured above: Dara Cameron and Michael Mahler; Shawn Goudie; Manny Buckley and Joe Dempsey. Photos by Michael Brosilow. Video by Stage Channel.



MAINSTAGE PRODUCTIONS



# STAND UP IF YOU'RE HERE TONIGHT

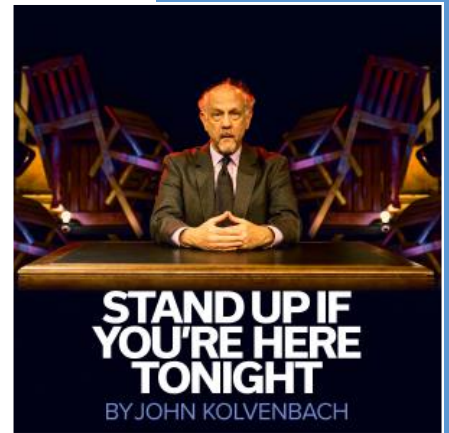
Chicago Premiere

MARCH 18, 2022 - APRIL 9, 2022

WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY JOHN KOLVENBACH

FEATURING ARTISTIC AFFILIATE JIM ORTLIEB

READ THE  
DIGITAL PROGRAM



"You've tried everything. Yoga. Acupuncture. Therapy. You floated in salt water in the pitch black dark. You juiced, you cleansed, you journaled, you cut, you volunteered. You got a mattress that fitted itself to your fetal form. You ate only RINDS for three days and nights. You reached out, you looked within. You have tried. And yet here you are."

So begins a new play by Olivier-nominated playwright John Kolvenbach in its Chicago premiere. Broadway's Jim Ortlieb delivers a tour-de-force performance as a man desperate for connection, bent by isolation, and deeply in love with the audience itself.

## AWARDS & REVIEWS

Joseph Jefferson Award nomination for Performer in Short Run Production (Jim Ortlieb)

Joseph Jefferson Award recommended

**Jim Ortlieb is a "rich, vulnerable veteran actor."** - Chicago Tribune

**"Brilliant production...A true tour de force."** - WTTW

**"Dynamic & charismatic."** - Chicago Reader

**"Perfect antidote for being shut-in for so long."** - Chicago Theatre Review

**"For a moment, or a least 60 minutes, you feel free."** - Let's Play at Chicago Now

**"Masterpiece written and directed by John Kolvenbach."** - Around the Town

## COMMUNITY SERVICE

We honor healthcare workers, first responders, educators & support staff, and military personnel with complimentary tickets. We proudly support NAMI Chicago and SAMHSA.



**nami**  
CHICAGO

**SAMHSA**  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health  
Services Administration

17

PERFORMANCES



7

ARTISTS



637

PATRONS



WATCH THE TRAILER







## August Wilson's **FENCES**

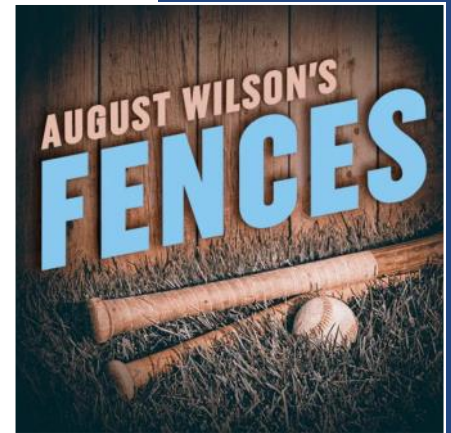
Winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Drama  
July 1 - August 6, 2022

WRITTEN BY AUGUST WILSON

DIRECTED BY MONTY COLE

FEATURING ENSEMBLE MEMBER MANNY BUCKLEY, AND KAMAL ANGELO BOLDEN, SHANÉSIA DAVIS, AJAX DONTAVIUS, MARTEL MANNING, WILLIAM ANTHONY SEBASTIAN ROSE II, AND RILEY WELLS

READ THE  
DIGITAL PROGRAM



This is the sensational drama about Troy Maxson, a former star of the Negro Baseball League, who now works as a garbage man in Pittsburgh. Troy and his wife Rose want the American Dream – to own a house with a white picket fence that keeps the family safe and trouble out. When mistrust builds and secrets are revealed, this iconic Black family begins to crumble in America's embrace. Director Monty Cole's innovative and intimate production explodes Wilson's masterful text with raw emotion. You've never seen *Fences* like this before!

### AWARDS & REVIEWS

Black Theater Alliance Award winner for Most Promising Actor (Ajax Dontavius)

Black Theater Alliance Award nomination for Direction of a Play (Monty Cole)

Black Theater Alliance Award nomination for Leading Actor in a Play (Kamal Angelo Bolden)

Black Theater Alliance Award nomination for Featured Actress in a Play (Shanésia Davis)

Joseph Jefferson Award Recommended

**"3.5 out of 4 stars. The casting and staging combine for an intense revival of a modern American classic."** - *Chicago Tribune*

**"Monty Cole's blistering staging of *Fences* for American Blues Theater should not be missed. SEE THIS PLAY."** - *Chicago Reader*

**"Riveting...there could be no greater testament to the play's greatness than this magnificent production."** - *WTTW*

**"Exceptional Cast!"** - *Chicago Sun-Times*

**"Brilliant staging by Monty Cole. Pitch perfect acting all around."** - *Picture this Post*

### COMMUNITY SERVICE

We raise awareness of other non-profit organizations' great causes through creative collaborations. We're proud to partner with Northwestern University's The Family Institute, and Chicago Public Schools.



THE FAMILY  
INSTITUTE  
at Northwestern University



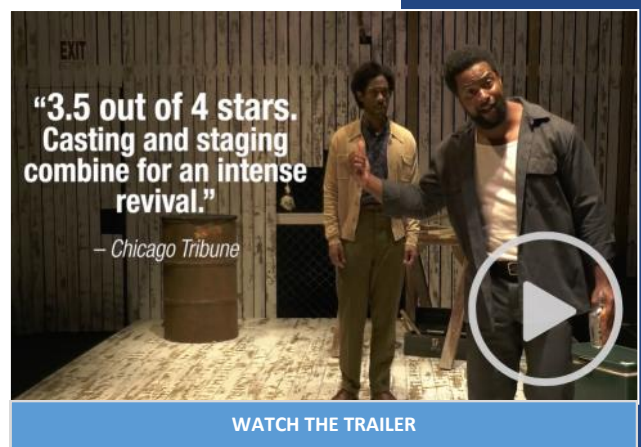
27  
PERFORMANCES



28  
ARTISTS



1,351  
PATRONS



WATCH THE TRAILER

Pictured on previous page: Kamal Angelo Bolden and Shanésia Davis. Pictured above: Manny Buckley and Kamal Angel Davis; Riley Wells and Ajax Dontavius; William Anthony Sebastian Rose II and Kamal Angelo Bolden. Photos by Michael Brosilow. Video by Stage Channel.



# THE ROOM

A READING SERIES

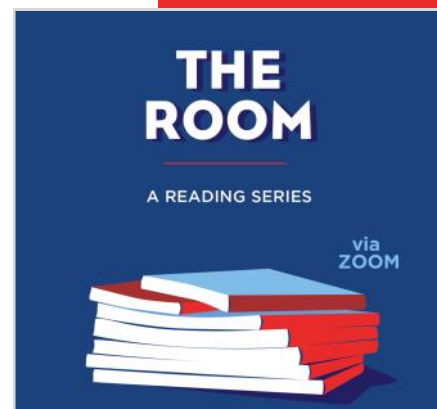
via  
ZOOM





# THE ROOM

*The Room* is an online reading series that brings original work, plays in-development, and new stories to Chicago audiences. Offering in-depth discussions as well as action steps for patrons that intersect with themes of the plays. *The Room* ran virtually throughout the 2022 fiscal year.



## THE THANKSGIVING PLAY

WRITTEN BY LARISSA FASTHORSE

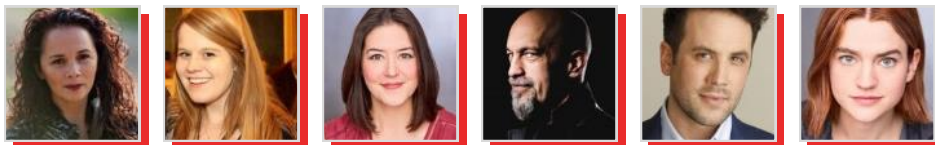
DIRECTED BY ENSEMBLE MEMBER ELYSE DOLAN

FEATURING ENSEMBLE MEMBERS AUDREY BILLINGS, LINDSAY JONES, AND J.G. SMITH, AND ARTISTIC AFFILIATE ZACH KENNEY

READ THE  
BACKSTAGE GUIDE

NOVEMBER 5, 2021

Good intentions collide with absurd assumptions in MacArthur “Genius” Fellowship recipient Larissa FastHorse’s wickedly funny satire, as a troupe of terminally “woke” teaching artists scrambles to create a pageant that somehow manages to celebrate both Turkey Day and Native American Heritage Month. Featuring an all-star cast of American Blues artists, including two-time Tony Award nominee Lindsay Jones.



# 3

READINGS



# 26

ARTISTS



# 198

PATRONS

Pictured on previous page: the writers and directors of *The Room*: (top row) Larissa FastHorse, Nathan Alan Davis, and Scott Organ; (bottom row) Elyse Dolan, Manny Buckley, and Michael Cotey. Pictured above: J.G. Smith, Audrey Billings, Zach Kenney, and Lindsay Jones in *The Room* reading of *The Thanksgiving Play*.



# ORIGIN STORY

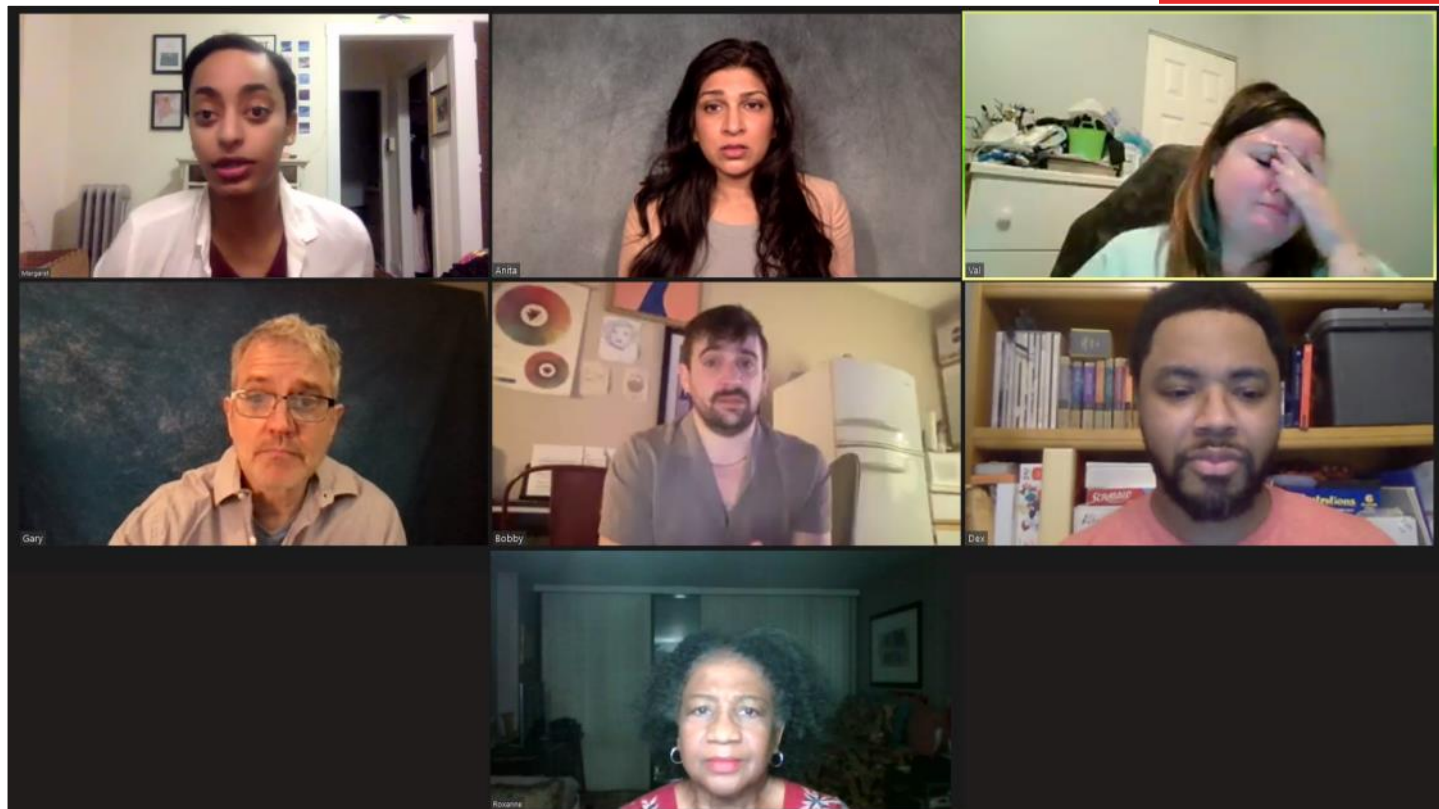
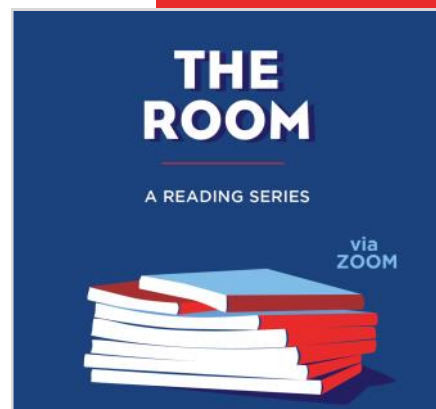
WRITTEN BY NATHAN ALAN DAVIS

DIRECTED BY ENSEMBLE MEMBER MANNY BUCKLEY

FEATURING ENSEMBLE MEMBER STEVE KEY, ARTISTIC AFFILIATE JOSLYN JONES, AND BRIAN BRADFORD, GRANT CARRIKER, MINITA GANDHI, CARLY JO GEER, AND SANA SELEMON

FEBRUARY 5, 2022

Margaret is working two jobs to pay down her debt. During the day, she's wading through office triviality at The Services Corporation, and by night, she's working the drive-through of The Burg, a 24/7 fast food restaurant. Overtired, ungrounded, and abandoned by her parents at birth, Margaret's existential crisis begins to turn around as connections are found in the most unsuspecting of places. Funny and heartfelt, this is a contemporary look at the quarter-life crisis and connecting in an impersonal world.



Pictured above: Sana Selemon, Minita Gandhi, Carly Jo Geer, Steve Key, Grant Carriker, Brian Bradford, and Joslyn Jones in *The Room* reading of *Origin Story*. Pictured on next page: Audrey Billings, Ian Paul Custer, Mackenzie Jones, Dennis Cockrum and Editha Rosario-Moore in *The Room* reading of *17 Minutes*.



# 17 MINUTES

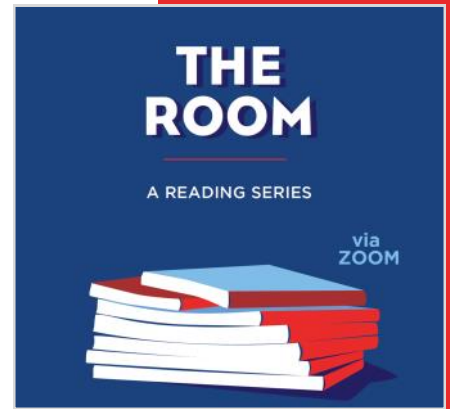
WRITTEN BY SCOTT ORGAN

DIRECTED BY MICHAEL COTEY

FEATURING ENSEMBLE MEMBERS AUDREY BILLINGS, DENNIS COCKRUM, IAN PAUL CUSTER, AND EDITHA ROSARIO-MOORE, AND ROBERT N. ISAAC AND MACKENZIE JONES.

JUNE 27, 2022

In the aftermath of a school shooting, Sheriff's Deputy Andy Rubens must come to terms with the choices he made during the tragedy. In Scott Organ's spellbinding new play, one man's search for redemption prompts a community to ask – what will we be known for? Talkin' Broadway wrote, "[17 Minutes] accomplishes what theatre does best; it presents this issue not as an emotionally fraught intellectual argument, but as a complicated and compassionate human drama."



READ THE  
BACKSTAGE GUIDE



## THE ROOM - Partners & Additional Resources







# Blue Ink Award

for playwriting

AMERICAN  
BLUES  
THEATER





# 2022 BLUE INK AWARD

The nationally-renowned Blue Ink Award for playwriting was created in 2010 to support new work. Since inception, we've named 12 Award winners, 112 finalists, and 171 semi-finalists. Nearly \$10,000 in cash and prizes was distributed to playwrights in 2022.

## 2022 WINNER

***The Reapers on Woodbrook Avenue* by Mardee Bennett**

*The Reapers on Woodbrook Avenue* was selected from a pool nearly 700 submissions. As part of the award, Bennett receives a \$2,500 cash prize, a staged reading at American Blues Theater, and the opportunity to further develop his script with our artists.

Mardee Bennet notes, "I am elated to have my work selected by American Blues Theater. Set in mid-century Baltimore, *The Reapers on Woodbrook Avenue* is the tale of a family striving for what was once called the American dream. It is also a political drama that speaks to the state of the nation with grace and humor. The opportunity to develop this play in one of the theater capitals of the world— Chicago—is a delight. The *Blue Ink Award* adds legitimacy to my work. For that I am profoundly grateful."

"We are thrilled to announce Mardee Bennett's script *The Reapers on Woodbrook Avenue* as the 2022 winner," notes Artistic Director Gwendolyn Whiteside. "Mardee created an incredibly detailed world with rich characters that leap off the page and into our hearts. We're honored to share this relevant and timeless story."

## ABOUT THE REAPERS ON WOODBROOK AVENUE

Spanning decades, this heartrending play explores the complex relationship between three generations of women: Loretta Reaper, a middle-aged Black woman, her grown, spitfire daughter, Nell, and her starry-eyed granddaughter Tamar. Raised in the church, all three ladies cut a mean cloth while taking us on a riveting journey through time, exhuming long-buried family secrets, and creating gospel fire in the process.

## 2022 BLUE INK PLAYWRITING AWARD FINALISTS & SEMI FINALISTS

**Featured Finalists:** Gina Femia (*Staff Retreat*), Rachel Lynett (*White People By the Lake*), Matthew Paul Olmos (*a home what howls (or the house what was ravine)*), Deborah Yarchun (*Preservation*)

**Finalists:** Paris Crayton III (*Only Some of God's Children or Mississippi Magnolias*), Raul Garza (*Arbolito*), Emma Gibson (*If nobody does remarkable things*), Shannon TL Kearns (*Body + Blood*), Matthew Libby (*Tomorrow and Tomorrow*), Kyle J. McCloskey (*Edge of Town*), Tania Richard (*The America Situation*), Nia Akilah Robinson (*"WP" Means "White People"*), chandra thomas (*...of Champions*), Sarah Tuft (*ABIGAIL*), Ken Urban (*The Moderate*), P.C. Verrone (*The Pretendians*), Jessica Wu (*Good Mourning*)

**Semi-finalists:** Lucas Baisch (*404 Not Found*), Leah Roth Barsanti (*The Almost Emperor of the Unofficial Deestrick of Lake Michigan*), Cris Eli Blak (*Sons of Liberty*), Brysen Boyd (*Closing Costs on 6101 Nyanza Park Drive APT D6 Flushing, NY 11351*), Xavier Clark (*supper*), Erin Considine (*Artists & Vandals*), Shualee Cook (*Cercle Hermaphrodites*), Andrew Lee Creech (*Last Drive to Dodge*), Pauline David-Sax (*Cotton's Tale*), Angela J. Davis (*AGATHE*), Alexandra Espinoza (*All My Mothers Dream in Spanish*), Mouncey Ferguson (*Three-Day Hold*), Linda Maria Girón (*amémonos // let us love each other*), Keiko Green (*Sharon*), Amina Henry (*Interstate*), M.J. Kang (*Pretender*), Gloria Majule (*Culture Shock*), Nick Malakhov (*A Picture of Two Boys*), Thaddeus McCants (*No Different Than Cotton or Cobalt*), Karissa Murrell Myers (*Blood of My Mother's*), Felicia Oduh (*Mercy*), Tira Palmquist (*The Body's Midnight*), Ankita Raturi (*The Elephant is Very Like*), Kira Rockwell (*Oh, to Be Pure Again*), Marcus Scott (*Tumbleweed*), SEVAN (*Gorgonae*), Christopher G. Smith (*The Violin Maker*), Phillip Christian Smith (*Walking While Black*), Ellis Stump (*Once on Rumspringa*), Caridad Svich (*Clara Thomas Bailey*), Caity-Shea Violette (*Rx Machina*), Laura Zlatos (*The Blue Whale*)



690  
SUBMISSIONS



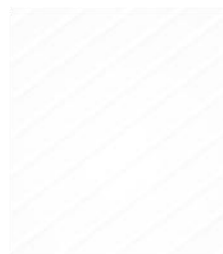
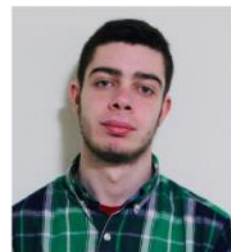
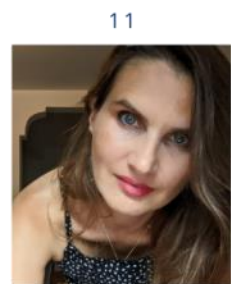
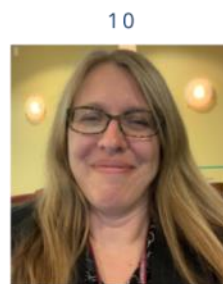
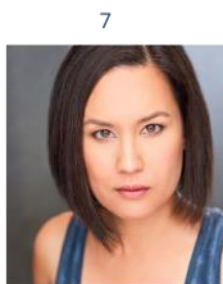
17  
FINALISTS



32  
SEMI-FINALISTS



# JUNE 2022



## 30 PLAYS IN 30 DAYS

# THE RIPPED FESTIVAL

21st EDITION

JUNE 1 - JUNE 30, 2022

Our *Ripped: The Living Newspaper Project* began in 2009 with a series of staged readings of short plays based on the 1930s WPA era program "The Living Newspaper" and Federal Writers' Project, enabling artists such as Ralph Ellison, Susan Glaspell, Zora Neale Hurston, Eugene O'Neill, Studs Terkel, and Richard Wright. Since our inaugural 2009 launch, we've presented 21 events and utilized 610+ artists that feature short plays *ripped from today's headlines*.

In 2013, we expanded our staged readings into the sold-out, one-night-only, annual event – *The Ripped Festival*. All proceeds of these annual events benefit our free arts education program, including "The Lincoln Project" in Chicago Public Schools. In addition, we showcase short plays from CPS students who've completed our course.

Due to the pandemic and industry shutdown of live events, we presented *The Ripped Festival* as an online library for the first time in June 2020. 2022 marked our third year of celebrating writers and their short plays with the *Ripped Festival* online library.

Our annual festival cultivates new material and allows audiences to discuss topical issues together. American Blues Theater provides community service and raises awareness through creative collaborations. The following organizations have been supported by *Ripped* events since its inception in 2009: AgrAbility, American Indian Chicago, Chicago Public Schools, Greater Chicago Food Depository, Illinois Farm Bureau, Lincoln Park Community Shelter, NAACP Legal Defense & Education Fund, No Kid Hungry, University of Chicago's Urban Education Teachers Program, and more.

## 2022 PLAYS

^Blues Ensemble Member or Artistic Affiliate \*Classes for the Masses student

- **(again)** by Katarzyna Müller
- **Vigilante** by Zachariah Ezer
- **Chicken-Fried Catfish** by Donna Latham
- **Sundown Town** by Marcus Scott
- **Lifestyle Content** by Lia Romeo
- **Exhausted By You** by Zack Peercy
- **Jury Selection** by Karissa Murrell Myers
- **The Case Against Love** by Mikki Gillette
- **Waiting** by Daniel A. Olivas
- **Shut Up, Mom** by Heather Meyers^
- **Home** by Catalina Florina Florescu
- **Cookie Eatin'** by Scott Carter Cooper
- **Woke Church** by Maximillian Gill
- **Missing White Woman Syndrome** by Leah Roth Barsanti
- **Folding Danica** by Chima Chikazunga
- **A History** by Susan Hansell
- **Hong Kong Date Night** by Angela J. Davis
- **Perfect Porcelain Doll** by Scott C. Sickles
- **oranges** by Rachel Lynett
- **Celebrities in Space** by Jessica Moss

- **Petrified** by James Still^
- **Daal and Duty** by Minita Gandhi
- **The Empress of Jupiter** by Laura Zlatos
- **I Am A Woman...Hear My Voice** by Wandachristine^
- **What Do You Do With A \*bleep\*ing Nazi?** by Brent Leibowitz
- **Confinement** by Ada Cheng^
- **Louder than the Guns** by Zachary Stevenson^
- **Court, or the Place We Go** by Editha Rosario-Moore^
- **Unwritten - two days in May / the American Guns Play** by Jaisey Bates
- **The Day Mac Quit** by Darren Canady^

## STUDENT SCRIPTS

- **Prince** by McKennzie Boyd\*
- **The Adventure of Eli and Skye** by Jillian Coleman\*
- **Lab of Vengeance** by River Luna Viets-Strel\*



# 30

PROFESSIONAL  
PLAYWRIGHTS



# 3

STUDENT PLAYS



# 1,062

VISITS TO THE  
RIPPED FESTIVAL  
ONLINE LIBRARY

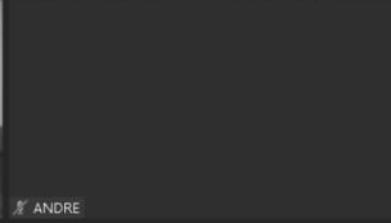






# ARTS EDUCATION

2021 - 2022



# CLASSES FOR THE MASSES

Pay-what-you-can classes in acting, music, yoga, and more taught by American Blues Ensemble members and artists. All classes are taught through one-on-one, individualized consultations in order to best fit participants' schedules and learning styles.

## 2021-2022 CLASS OFFERINGS

### "Guitar Lessons with Your 'Buddy'"

*Taught by Ensemble member Zachary Stevenson*

Whether you're a beginner or intermediate guitarist, award-winning actor and North America's theater-rock royalty Zachary Stevenson will elevate your skills. Private instruction delivered with a Canadian's kindness? Yes, please! Chords, tips, & tricks - we'll take that "Everyday"

### "The Art & Business of Voice-Overs"

*Taught by Ensemble member Wandachristine*

Beginning, intermediate, and advanced artists learn voice-over techniques from Chicago legend Wandachristine. She'll answer all your questions and share insider information from producers, agents, and casting directors.

### "Writing for Justice: Theatricalizing Politics"

*Taught by Ensemble member Editha Rosario-Moore*

This small community meets on Zoom three times to explore playwriting techniques to theatricalize political themes, ideas, & movements. The group discusses performance theory and sample plays, with aim of creating original short play or performance with group & Editha

### "Commercials, Agents, & Career Counseling"

*Taught by Ensemble member Ed Kross*

From auditioning for tv & film projects to cultivating a relationship with agents and casting directors, Ed Kross will help you get to the next step in your career with coaching tailored to your needs. (Psst...he's appeared in over 75 commercials, major motion pictures, and television shows. Just sayin'.)

### "Ten-Minute Plays for Kids & Teens"

*Taught by Teaching Artist Carolyn Minor*

Unleash your child's creativity! Teaching artist Carolyn Minor shares playwriting techniques from our highly-lauded arts education program. Your child will write a short play and hear it aloud at a Zoom private reading.



# 240

PAY-WHAT-YOU-CAN  
HOURS



# 32

STUDENTS IN CLASSES  
FOR THE MASSES



# 16

TEACHING ARTISTS,  
PROFESSIONAL  
ACTORS, &  
STUDENT ACTORS  
IN #ENOUGH

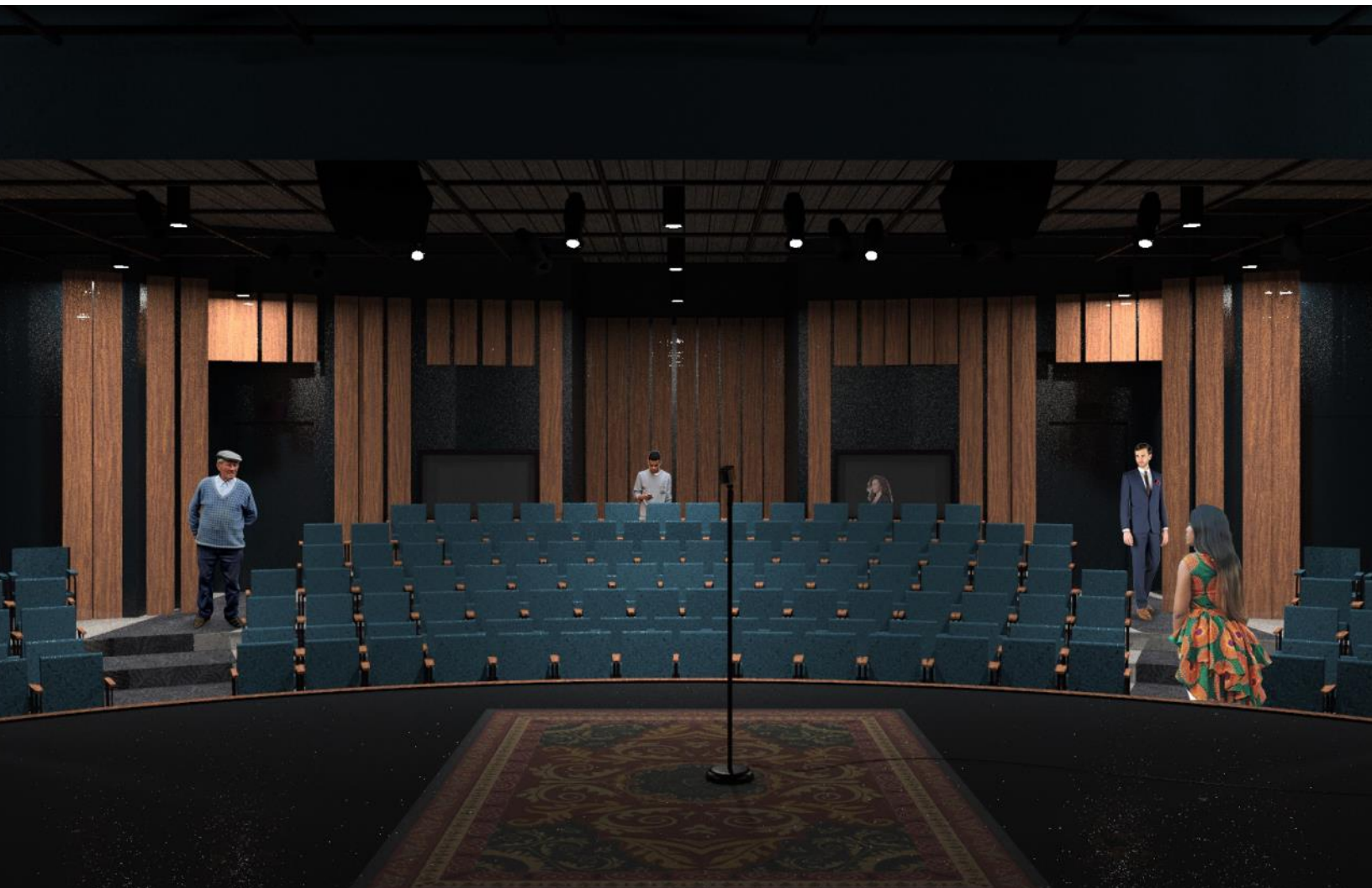
## #ENOUGH PLAYS TO END GUN VIOLENCE

A founding sponsor of this incredible series, American Blues Theater proudly participated in this year's nationwide reading of 8 short plays about gun violence written by teen writers. On April 20, 2022 — the 23rd anniversary of the Columbine High School tragedy— the winning

titles were performed and directed by American Blues teaching artists, professional actors, and students, via Zoom, as one of dozens of simultaneous staged reading across the country. Launched in 2019, #ENOUGH hopes to harness the current generation's spirit of activism by promoting playwriting as a tool for self-expression and social change and supplying a platform for America's future playwrights to develop their voices today.

Pictured on previous page: (top) "Classes for the Masses" instructors Zachary Stevenson, Wandachristine, Editha Rosario-Moore, Ed Kross, and Carolyn Minor; (bottom) Manny Buckley, Edward Berber, Naysa Sutherlin, Marlee Feacher, MiKayla Boyd, David Goodloe, James McClam, Brian McKnight, Carolyn Minor, Jazzma Pryor, Ashley Ocampo, Nevada Montgomery, Andy Feingold-Fisher, Kevin Duvall, and Noah Smith in the reading of #ENOUGH: Plays to End Gun Violence.





# OUR FIRST HOME

We are thrilled to announce the launch of “Our First Home” campaign and purchase of a 17,965 square foot property in Chicago’s Lincoln Avenue North Arts District (LANA). This will establish the first permanent home in our history!

“This historic move to a permanent home is over 35 years in the making. After decades of leasing, including the beloved space on Byron Avenue, American Blues Theater will control its own artistic and financial destiny for the first time. Our exceptional Ensemble has dreamed of a dedicated home to expand our programming, education initiatives, and community partnerships,” said American Blues Theater Artistic Director Gwendolyn Whiteside. “We understand all too well the limitations of being an itinerant company, and – with very few true subsidized venues in Chicago – we’re also excited to create an affordable rental space for other theater companies on their respective journeys.”

American Blues Theater’s productions explore the lives of everyday people who inhabit the working neighborhoods of America. Its new venue, designed by John Morris of Morris Architects Planners with theater systems supported by Schuler Shook, fully embraces this ethos. Formerly the site of a Mobil gas station, Walgreens, and Dollar General, the building will be repurposed to establish a cultural institution that is accessible to all.

The new theater venue will include two theaters (148-seat proscenium and 40-seat flexible studio); an inviting lobby with box office, bar, and concessions; gendered and gender-neutral restrooms; dressing rooms and greenroom; administrative offices; production spaces for scenery, props, and costumes; a small on-site parking lot with ample street parking. The facility is accessible from Interstate 90 and 94 and via the CTA Brown line and buses.

Alderperson Andre Vasquez comments, “It is an absolute honor and dream to welcome such a landmark institution to the 40th Ward. I had a clear vision of creating a Lincoln Avenue North Arts District, but I could never have imagined that we’d be blessed by having American Blues Theater as a crown jewel. It would be impossible to overstate the importance of such a beautiful entertainment experience to the business district for the whole city, here in the 40th Ward!”

It will serve a community comprised of many cultural backgrounds and complement the area’s local restaurants, schools, and the Budlong Woods Library. Whiteside said, “For over three decades, we’ve been working towards this dream. Through community support and the dedication of all our artists and staff over the years, we are able to make this dream a reality now.”

The \$7.6 million “Our First Home” campaign will provide the company with funds for the building purchase, adaptive reuse within the building’s existing footprint, construction, as well as a building reserve fund. With over \$4 million from individual donors raised to-date, the company anticipates completion in November 2023 with a grand opening celebration highlighted by the inaugural production of the beloved holiday classic, *It’s a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!*

“I’ve been involved in many of Chicago’s cultural institutions as a trustee, patron, and donor, but I have always had a soft spot for American Blues. It has been touchstone in my life. By supporting them now in achieving this momentous milestone, I am making a significant difference in the lives of these incredible artists and communities they serve,” said Board Vice-President Kimberlee Herold. “Blues has proven again and again it deserves its own home, and I invite Chicago’s individual donors, foundations, and corporations to join in this crucial effort.”



Pictured on previous page: (top) rendering of the exterior at nighttime; (bottom) rendering of the interior from the stage.  
Pictured above: rendering of the exterior during daytime.



# FY22 FINANCIALS

## Statement of Financial Position

June 30, 2022

	Without Donor Restrictions	With Donor Restrictions	Total
<b>Current Assets</b>			
Cash & Cash Equivalents	\$ 482,098	\$ 40,400	\$ 522,498
Investments	1,280,018	0	1,280,018
Grants Receivable	0	88,500	88,500
Accrued Interest Receivable	4,481	0	4,481
Prepaid Expenses	42,682	0	42,682
Deposit	10,862	0	10,862
<b>Total Current Assets</b>	<b>1,820,141</b>	<b>128,900</b>	<b>1,949,041</b>
<b>Total Fixed Assets</b>	<b>1,958,551</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,958,551</b>
<b>Other Assets</b>			
Security Deposit	4,050	0	4,050
Investments	0	2,422,635	2,422,635
<b>Total Other Assets</b>	<b>4,050</b>	<b>2,422,635</b>	<b>2,426,685</b>
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>\$ 3,782,742</b>	<b>\$ 2,551,535</b>	<b>\$ 6,334,277</b>
<b>Current Liabilities</b>			
Accounts Payable	\$ 13,570	\$ 0	\$ 13,570
Accrued Liabilities	34,255	0	34,255
<b>Total Current Liabilities</b>	<b>47,825</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>47,825</b>
<b>Long-Term Liabilities</b>			
Note Payable	\$ 499,900	\$ 0	\$ 499,900
Accrued Liabilities	5,728	0	5,728
<b>Total Long-Term Liabilities</b>	<b>505,628</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>505,628</b>
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>	<b>\$ 553,453</b>	<b>\$ 0</b>	<b>\$ 553,453</b>
<b>TOTAL NET ASSETS</b>	<b>\$ 3,229,289</b>	<b>\$ 2,551,535</b>	<b>\$ 5,780,824</b>
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES &amp; NET ASSETS</b>	<b>\$ 3,782,742</b>	<b>\$ 2,551,535</b>	<b>\$ 6,334,277</b>

From the most recent audit conducted by IL NFP Audit & Tax.

# FY22 FINANCIALS

## Statement of Activities

June 30, 2022

### REVENUE

#### CONTRIBUTED

Individuals	\$	1,877,676
Foundations		105,141
Corporations		35,464
Government		218,092

#### EARNED

Net Investment Return	\$	(543,429)
Special Events		0
Performances		125,843
Miscellaneous		41,132
Merchandise Sales		0
Rental income		848
In-Kind Donations		45,000
Net Assets Released from Restrictions	\$	0
<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b><u>1,905,767</u></b>

### EXPENSES

#### FUNCTIONAL EXPENSES

Program Services	\$	568,625
Administrative		273,041
Fundraising		98,741
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b><u>940,407</u></b>

<b>Change in Net Assets</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>965,360</b>
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#### Net Assets,

<b>Beginning of Year</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>4,815,464</b>
<b>End of Year</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>5,780,824</b>

^ Of the \$5,780,824 net assets, \$2,422,635 is a restricted endowment from the Ruth D. & Ken M. Davee General Operation Support Fund. The allowable, annual draw is 4% —with an exception made for the pandemic. The permanent venue is currently valued at \$1,958,551.







We are honored to recognize the following contributors who enable American Blues Theater's artistic programming and community service. This list includes donations from our True Blue Annual Fund, Dead Ringers for Dead Singers, Blue Bash, production sponsors, and other contributions given from July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022.

[\\$25,000 and above](#)

Paul M. Angell Family Foundation  
Anonymous  
Kimberlee Herold  
MacArthur Fund for Culture, Equity,  
& the Arts at Prince  
Burt and Sheli Rosenberg  
The Shubert Foundation

[\\$15,000 - \\$24,999](#)

Commonwealth Edison  
Illinois Arts Council Agency  
National Endowment for the Arts  
Paul M. Angell Family Foundation

[\\$7,500 - \\$14,999](#)

Phil and Jill Calian  
Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley  
Foundation  
Libby Savner  
Wendy Whiteside and Ian Van Handel

[\\$5,000 - \\$7,499](#)

Anixter Foundation  
David and Sissy Coffin  
Brenda and James Grusecki  
Jeppson's Malort  
Michael and Cara Levinson  
Daniel H. Lome Foundation  
Marcy McVay and Dennis Zacek  
Rama Ranganathan  
Seyfarth Shaw LLP

[\\$2,500 - \\$4,999](#)

Karlson Garza McQueary LLC

[\\$1,000 - \\$2,499](#)

Benjamin Rosenthal Foundation  
Audrey and Nicholas Stone  
Manny Buckley and Steve Wroten  
Marcy and Greg Carlin  
Rita Dragonette  
Matt and Hillary Ebach  
Craig and Linda Grannon

[\\$1,000 - \\$2,499 cont.](#)

BJ and Candy Jones  
Mark Ragan

[\\$500 - \\$999](#)

Anonymous  
Michael and Mary Goodkind  
Michael and Mona Heath  
Sarajane Johnson  
Keith and Erica Karlson  
Lloyd A. Fry Foundation  
Christopher and Anne Motogawa  
Editha Rosario and Alexis Moore  
Malou Roth  
Roche Schulfer and Mary Beth Fisher  
Kerry Straub and Neil O'Callaghan  
Visionary Eye Care Professionals, PC

[\\$250 - \\$499](#)

Peter and Bari Amadio  
BMO Financial Group  
Michael Braun  
Casey Campbell  
Dennis Carlin  
Arlene and Bill Flynn  
Jim Moles  
David and Agnes Murdoch  
John and Joy O'Malley  
Glen and Beth Prezembel  
Margaret Reagor  
Melissa Roeters

[\\$100 - \\$249](#)

Jonathan Abarbanel  
Juan Alfonso  
Amazon Smile Foundation  
Anonymous  
Betty and Bob Becker  
Elizabeth Beyreis  
Cynthia Brown  
Kerry Bryson  
Michael Budzik  
Karen Callaway  
Liz Chidester

[\\$100 - \\$249 cont.](#)

CNA Insurance Companies  
Jeannette Cole  
Sue and Clark Davoust  
Joe and Paula Dempsey  
Elyse Dolan and Will Brackenbury  
Iris and Douglas Dowden  
Joan Esposito  
John and Jennifer Falduto  
Jon Faris  
Tom and Kate Geraty  
Margaret and Michael Gergen  
Adrienne Gomez  
Carole Griggs  
Kevin Gufstafson  
Matt and Beth Hafter  
Marty Higginbotham and Ashley Bishop  
Lois and Jim Hobart  
Illinois Humanities Council  
Philip Earl Johnson  
Philip and Sandra Johnson  
Whitney Jones  
Larry Levin  
Michael Mahler and Dara Cameron  
Heather Meyers and Roger Grum  
Anne and Keith Moffat  
Katarzyna Muller  
Suzy Petri and Robert Breuler  
Merril Prager and John Levine  
Marjorie Punter  
Douglas Reichert Powell  
Anthony Roberts  
Kirsten Simanonok  
Chris Thangaraj  
The Saints  
Ainslie and Larry Vaughan  
Allison and Joseph Villinski  
Joyce Anne Wainio  
Wandachristine  
Darrel and Shirley Whiteside  
Tilly Wilhoite  
Hope Williams  
Steven Wolff  
Tom Yocky and Kathryn Simon

American Blues Theater is grateful for every contribution. We regret that due to space limitations we are unable to list donations under \$99. Please accept our deepest appreciation as your donation makes a difference!



# 5,161

patrons returned  
to in-person  
performances



# 132

artists in  
2021-2022  
season



# 20

sold out  
performances



# 26

"Teacher  
Tributes"

## 2021-2022 Snapshot



# 690

Blue Ink  
submissions

# 32

students enrolled  
in pay-what-you-  
can classes



# 36

years as an itinerant  
company before purchasing  
Our First Home



[True Blue Annual Fund](#)

Jonathan Abarbanel  
 Juan Alfonso  
 Peter and Bari Amadio  
 Anixter Foundation  
 Anonymous (2)  
 Betty and Bob Becker  
 Audrey and Nicholas Stone  
 Michael Braun  
 Manny Buckley and Steve Wroten  
 Michael Budzik  
 Phil and Jill Calian  
 Karen Callaway  
 Donna Cameron  
 Dennis Carlin  
 Marcy and Greg Carlin  
 Jeppson's Malort  
 CNA Insurance Companies  
 David and Sissy Coffin  
 Jeanette Cole  
 Sally Cooper  
 Daniel H. Lome Foundation  
 Sue and Clark Davoust  
 Iris and Douglas Dowden  
 Rita Dragonette  
 Joan Esposito  
 John and Jennifer Falduto  
 Jon Faris  
 Arlene and Bill Flynn  
 Mary and Michael Goodkind  
 Kathy and John Goudie

[True Blue Annual Fund cont.](#)

Henry Gregory  
 Carole Griggs  
 Brenda and James Grusecki  
 Kevin Gustafson  
 Susan Haimes  
 Michael and Mona Heath  
 Kimberlee Herold  
 Lois and Jim Hobart  
 Sarajane Johnson  
 BJ and Candy Jones  
 Keith and Erica Karlson  
 Larry Levin  
 Marcie McVay and Dennis Zacek  
 Anne and Keith Moffat  
 Jim Moles  
 Christopher and Ann Motogawa  
 Roger and Jill Mueller  
 David and Agnes Murdoch  
 Lenore Murphy  
 John and Joy O'Malley  
 Merrill Prager and John Levine  
 Glen and Beth Prezembel  
 Marjorie Punter  
 Margaret Reagor  
 Anthony Roberts  
 Melissa Roeters  
 Editha Rosario and Alexis Moore  
 Libby Savner  
 Bette Schoenholtz  
 Kirsten Simanonok

[True Blue Annual Fund cont.](#)

Lucy Soltau  
 Allison and Joseph Villinski  
 Julie and Scott West  
 Darrel and Shirley Whiteside  
 Wendy Whiteside and Ian Van Handel  
 Steven Wolff  
 Tom Yocky and Kathryn Simon

[Donations made in memory of John Mohrlein](#)

Anonymous  
 Joan Esposito  
 Craig and Linda Grannon  
 Susan Haimes  
 Jeppson's Malort  
 BJ and Candy Jones  
 Marcie McVay and Dennis Zacek  
 Anne and Keith Moffat  
 Christopher and Ann Motogawa  
 Roche Schulfer and Mary Beth Fisher  
 Allison and Joseph Villinski  
 Darrel and Shirley Whiteside

[In-Kind Contributions](#)

Scott Cooper  
 Heather Meyers and Roger Grum  
 Audrey and Nicholas Stone  
 Wandachristine

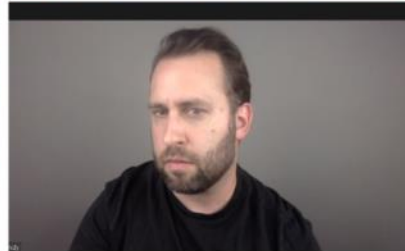
We make every effort to keep this list as accurate and complete as possible.

Please contact us at [info@AmericanBluesTheater.com](mailto:info@AmericanBluesTheater.com) to correct any unintentional errors or omissions.



Pictured: Zachary Stevenson performing at the 2021 "Red, White, & Blues" event; Ian Paul Custer and Zachary Stevenson performing at ComEd's "Switch on Summer" event at Buckingham Fountain.







## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Keith A. Karlson <i>President</i>	Editha Rosario-Moore <i>Vice-President</i>	David Coffin <i>Secretary</i>	Gwendolyn Whiteside Jeremy Zednick	<i>In Memoriam</i> Chip Pringle
Kimberlee Herold <i>Vice-President</i>	Michael R. Levinson <i>Treasurer</i>	Manny Buckley Rama Ranganathan	<i>Lifetime Director</i> Burt X. Rosenberg	

## ENSEMBLE MEMBERS

Dawn Bach	Elyse Dolan	Heather Meyers	Michael Trudeau	Kevin Kelly
Audrey Billings	Jared Gooding	Christopher Neville	Denzel Tsopnang	James Leaming
Matthew Brumlow	Marty Higginbotham	Cara Parrish	Wandachristine	William Payne
Manny Buckley	Philip Earl Johnson	Suzanne Petri	Wendy Whiteside	Carmen Roman
Dara Cameron	Lindsay Jones	Camille Robinson		
Casey Campbell	Steve Key	Editha Rosario-Moore	<i>Emeritus</i>	<i>In Memory</i>
Darren Canady	Ed Kross	Chuck Smith	Rick Cleveland	John Mohrlein
Austin Cook	Warren Levon	J.G. Smith	Dennis Cockrum	
Ian Paul Custer	Michael Mahler	Zachary Stevenson	Lauri Dahl	

## ARTISTIC AFFILIATES

Simone Allen	Paul Deziel	Cisco Lopez	Rick Sims	Adrienne Walker
Eric Backus	Tom Geraty	Manny Ortiz	James Still	Lily Walls
Ada Cheng	Shawn Goudie	Jim Ortlieb	Christina Telesca	Rachel West
Liz Chidester	Joslyn Jones	Alexander Ridgers	Shandee Vaughan	
Yuchi Chiu	Mackenzie Jones	Eileen Rozycki	Ana Velazquez	<i>Emeritus</i>
Joe Dempsey	Zach Kenney	Grant Sabin	Katy Peterson Viccellio	Richard Shavzin

## STAFF

<b>LEADERSHIP</b> Gwendolyn Whiteside <i>Artistic Director</i>	Sarajane Johnson <i>Director of Development</i>	Abdullah Khan Alfredo Rodriguez, Jr <i>Illinois NFP Audit &amp; Tax, LLP</i>	The Stage Channel <i>Video/Media</i>
<b>ARTISTIC</b> Elyse Dolan <i>Associate Artistic Director</i>	Tania Richard <i>Antiracism Consultant</i>	<b>PR, MARKETING, DESIGN</b> Cathy Taylor PR <i>Public Relations</i>	Natalie Bontumasi Sam McCay <i>Graphic Design</i>
<b>ADMINISTRATION</b> Samantha Mitchell <i>General Manager</i>	Yvonne Afable Priya Mishra Teresa Tristan <i>Accounting Services</i>	Michael Brosilow <i>Photography</i>	

Pictured on previous page (top row): Sana Selemon and Steve Key in *The Room* reading of *Origin Story*; the cast, crew, and members of the creative team, of *Fences* (photo by Michael Brosilow); (second row) Jim Ortlieb and John Kolvenbach in rehearsal for *Stand Up If You're Here Tonight*; Manny Buckley, Nevada Montgomery, Jazzma Pryor, and Noah Smith in *#ENOUGH: Plays to End Gun Violence*; (third row) the cast, crew, and members of the creative team of *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!* (photo by Michael Brosilow); Cara Parrish, Sarajane Johnson, Elyse Dolan, and Wendy Whiteside at *Dead Ringers for Dead Singers*; Ian Paul Custer and Zachary Stevenson at ComEd's "Switch on Summer" event; (fourth row) Ian Paul Custer and Editha Rosario-Moore in *The Room* reading of *17 Minutes*; (fifth row) Riley Wells, Kamal Angelo Bolden, Monty Cole, Shanésia Davis, moderator Tania Richard, and Manny Buckley in a virtual "Blues Views" Q&A for *Fences*; John Mohrlein in *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!* (photo by Michael Brosilow); (sixth row) Kimberlee Herold, Therese Lysaught, and Sue Wilde at *Dead Ringers for Dead Singers*; Manny Buckley during photo call for *Fences* (photo by Michael Brosilow); (bottom row) William Anthony Sebastian Rose II, Ajax Dontavious, Kamal Angelo Bolden, Shanésia Davis, Monet Felton, Monty Cole, and Martel Manning at the first rehearsal of *Fences*; Lindsay Jones, Audrey Billings, Zach Kenney, and J.G. Smith in *The Room* reading of *The Thanksgiving Play*.





ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE  
4809 N RAVENSWOOD, SUITE 221  
CHICAGO, IL 60640  
AMERICANBLUESTHEATER.COM

American Blues Theater is located in Chicago, the traditional homelands of the Council of the Three Fires: the Odawa, Ojibwe, and Potawatomi Nations. Read more at [AmericanBluesTheater.com/neighborhood](http://AmericanBluesTheater.com/neighborhood).