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JULY 2017



Jul 14–Aug 6

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# *Alex & Aris*

BY MOBY POMERANCE

DIRECTED BY JOHN LANGS

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# encore STAGES

SUMMER 2017

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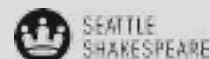
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Encore Stages is an Encore Arts Program that features stories about our local arts community side-by-side with information about performances. Encore Arts Programs are publications of Encore Media Group. We also publish City Arts, the monthly arts & culture magazine, and specialty publications, including the Official Seattle Pride Guide and the SIFF Guide and Catalog. Learn more at [encoremidiagroup.com](http://encoremidiagroup.com)

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# Putting Classics to the Test

Producing plays from the canon to contemporary effect



Sally Brady, Jeffrey Azevedo, Cherdonna, and Samie Spring Detzer in *Cherdonna's Doll's House*. Photo by Jeff Carpenter.

Seattle theatres are taking on classics through contemporary lenses.

Henrik Ibsen's play, *A Doll's House*, premiered in 1879 in Copenhagen. It was Christmastime, and audiences may have been expecting something a bit more festive. Instead, they were presented with a shockingly feminist play, one where women make decisions and have agency. Over the intervening decades, the play has become a classic and is performed and adapted all over the world. Just a few months ago, the Washington Ensemble Theatre presented *Cherdonna's Doll's House*, an adaptation of *A Doll's House* featuring beloved Seattle bio queen Cherdonna Shinatra. Director Ali Mohamed el-Gassier was excited to see how the original play would bend and break with Cherdonna in the mix. "If you

love a classic, test it," he says. "F\*\*k with it to see if it's still relevant. Truly engage with it."

There are many reasons that classics endure. Many are beautiful wrought, satisfyingly structured, and engage themes that remain relevant far beyond their initial premiere. There's artistic and fiscal value for theatres to produce work well-loved works from the cannon. Seasoned theatre-goers have seen many plays by Miller, Shakespeare, Ibsen, O'Neill, Williams, and more. Reinterpretations and new adaptations of classics bring new light to characters many theatre audiences know well and can challenge us to see



new perspectives in old stories.

Seattle Shakespeare Theatre produces almost exclusively classic work, mostly by Shakespeare. But the productions are hardly ever styled in a straightforward Elizabethan manner. "This is still contemporary theatre," says George Mount, Seattle Shakespeare Theatre's artistic director. "We are speaking directly to an audience that night, a new audience every night. Each night is fresh. It's never the same. Every single performance is new."

Earlier this year, Seattle Shakespeare Company presented *Bring Down the House*. Adapted by Rosa Joshi and Kate Wisniewski, it was an epic 2-part adaptation of Shakespeare's *Henry VI* trilogy. Produced in partnership with the upstart crow collective, the cast was entirely women. "Here we were highlighting power structures," notes Mount, "and we were tech-ing the production the day the Women's March was taking place. There were shouts of power right outside our doors." The play premiered in 1592. Thrilling at the time, the history play deals with the English political system torn apart by personal squabbles and deepening jealousies. The play is hundreds of years old, but it is still relevant.

Mining and adapting classic stories for their modern relevance is itself a classic idea. "It's what Shakespeare was doing at the time," Mount says. "What Aeschylus was doing." The ancient Greek poets wrote dramatized adaptations



The cast of *Medea*. Photo by John Ulman.

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Alexandra Tavares in the titular role in Seattle Shakespeare Company's production of *Medea*, directed by Kelly Kitchens in fall 2016. Photo by John Ulman.

of mythology to engage the issues and theme with which society was wrestling. Through that process, new ideas and perspectives within the story were brought to light. "We have to keep doing that," Mount says of stories audiences know by heart. "Take them apart and reimagine them. We have to look at each play afresh and askance."

ACT Theatre's Artistic Director John Langs looks to past works to see the future. "Producing the classics assists us in our vision of finding the classic theatre of tomorrow," he says. This fall, Langs directs *The Crucible* at ACT. The classic Miller play about the Salem witch trials that is really about the dangers of McCarthyism stunned audiences when it premiered in 1953. *The Crucible* has now become a central work in the canon of American drama. The production at ACT this fall will be a new interpretation. "Classics endure. They deal with issues that come around again and again" says Langs. The production will draw parallels between the American political landscape that from 1953 and today. "The theme of a community turning in on itself and targeting its own is something our

John Langs  
Artistic Director

Becky Witmer  
Managing Director

ACT – A Contemporary Theatre presents

# Alex & Aris

By Moby Pomerance

Directed by John Langs

Beginning July 14, 2017 • Opening Night July 20, 2017

## CAST

Darragh Kennan*	Aris
Chip Sherman	Alex

## CREATIVE TEAM

John Langs	Director
Julia Hayes Welch	Scenic Designer
Melanie Burgess	Costume Designer
Robert Aguilar	Lighting Designer
Matt Starritt	Sound Designer
Cathan Bordyn	Fight Choreographer
Jeffrey K. Hanson*	Stage Manager
Ruth Eitemiller	Assistant Stage Manager
Alex Bodine	Kenan Directing Fellow
Lily McLeod	Assistant Lighting Designer
Indira Schlag	Costume Intern
Mario Gomez	Dramaturgy Intern

**Act 1** - An abandoned temple, now a school house in Mieza, a small settlement in Macedonia.

**Act 2, Scene 1** - A hill over Pella.

**Act 2, Scene 2** - In the mind of Aristotle and Alexander, somewhere between Greece and the Persian City of Bactra.

Running Time: This performance runs approximately two hours. There will be one intermission.

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

The video and/or audio recording of this performance by any means whatsoever are strictly prohibited.

*Alex & Aris* was developed in part at the Icicle Creek New Play Festival.

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Closed Captioning devices are available at evening performances on Jul 14, 15, 18, 21, 25, 28, Aug 1, 4 and matinee performances on Jun 22, 27, and Aug 5.

Audience members are cordially reminded to silence all electronic devices. All forms of photography and the use of recording devices are strictly prohibited. Please do not walk on the stage before, during, or after the show. Patrons wearing Google Glass must power down the device if wearing them in the theatre.





*John Langs*

PHOTO BY TRUMAN BUFFET

# WELCOME to ACT

The Greatest Story Never Told.

One of the great pleasures of being an Artistic Director is to unearth and develop a new play about a subject that has never been explored. *Alex & Aris* is a fierce two-hander about the four years that a young Macedonian prince—soon to become Alexander the Great—spent under the tutelage of one of the greatest minds the world has ever known: the philosopher Aristotle. Very little is written by the great historians about this time in the life of both men. However, it was just after this moment of connection that each embarked on his earth-shattering, world-changing trajectory.

This play is for all of us who have had a teacher that we loved and hated and in hindsight made us who we are. For all of us who have taught a young person with terrifying potential. What would it be like if we had a chance to set the moral compass of a young person who would be a king? What would it be like to carry the burden of history on your shoulder, knowing it was your turn to change it?

This play delves into the powerful moment when we must come to terms with our past and our destiny as we forge our identity. It is also a mountain for two great actors to climb. It is my pleasure to guide Darragh Kennan and Chip Sherman in two of the most challenging roles that I have encountered for actors in a long while. I am so humbled to be a part of a company that takes a risk on brand new and adventurous works, and so inspired by our audience that dares us to continue.

John Langs  
Artistic Director



## A Note from Managing Director **BECKY WITMER**

As a not-for-profit arts organization, our mission is to serve the public and to be accessible to all. We are so grateful for the extraordinary support from families and individuals who believe, as I do, that live theatre and ACT in particular, is a civic necessity. We strive to be relevant and accessible to all the citizens of our region so that everyone has access to cultural and creative experiences.

I assume (given the distribution of this program) that you are likely part of the choir who believe that a strong arts community increases quality of life. ACT is known for producing a season of plays that speak to the heart of our times through relevant themes and thought-provoking narratives.

What you may not know is how much we are able to accomplish because of the generous support of the community through donations and grants:

- Affordable tickets starting at \$20. Plus another \$185,000 in free and discounted tickets that we offer each year to youth, students, seniors, and low income residents.
- The ACTLab, our partnership programming model with area artists and organizations, is made possible because of community support that allows ACT to open our doors and to subsidize much of the cost of producing at a professional level.
- Our Education and Engagement programs build connections in schools, libraries, community centers, senior centers, and more. Plus we create pre-show and post-show conversations to help audiences dig deep on the themes of the plays.

- We strive to steward the historic landmark Eagles Auditorium that ACT saved from disrepair in the 1990s, and which we continue to maintain and operate.
- We employ over 100 people every year, including artists and those who support Seattle's creative spirit.

On the summer ballot in King County you will have an opportunity to vote on Access for All, a county-wide sales tax of .01% that would be distributed to arts, cultural, science, and heritage organizations specifically to increase services across the county. Upon passing, ACT will expand our Young Playwrights Program to schools outside of Seattle; create opportunities for theatre and arts administration jobs for diverse communities; provide programs, tours, and partnerships across the county; increase our services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Blind and Visually Impaired, and Mobility Impaired persons; AND we will add even more free and low cost performances.

The board, staff, and artists of ACT are eager to grow and deepen the relationships that have kept us going strong for 52 years. With your continued support and the upcoming success of Access for All, there will be an infusion of cultural experiences in King County that is going to have a dramatic impact on the health and quality of life in our region.

Thank you for being part of the choir. Your support means the world to us.

# The Characters

## School Years



### Aristotle

#### Teacher of Alexander

Lauded as the most important philosopher of the last two thousand years, Aristotle was the student of Plato and the teacher of Alexander.



### Hephaestion

#### Son of Amyntor Agathonos

A nobleman and general in Alexander's army, the dearest of Alexander's friends and raised alongside him. He went on to command the elite Companion cavalry and was entrusted with many tasks throughout Alexander's 10-year campaign in Asia.



### Callisthenes

#### Aristotle's nephew

A well-connected Greek historian in Macedon, who accompanied Alexander during the Asiatic expedition. He was implicated in a plot to assassinate Alexander, and died serving his prison sentence. This brought Alexander's relationship with Aristotle to a close.



### Ptolemy

A mathematician, astronomer, geographer, astrologer, and poet. He wrote several scientific treatises, three of which were of importance to later Byzantine, Islamic, and European science.



### Lysimachus

Alexander's successor, who became king in 306 BC, ruling Thrace, Asia Minor, and Macedon. He was a nobleman of high rank and an intimate friend of Philip II. Before becoming king, Lysimachus enjoyed a prominent position in Alexander's inner circle.



### Cassander

King of Macedon from 305–297 BC, and de facto ruler of much of Greece from 317 BC until his death. Following Alexander's death, he fought for Alexander's empire. He was ruthless in his dealings with political enemies.



### Nearchus

An officer in the army of Alexander, and his mentor. Though exiled under Philip II's rule, he was recalled once Alexander attained power. His voyages with Alexander are recounted in *Indica*, written in 2nd century AD.

## Persia, Enemy of Greece



### Darius III

#### Reigning king of Persia

Darius oversaw the Persian Empire until Alexander's invasion in 334 BC. His empire was unstable, with large portions governed by jealous and unreliable leaders and inhabited by rebellious subjects. Alexander defeated the Persian army before destroying the capital Persepolis by fire in 331 BC.

## The Northern Tribes

### King Bardylis I

#### Contemporary of Amyntas IV

King of the Dardanian Kingdom, reigning over Upper Macedonia. He is rumored to have lived over 90 years.

### King Bardylis II

#### Contemporary of King Philip II

King Bardylis I's grandson, and an enemy of the Macedonian kingdom.

### Bardylis

A blind man from the Northern tribe, befriended by Alexander.



# of Alex & Aris

## The Wedding Story



### Attalus

Cleopatra's uncle, friend of New Pausanias

A friend of Philip II. According to Aristotle, Attalus sexually assaulted New Pausanias in retribution for tarnishing the reputation of Attalus' friend, Old Pausanias.



### Amyntas IV

Alexander's grandfather

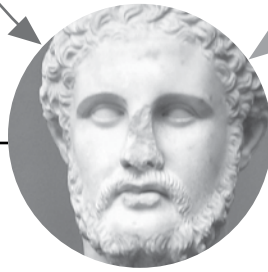
Amyntas IV was a titular king of Macedonia in 359 BC. He became king as an infant after the death of his father, and was tutored by his uncle, Philip II, who would later declare himself king, expropriating his young nephew. When Alexander became king, Amyntas was immediately executed.



### Cleopatra Eurydice

Macedonian noblewoman, and last of the seven wives of Philip II

Their marriage upset Olympias, Philip's fourth wife and mother of Alexander, thereby throwing Alexander's inheritance into question.



### King Philip II

Alexander's father, reigning king of Greece

King Philip II was the king of Macedon from 359 BC until his assassination in 336 BC. Under his leadership, Macedon saw unprecedented rise due to the personality and policy of Philip II, which included reforming the army into an effective fighting force.



### Old Pausanias

First lover of King Philip II  
Pausanias of Orestis, Philip's former lover and member of his bodyguard. Attalus blamed him for the death of New Pausanias, after his public shaming of Philip's new lover. He would be subjected to Attalus' brutal revenge.

### New Pausanias Second lover of King Philip II

A member of Philip's personal bodyguard, and close friend of Attalus. He replaced Philip's former lover, and later committed suicide due to Old Pausanias' public shaming of his romantic rival. For this, Attalus would seek brutal revenge against Old Pausanias.



### Olympias

Mother of Alexander

She was an extraordinarily powerful woman and Priestess. Even as the fourth wife of Philip II, her formidable power assured that she was the highest-ranking wife.



## Alexander the Great

King of Macedon

Under the tutelage of Aristotle, Alexander would become not only King of Macedon, but Pharaoh of Egypt, King of Persia, and King of Asia.

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King of the Yees, The Crucible photos by Davis Schindler

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A Contemporary Theatre



# Notes of Ancient Macedonia & the Macedonians

BY ALEXANDER HOLLMANN, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF CLASSICS  
AT UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

Rough lands breed rough people, according to Hippocrates, the father of medicine. This was certainly true of Macedonia and the Macedonians. High mountains and massifs, steep and isolated valleys, rivers prone to flooding, brutally cold winters and blisteringly hot summers on the plains made for a tough and self-reliant population. But Macedonia was also blessed with resources that were the envy of their neighbors, including the Greeks to the south. Forests of fir, cedar, pine, and oak, which had been in steep decline in southern Greece since the Bronze Age, were still abundant there and in demand for shipbuilding and other construction. Metals, especially silver and gold, enriched the ruling elite, and it was said that the gold mines of Pangaion provided Philip II with 1000 talents a day. Fish in rivers and lakes were plentiful and could be dried and exported, hunting of game was good, careful moving of flocks between winter and summer pastures enabled effective husbandry of sheep and goats, and crops of all kinds were cultivated.

"Rough lands  
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medicine."

For these reasons Macedonia began to emerge as a major power in the region already at the beginning of the fifth century. Its proximity to Athenian colonies in the northern Aegean founded later in the fifth century to exploit these same resources brought about tensions between the two states, and the Macedonians also had to deal with incursions by Illyrians and Thracians (the "Northern Barbarians" of the play) as well as their (Greek) neighbors to the west, the Epirotes.

Alexander I expanded the borders of Macedonia considerably during his reign from its core, but it was Philip II who by his organization of resources, diplomacy, and reform of the army pushed these borders even further, so that Macedonia comprised the modern day Greek province of Macedonia, the formerly Yugoslavian but now independent Republic of Bulgaria. His influence spread into southern Greece

and through his leadership of the Corinthian League, judicious bribery, and use and threat of military force he achieved hegemony over all the independent city states of Greece. A decisive victory at Chaeronea in 338 BCE over Thebans,



Athenians, and others was the final blow. This was the Macedonia that his son Alexander would inherit when Pausanias assassinated Philip shortly afterward in 336 BCE.

Who were the Macedonians? If we read the largely hostile Athenian sources, they were not Greeks but barbarians, or at best a kind of hybrid, not to be grouped with the Greeks of the south. Ethnicity, we realize today, is a particularly slippery and subjective concept, and there are clear indications that in antiquity the Macedonians could in fact be considered as Greeks, depending on one's point of view. It is now generally agreed that they spoke a dialect of

"Macedonia was also blessed with resources that were the envy of their neighbors..."

Greek, which other Greeks may or may not have been able to understand (one might think of Ukrainian and Russian). The royal family of Macedonia were in a different situation from the general population: they boasted descent from Temenos of Argos, a son of Heracles, and that his descendants had left Argos and settled in Macedonia. They could thus claim to be unequivocally Greek (a claim that was challenged but upheld when Alexander I competed in the Olympic Games). Early on, using their great wealth, they began to invite the great poets (Pindar, Bacchylides, Euripides), artists (Zeuxis), and performers (Timotheos) of southern Greece to their court, surrounded themselves with the best of Greek craftsmanship, and had their sons educated in the prestigious Greek paideia (culture/education). Thus when Aristotle was summoned by Philip to be the tutor of the young Alexander he was following in the footsteps of great (and well-compensated) men—perhaps not such a bad gig.

## Who's Who in *Alex & Aris*



### **Darragh Kennan**

(*Aris*) Darragh is delighted to return to ACT (where he was last seen as Gary in *Bethany*), and to work again with longtime

friend and collaborator John Langs. Recent credits: Leontes in *The Winter's Tale* (Seattle Shakespeare Company), and Sherlock Holmes in both *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and *Sherlock Holmes and The American Problem* (Seattle Repertory Theatre). Darragh works as a Major Gifts Officer at Seattle Repertory Theatre, and lives on Vashon Island with his incredible family: Jessica, Finn, and Máire Kennan. To work on a new play right up until the last second is a true gift and one of the great pleasures an actor can experience. Thank you to Moby Pomerance for this beautiful play, and to the patrons of ACT for supporting new work.



### **Chip Sherman** (*Alex*)

Chip feels honored to have his Seattle debut be at ACT with the progressive mind of John Langs, and next to one of Seattle's best,

Darragh Kennan. He will remember this welcome very fondly, thank you. He's a trained dancer, actor, singer, who has enjoyed playing roles from Shakespeare and Bertolt Brecht to up-and-coming playwright Idris Goodwin, recently being in productions of *Romeo and Juliet* as Romeo, and *How We Got On* as Julian. Other notable roles; MacHeath (*Threepenny Opera*), Cleopatra (*Antony and Cleopatra*), Olivia (*Twelfth Night*), The Tin Woodsman (*The Wizard of Oz*). He also got the brilliant opportunity to take a one-man adaptation of *Hamlet*, titled *Tis In My Memory Locked*, to the Edinburgh Fringe in 2012 and has been working on a one-man show detailing the life of Jean Michel Basquiat to return with. Thank you for supporting diverse theatre, the world needs it now more than ever. Enjoy, Moby Pomerance's *Alex & Aris*!



### **Moby Pomerance**

(*Playwright*) Moby was born in London in 1969. He moved to Boston to attend Berklee College of Music, and from there

proceeded to New York where he lived and played professionally in the local scene for five

years. He returned to London to study theatre at Central School of Speech and Drama, after which he worked as playwright Howard Barker's assistant for two years. He lives in London with his wife Kate Stevens and son Gabriel. Other productions include: *The Piano Men* (ACT Theatre best new play), *Broken Hands* (NY Fringe winner), *The Good Book of Pedantry* and *Wonder* (Boston Court).

**John Langs** (Director) See bio at right.

**Julia Hayes Welch** (Scenic Designer) is pleased to be back at ACT after designing *Bad Apples* last fall. Recent credits include *Grounded* (Seattle Public Theater); *Barbecue*, *Bootycandy* (Intiman); *The Things Are Against Us* (Washington Ensemble Theatre; Footlight Award, Gypsy Rose Lee Award); *Peter and the Starcatcher*, *Really Really* (ArtsWest); *Free Boy* (5th Avenue Adventure Musical Theater); *Twister Beach* (Café Nordo); *The Noteworthy Life of Howard Barnes* (Village Theatre); *Trojan Women* (Civic Rep); *Pride and Prejudice* (Theatreworks UCCS); *Through the Looking Glass*, *Land of the Sweets* (House of Verlaïne); *Julius Caesar*, *The Abdication*, *Vitriol* (Handwritten Productions); *Twelfth Night*, *Cold Empty Terrible*, *Cowboy Mouth*, *The Real Inspector Hound*, *Stop Kiss* (UW Drama). Ms. Welch attended the University of Washington where she received her M.F.A. in 2015. Much love to W. [jhwelchdesigns.com](http://jhwelchdesigns.com)

**Melanie Burgess** (Costume Designer) is a Seattle-based Costume Designer. She has designed costumes for over 160 productions for: ACT, Seattle Opera, Seattle Repertory Theatre, The 5th Avenue Theatre, Intiman, The Village Theatre, Seattle Children's Theatre, Seattle Shakespeare Company, NCTC, Seattle Theatre Company, Strawberry Theatre Workshop, Taproot Theatre, Tacoma Actors Guild, and The Empty Space Theatre. Regionally for: The Guthrie, Cincinnati Playhouse, Minneapolis Children's Theatre, Tantrum Theater in Ohio, Idaho Theatre for Youth, Honolulu Theatre for Youth, and Hawaii Opera. Melanie received her M.F.A. from the University of Washington. She is the recipient of the Gregory Award for Outstanding Costume Design 2010 and has received multiple Seattle Footlight Awards for her work. She is a member of USA Local 829 and a professor of costume design at Cornish College of the Arts.

**Robert Aguilar** (Lighting Designer) At ACT: *The Legend of Georgia McBride*, *Daisy*, *Little Shop of Horrors* (The 5th Avenue Theatre co-production), *The Lady With All the Answers*; Seattle area: *The Pajama Game*, *How to Succeed ...*, *Jasper in Deadland* (The 5th Avenue Theatre); *Dry Powder*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, *Buyer and Cellar*, *Lizard Boy*, *Dear Elizabeth*, *The Vaudevillians*, *Bo-Nita*, *I Am My Own Wife*, *Of Mice and Men*, *The K of D*, and *boom!* (Seattle Repertory Theatre); *The Cherry Orchard*, *Three Sisters* (The Seagull Project, ACTLab); *Barbecue*, *Wedding Band*, *The Children's Hour*, *Angels in America* (Intiman); *Trails* (Village Theatre); *Next to Normal*, *The Yellow Wood*, *The 25th Annual ...*, and *Zanna Don't!* (Contemporary Classics). Regional: *Full Gallop* (The Old Globe), *7 Spots on the Sun* (Cincinnati Playhouse).

**Cathan Bordin** (Fight Choreographer) is excited to be a part of this production of *Alex & Aris*, his first with ACT. A Seattle based stage/film actor and fight choreographer, Cathan started stage fighting as a company member of the Montana Shakespeare Company, and continued his training in graduate school and with Shakespeare & Company (Lenox, MA). Recent fight direction includes *Pippin*, *Cubamor*, and *Peter Pan* at Village Theatre, and he is also currently working on *AIDA* (Village Theatre KIDSTAGE). He holds a B.A. in Theatre from Carroll College, an M.F.A. in Acting from Arizona State University, and received his combat certification through Dueling Arts International. His most recent film, *The Last Buck Hunt*, is now streaming on Amazon Prime.

**Matt Starritt** (Sound Designer) is a Seattle-based, freelance sound designer for theatre and dance. In Seattle, he has designed for ACT, Seattle Repertory Theatre, Intiman, Seattle Shakespeare Company, Strawberry Theatre Workshop, Book-It Repertory Theatre, ArtsWest, New Century Theatre Company, BenDeLaCreme, Waxie Moon, zoe I juniper, and Washington Ensemble Theatre. Nationally, he has designed for Alley Theatre, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Cornerstone Theater Company, The Old Globe, and South Coast Repertory. He is a part-time lecturer for the University of Washington's School of Drama and was a founding member of Washington Ensemble Theatre.

**Jeffrey K. Hanson** (Stage Manager) Now in his 28th season at ACT, Hanson has stage managed more than 70 shows including *Murder for Two*; *Jacques Brel is Alive and Well and Living in Paris*; *Mr. Burns*, a post electric play; *Little Shop of Horrors*; *Sugar Daddies*; *Double Indemnity*; *Becky's New Car*; *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*; *Das Barbecü*; *The Women*; *Stuff Happens*; *The Pillowman*; *Mourning Becomes Electra*; *Quills*; *Laughter on the 23rd Floor*; *The Gospel at Colonus*; *Halcyon Days*; *The Revengers' Comedies*; and *Lloyd's Prayer*. At The 5th Avenue Theatre, he has been production stage manager for *Pajama Game*, *A Night With Janis Joplin*, *How To Succeed In Business Without Really Trying*, *A Chorus Line*, *Oklahoma!*, *Candide*, *Irving Berlin's White Christmas*, *Hello, Dolly!*, and *Mame*. He has stage managed *Metamorphoses*, *The Cider House Rules*, *Parts One and Two* (Seattle Repertory Theatre); and for Seattle Children's Theatre, Intiman, and Arizona Theatre Company.



**John Langs** (Artistic Director) John has been delighted to serve ACT as Artistic Director since 2016, and previously as Associate Artistic Director for three years.

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

## Who's Who in Alex & Aris



**Becky Witmer**  
(Managing Director)  
has been with ACT  
since 2011, serving as  
the General Manager  
(2014-2015) and also  
the Director of

Marketing and Communications (2011-2014). Becky began her career in arts management through marketing and communications. She was the Director of Marketing and Public Relations at Intiman Theatre (2008-2011) and Opera Colorado (2006-2008). She was the Associate Director of Marketing with Central City Opera (2002-2005). Becky is an advisory board member for TeenTix, a founding co-chair of the Cultural Resource Collective, an Arts Business Consultant with Shunpike, and she frequently appears as a guest lecturer for Seattle University's Arts Leadership M.F.A. program. She is a graduate of the Leadership Tomorrow program.

ACT operates under agreements with the following:



This theatre operates under an agreement between the League of Resident Theatres and Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

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## PATRON INFORMATION

### Emergency Evacuation Procedures

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

### Emergency Number

The theatre's emergency number in the Union lobby is 206.292.7667. Leave your exact seat location with your emergency contact in case they need to reach you.

### Smoking Policy

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

### Firearms Policy

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

### Food

Food is not allowed in the theatre. Tuxedos & Tennis Shoes is the exclusive caterer of ACT.

### Accessibility

Wheelchair seating is available. The theatre is equipped with the Williams Sound® Listening System for the hard of hearing; headsets are available from the house manager for use, free of charge, with a valid ID and subject to availability. ACT offers American

Sign Language interpreted and audio-described performances. For more information, email [service@acttheatre.org](mailto:service@acttheatre.org).

### Lost & Found

Call 206.292.7676 between 12:00pm and 6:00pm, Tues-Sun.

### Address & Website

ACT is located at  
700 Union Street, Seattle, WA 98101.  
Ticket Office Phone: 206.292.7676.  
Administrative Office Phone: 206.292.7660.  
Fax: 206.292.7670.  
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THE ACT

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If you have included ACT in your estate plans but are not a member of the Legacy Society, please let us know so we can include you in this very special group. **Please contact Clare Hausmann Weiland, Director of Development at 206.292.7673 or [clare.hausmann@acttheatre.org](mailto:clare.hausmann@acttheatre.org).**

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<sup>†</sup> Denotes staff member has worked at ACT for 10 years or more





Betsy Schwartz and the cast of *Bring Down the House*. Photo by John Ulman.

country is struggling with,” Langs says. *The Crucible*, by that token, is still relevant.

“It probably isn’t clear, but I really, really love Ibsen,” el-Gasseir says of WET’s *Cherdonna’s Doll’s House*. “I think his writing is cruel and yet compassionate, blunt and subtle, timeless and forward thinking.” His production included actors breaking character to act as themselves, dance sequences to Cher songs, and cookies distributed to the audience, but Ibsen’s work shines through. The story is the same, but the message shifts. el-Gasseir’s self-stated project was to “find a concept that stretches the theme of the text and its language to the limits in order to see how it hits us now in our current world.”

Successful adaption projects begin with a thorough understanding of the original play. “To succeed you need to meet the source material,” Mount, of Seattle Shakespeare Theatre, says. “If you don’t bring you’re a-game to a

work that is already A-game, you’ll fail,” el-Gasseir adds. “If you do a modern *Cherry Orchard* in some logging community in the Pacific Northwest, all I will do in your audience is scan for dissonance. I will spend my time trying to see how the concept doesn’t fit.” Concepts for concept’s sake tends not to sit well with audiences, but thoughtful dramaturgically-informed choices can make a production soar.

When concept or additions fall flat, audiences and critics notice. Paul Constant of *Seattle Review of Books*, recently reviewed a production of a Shakespeare play in Seattle. He was so disappointed in the work, he would not even name the play and company he was reviewing. He wrote: “Shakespeare’s language is the source code of everything we say or write even today, so if your production mangles the language by piling overacting on top of it, say, or by screwing up the delivery of it with musical interludes, or by—worst

of all—adding to it, you are basically committing a crime against the English language. You can’t outdo Shakespeare. Don’t even try.”

But any contemporary production is new. That’s the nature of live performance. Theatres can bend classics a little or a lot to tell the stories they want to tell on stage, putting classics will to the test. “[We’re] looking to connect [the] text to our contemporary world, revealing something new about the heart of the play that clarifies rather than obscures,” explains Langs. “I think we can still do the classics and really engage with them without pandering to perceptions about our audiences who, in my experience, actually love risky, wild ideas,” adds el-Gassier. Whether new adaptations of classic deepen themes that are already in the plays or find new angles to explore in the text, it is clear there is much classic plays still have to offer contemporary producers and theatre artists. ■

## A Conversation with Reboot Theatre Company

Reboot Theatre Company tests new interpretations of established works through nontraditional casting, design, and methods yet to be discovered.

We recently sat down with founder and artistic director, Jasmine Joshua, to discuss John Adams, Southern belles in beards, and challenging the norm.

### Why did you found Reboot Theatre Company?

I started the company because as an artist, especially as an actor, I frequently found myself bored with a lot of female roles. I was too young to be someone's mom, too old, or not the right body type, to be the romantic lead, and there are only so many sassy friends you can go out for before you're over it.

I've always wanted to play John Adams from the musical *1776*. So back in 2014 when I had just found out I was pregnant with twins, I thought, "What the heck? I'm not going to be cast in anything anytime soon. Let's do an all-female reading in my living room!" It snowballed into a fully-realized production that played over one weekend to over 400 people! The feedback I kept hearing over and over again from audiences was, "After the first five minutes, I forgot you were all women!" and that got me thinking. What else could be tested? What other shows could you change the "normal" and either have it make no difference or change the meaning entirely. When does it have more impact? Let's find out!

### What does Reboot offer that other theatre companies don't?

We focus entirely on non-traditional casting or design. It's not a once-a-season gimmick. It's not one gender-flip cabaret.

Our entire season will always be filled with shows that challenge what is normal and move the needle for what storytelling can achieve if you alter who is telling the story.

### What's your favorite classic?

My favorite classic musical is *Gypsy*. Powerful female characters, a Sondheim score, hilarious script, familial drama — it is the perfect musical and no one will convince me otherwise. My favorite classic play is, actually, *Private Lives*, by Noel Coward, which I just had the great honor to direct for Reboot this last season. I am a comedic actor at heart and I love the witty banter and hilarious one-liners. Warms my heart!

### What's your favorite re-imagined classic you've seen?

My favorite reimagined classic that I've seen in Seattle was Intiman's *Orpheus Descending* by Tennessee Williams that they co-produced with the Williams Project. I saw the try-out version of it in the summer of 2014 when I was involved in the Emerging Artist Program and it absolutely blew my mind. Five or six actors, playing all the roles, men playing women, women playing men, actors playing whatever race. It was transcendent. The storytelling was so rich and eventually the performers just faded away into the script and I was lost in the world. It was only afterward that I realized, "Wow, that skinny dude with a



Jasmine Joshua, artistic director of Reboot Theatre Company. Photo by Jeff Carpenter.

beard just played a Southern belle and I 100% bought it." It was one of the major catalysts that got me to produce *1776* and found Reboot.

### Why should we reimagine the classics?

There will always be someone who will do *Our Town* the way it was originally intended. There will always be amazing classic productions of *The Music Man*. I don't think those should go away. But why not see how much more all the funny, and heartbreaking, and brilliant, and celebrated shows out there can yield if we just change up the status quo a little bit? On a less broad level, I think it is vital that we as a theatre community crack open the treasure trove of classic plays and make them accessible to everyone. Challenging the norm not only attracts diverse artists but also diverse audiences and art is something everyone should have a piece of. Would Willy Loman's plight hit home harder if a woman played him? If a person of color played him? How much more reach could a piece of art have if only a small change was made?

### What makes some tests effective and others fail?

Honestly, we're still trying to figure this out and, to me, it is the most exciting part of experimentation. I think an effective reboot can be one of two things: either the audience didn't notice what you've done

to change the story and, thus, started questioning why it's always been done a certain way or you have cracked open a completely new way of interpreting or enjoying a work simply by having a different vessel — performer, designer, what have you — for the art.

I have a pretty narrow definition of a reboot "failing" because I think subtlety, like blind casting where the race or gender of your performers isn't acknowledged in the actual show, like we did in *Fly By Night* or *1776*, is just as worthy of an experiment as big broad strokes, like turning a traditionally cis male character into a trans masculine character, like we did in *Private Lives*. I think the latter sort of reboot is a bigger risk and so can give a bigger reward, but I still say if you just

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watched a woman casually play a male character on stage and it didn't affect how the story was understood, is that not just as revolutionary?

I guess if I was forced to make a litmus test, I'd say if your reboot breaks the story and makes it impossible for the audience to immerse themselves in the world of the play, then yes, I think it would be a failed test. I think if nontraditional casting actively harms the essence of the show, then it would be a failed test like, for example, an all-white *Raisin in the Sun* or *Fences*.

**What Reboot productions are you most proud of?**

I am a bit biased since I played the lead, but our all-female *1776* will always have a special place in my heart. As far as I can tell, we produced the only fully realized all-female production ever done. There are plenty of concert versions, but no one has put 26 women in frock coats and done the whole show. I am so incredibly proud of our work and of the conversations that it started. How our Founding Fathers essentially threw American slaves under the bus in order to secure independence is a gut-wrenching and important part of our history that this brilliant musical plays out on stage. I think that having a diverse group of women portraying this decision was extremely impactful on our audiences, especially since Freddie Gray's murder and the Baltimore riots were still so fresh in everyone's minds and hearts at the time.

#### **What's coming up for Reboot?**

We are working on another season right now. We did solicited submissions from the community for our next season and got over 20 submissions, which was so exciting. We read through them all and have some favorites, musicals and straight plays alike, but are waiting on some permissions before we can announce. We think it's important to gain permission from licensing houses and playwrights before we change the original intent of a piece because even if the authors decline our reboot, we want them to know that the theatre community is seeking out diversity and wanting to push the boundaries of traditional theatre. But all that takes time.

#### **How can someone help Reboot?**

There are a couple of great ways to help Reboot. The most fun way is coming to see our shows and spreading the word. We love new audiences and we are always looking to engage people on what they think about our projects, so we encourage people to check us out, support new companies, and tell us what you think. The easiest thing to do is to join our mailing list, which you can do through our website, and that will keep you up to date on our goings-on and also ticket deals. ■

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## Exit Interview with Jonathan Shipley

This month, Encore Stages editor Jonathan Shipley ends his tenure with Encore Arts Programs and embarks on new adventures. We wanted to talk to him about company history, the Seattle arts community, and Encore Stages.

### How long have you been at Encore?

As of my last day, I have worked for Encore Media Group for eighteen years. I started before we had the internet installed. We were in this old brick building in Belltown, which is where we were during the Nisqually earthquake of 2001. That was really scary, I thought we weren't going to make it.

### Wait, really?

Totally! The building started to shake and me and my coworker, Jody, started getting under our desks, like they teach you to do when you're a child. The boss stormed out of his office and just shouted "RUN!" We were in a panic, so we all ran into the alley, which is quite possibly, the most dangerous place to be during an earthquake.

### But everyone was okay?

Yes, we all made it. No Encore casualties. Definitely some tears, though. And then, we went right back to work. We have deadlines, people!

### Have you ever missed a deadline?

For a publication, never. Not that I know of. I think, maybe a decade or so ago, there was a big snowstorm in Oregon, where our printer is, and the truck got stuck in some mountain pass and couldn't quite get the theatre programs to the theatre in time. Treacherous goings, sometimes, magazine publishing.

### Do you see the programs in action? Do you see a lot of performances?

I've gone to a lot of performances. Quite a few, actually, much to the delight of my kid, who is a bit of a theater nerd.

### What have been some of your favorites?

One of my favorites is *Kinky Boots*. Me and my daughter love that show. It's just got wonderful music and a wonderful message. Seattle Rep did *Of Mice and Men* several years ago. Being a Steinbeck nut, I couldn't help but appreciate that one. Anytime the Seattle Symphony performs Charles Ives, I swoon. You don't know Charles Ives? The best composer who has ever lived who also sold insurance. You should check him out.

### What's it like day-to-day in the Encore offices? How has it changed since you started?

It's busy here. We have approximately 1,385 deadlines from all the various publications we work on each year. I think the stress that comes with that, though, also produces some really creative, close collaborations—and friendships. We all put a lot of effort into a product that we believe in, because we all want to support the arts. The technology and the personnel have changed, but that passion for the arts and the desire to support them has always been central.

### The arts are important to you personally, then?

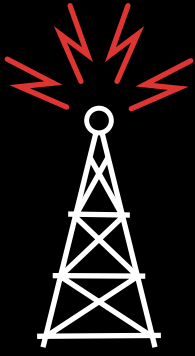
Oh, yes. I've been involved with them in some form or another since I was a little kid. It's one of the few things that elevates humans beyond mere humanity. I can think of three things that can do that for us: The natural world can do that for us, a religion can do that for us, and art can do that for us. With the arts, we can take us beyond ourselves and, at the same time, bring ourselves to us. I really believe that.

### What else should people know about you before you head out?

I'm interested in my city. I like writing about culture, and art, and food, and history, and about all the various communities within this city called Seattle.

### Tell me about the work you've done as an editor and writer for Stages.

It's been rewarding. This is publication of which I am proud. Internally, I've gotten to work closely with the team to redesign stages and figure out what we write about in each issue. Outside of the office, I've been able to meet and talk to people passionate about what they do. That's perpetually inspiring. For example, I wasn't particularly interested in the circus, but then I talked to folks at the School of Acrobatics and New Circus Arts, and then I was interested just because they are. To be able to capture that joy in words is a great exercise for me. Learning about drag queens or cello restoration or Latinx art, it's been an honest-to-god joy. ■



# Intermission Brain Transmission

Are you waiting the curtain to rise? Or, perhaps, you've just returned your seat before the second act and have a few minutes to spare? Treat your brain to this scintillating trivia quiz!

Email us the answer to the last question and have a chance to win tickets to a show!

- 1) Seattle Shakespeare Company's Wooden O Theatre is presenting *Much Ado About Nothing* outdoors this summer. Who played the role of Beatrice in the award-winning 1993 Kenneth Branagh film?
  - a) Kate Beckinsale
  - b) Emma Thompson
  - c) Helena Bonham Carter
  - d) Kristin Scott Thomas
- 2) Taproot Theatre is putting on a musical adaptation of Jane Austen's *Persuasion*. What was Austen's last completed novel?
  - a) *Persuasion*
  - b) *Mansfield Park*
  - c) *Sense and Sensibility*
  - d) *Emma*
- 3) *Alex and Aris* is a world-premiere play being showcased at ACT Theatre about the education of a king. Alexander the Great was the king of what empire?
  - a) Roman
  - b) Greek
  - c) British
  - d) Egyptian



Jane Austen engraving, care of the Library of Congress

- 4) *Pericles* is one of Shakespeare's least-known works. It's being put on by Wooden O Theatre this summer. What type of play is it?
  - a) Tragedy
  - b) Comedy
  - c) History
  - d) Romance
- 5) What Broadway musical production has won the most Tony Awards?
  - a) *Hamilton*
  - b) *The Producers*
  - c) *South Pacific*
  - d) *The Phantom of the Opera*

## Bonus Question

What was the last arts performance you attended that you liked best and why?

Email your response to [production@encoremediagroup.com](mailto:production@encoremediagroup.com) with Trivia Quiz in the subject line.

**ANSWERS** 1) B – Emma Thompson. Branagh played Benedick opposite her Beatrice. The film also starred such actors as Denzel Washington, Keanu Reeves and Michael Keaton. 2) A – *Persuasion*. It was published at the end of 1817, six months after her death. 3) B – Greek. Undeclared in battle, by the age of 30 Alexander the Great created one of the largest empires of the ancient world, stretching from Greece to northwestern India. 4) D – Romance. Scholars say it is not likely Shakespeare wrote the piece on his own. It was a collaboration, perhaps with English dramatist George Wilkins. 5) B – *The Producers*. Though Hamilton received more nominations (16), *The Producers* won more awards (12).

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