

WHAT'S **NEXT**

THE NEWSLETTER OF NEXT ACT THEATRE

VOLUME 33, ISSUE 5

JUL 2023



OUR NEXT ACT

ALL THE DETAILS ON OUR 2023-24 SEASON

PLUS...



**NEW FACES AT
THE THEATRE**



NEXT ACTORS 2023



**A STUDENT
INTERVIEW**

...and more!

Scene Change

New Faces in New Places at Next Act Theatre

This month, Next Act Theatre hired two new staff members. We're excited to have them as part of the next chapter of the company! Please join us in welcoming the two newest members of our team:



Tawnie Thompson joins Next Act Theatre as our new Development Manager. She comes to Next Act with three years of experience in the non-profit sector and was most recently the grant writer for Meta House, an organization which seeks to empower women to overcome substance use disorders. Tawnie is an actor, fight director, podcaster and writer. After graduating from UW-Whitewater with a BFA in Theatre and relocating to Milwaukee in 2013, she began studying stage combat and holds a number of certifications with the Society of American Fight Directors (SAFD) and Dueling Arts International (DAI). She has since worked with a wide variety of theatre companies as both a performer and fight director. In her spare time, Tawnie can be found playing tabletop games, backpacking, biking, rock climbing and cheering on the National Women's Soccer League. [Go Red Stars!]

Caroline Norton assumes the role of Administrative and Artistic Manager. An Alabama native, Caroline moved to Milwaukee in 2016 to obtain a BA in Theatre Arts and Digital Media from Marquette University. She comes to Next Act from MainStage Theatrical Supply, where she served as Sales Administrator. Caroline has also worked as an Artistic and Education Intern with Skylight Music Theatre, a Teaching Artist with First Stage and a House Manager with Next Act, and she currently serves as Director of Education with Summit Players Theatre. In addition to her efforts in arts administration, Norton is an actor and director who has worked with companies such as Milwaukee Chamber Theatre (Black Theatre Festival, Young Playwrights Festival), Summit Players Theatre, Sunstone Studios, Forte Theatre Company and Voices Found Repertory.



Coming soon to Next Act An independent rental production from Schmitz 'n Giggles

FROM THE CREATOR OF
THE COMEDY OF ROMEO & JULIET... KINDA SORTA
COMES ANOTHER PLAYFUL PARODY:



WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY PATRICK SCHMITZ
STARRING THE SHAKESPARODY PLAYERS

THURSDAY, AUGUST 10TH
FRIDAY, AUGUST 11TH
SATURDAY, AUGUST 12TH

ALL SHOWS 7:30PM
NEXT ACT THEATRE'S PERFORMANCE SPACE
255 S. WATER STREET
TICKET INFORMATION AT SCHMITZNGIGGLES.ORG



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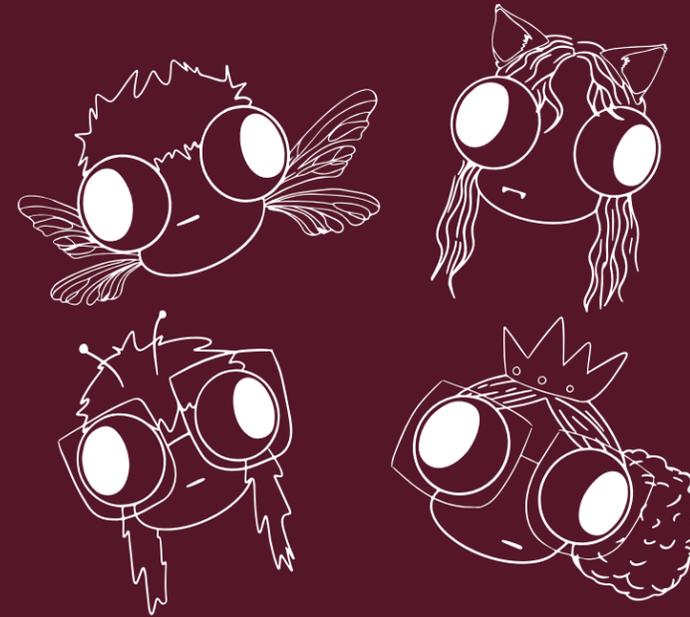
*Past Board President

What's Next is a quarterly publication of Next Act Theatre

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Design by A.J. Magoon



Belonging Shouldn't

be a fantasy

Next Actors 2023

**NEXT ACTORS: SUMMER THEATRE FOR TEENS
BENEFIT PERFORMANCE**

**SATURDAY, JULY 22
4:00 P.M.
NEXT ACT THEATRE**

A Class Act

by A.J. Magoon

An Interview with Next Actors Teaching Assistant Ryleigh Carroll

In 2019, Ryleigh Carroll joined the Next Actors: Summer Theatre for Teens program. She continued with the program annually through her high school career, through a pandemic and through other life events. This summer, she returns to the program as a Teaching Assistant. We sat down with Ryleigh to learn more about how Next Actors has impacted her.



What did you gain from the Next Actors program?

Not only did it give me a lot of theatre skills, it also gave me a lot of communication skills and social skills. I built different friendships, which allowed me to be a lot more open with myself and my experiences.

Do you have a favorite memory or moment?

We had a scene last year (in 2022) with two characters who were in kind of an emotional setting. We ended it with both characters sitting on two blocks leaning back to back and having a heart to heart as characters. That would be one of the highlights I took from Next Actors.



Photo by A.J. Magoon

What made you want to come back?

I really enjoyed my Next Actors experience, and at first I was sad that it was over so quickly. And then [Education Manager] Pia Russo emailed me and said, "how about you come back?" I was like, "of course," because I want to continue to see kids have the same positive experience that I had, and I wanted to continue to be a part of that for as long as I can.

What's different this summer about being a teaching assistant?

I do a lot less of the writing and acting, but I help the students have ideas, stay on track and encourage others to be outspoken, wild and crazy. They call me the "mom" of the group. My personal skills help bring everybody together.

What's your plan after this summer?

I'm going to continue with college at UW-Milwaukee, where I major in Anthropology and minor in Theatre. I'm hoping to join the Drama Club, where we read different plays, pick one and put it on stage. I'm hoping to get more into acting and writing as a hobby.

OUR NEXT ACT

The 2023-2024 season marks an exciting new chapter in Next Act's history. Cody Estle's first season as Artistic Director truly is **Our Next Act** - it takes what audiences already love about Next Act Theatre and infuses it with a new energy. Before this season begins, take a look behind the scenes at some of the exciting plays and people coming to Next Act in the next ten months.

Answering the Call

Cheryl Lynn Bruce, director of *SPLASH HATCH ON THE E GOING DOWN*

For our 2023-2024 season launch party, we asked for some remarks from Cheryl Lynn Bruce, the director of our first production, *SPLASH HATCH ON THE E GOING DOWN*. A Chicago-based director, actor and playwright, Cheryl appeared on Broadway in *THE GRAPES OF WRATH*, Off-Broadway in *FROM THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA* and has acted and directed at the Milwaukee Rep, Steppenwolf Theatre Company, the Goodman Theatre, Victory Gardens Theatre, the Court Theatre and many others. She is the recipient of a Helen Hayes Award and a Jane Addams Hull House Association Woman of Valor Award, among others. Her remarks on *SPLASH HATCH...* are as follows:



It's an honor to have been invited by Cody Estle, Next Act Theatre's newly-minted Artistic Director, to put my shoulder to the plough and launch his inaugural season.

It's a double-gift to have the chance to introduce Next Act audiences to the work of Kia Corthron, a

distinctly inventive and most prescient voice in American Theatre.

I first heard that voice back in the early 90s. It was at a Monday night play reading at Hartford Stage where I immediately fell under Kia's artful spell and left determined to search out every play she'd ever written.

By the time I'd gobbled up what all I could find, I was a solid devotee of her work. Still am.

You see, Kia's plays don't tell me what to do. No, they just reel me in with open-hearted characters caught up in arresting stories. Then, they sound the alarm.

Some time later, I found myself serving as the late Walter Dallas' Assistant Director for Goodman Theatre's Studio production of Kia's *SEEKING THE GENESIS*, a challenging piece about society's dangerous and unchecked assumptions about Black boys and violence.

Walter briefly left on urgent business, so I was handed

the reins. Kia was present during those rehearsals, and when she complimented my work, I think I levitated.

In fact, I'm sure I did.

Kia's idiosyncratic syntax, her novel contractions (just odd enough to shake things up), her quirky sentence structure, punch up dialogue, but never distract. Her novel way with words just gives scenes a jolt.

It's kinda like that old Certs commercial exclaimed:
Two!
Two!
Two mints in one!

SPLASH HATCH ON THE E GOING DOWN is a stark call-to-arms, written at a time when far too few of us were willing to read the toxic writing on the wall.

While Greenpeace activists waged holy war in our name, many regarded them (if at all) as an anxious, overzealous fringe of passionate alarmists, and we looked on, a bit amused.

That was until India's ghastly Bhopal cyanide leak in '84, and Chernobyl's terrifying nuclear disaster in '86 and British Petroleum's tragically avoidable oil spill in 2010 got our attention. For a while.

What were we waiting for?
What are we still waiting for?

Here at home we have the inexcusable and avoidable

Answering the Call, cont.

Exxon Valdez oil spill, the catastrophic (and ongoing) water crisis in Flint, Michigan and the current outrage in the modest town of Anniston, Alabama, where the air, water and soil are so long-saturated with known cancer-causing toxins that contaminants now regularly show up in residents' blood.

PFAS – “forever chemicals” – are man-made poisons. Simple as that. They are known to cause cancer and a host of other devastating health problems. They are found in our air. They are found in our drinking water. They are found in our food.

Predictably, PFAS pollution disproportionately plagues poorer communities, but it poses a serious threat to rural, suburban and urban areas alike.

SPLASH HATCH... shows how a deadly thing—like Pollution—can seep silently into everyday life and, literally, eat us alive.

See, it really doesn't matter where we live. No one is safe because the Earth is everyone's backyard.

SPLASH HATCH... is not prescriptive. It doesn't tell us what to do.

It simply grabs us by the heartstrings and gives us our marching orders.

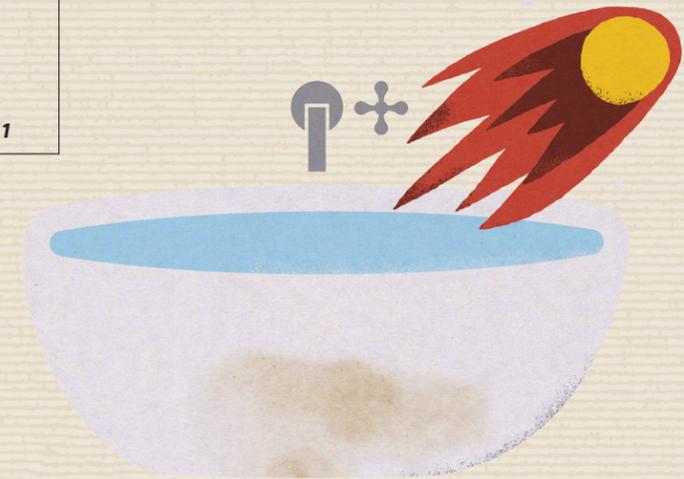
Will we answer the call?

SPLASH HATCH ON THE E GOING DOWN
by Kia Corthron

NEXT ACT THEATRE
255 S. Water St.
Milwaukee, WI 53207

SEPT. 20 - OCT. 15, 2023

SEASON TICKETS ON SALE NOW
SINGLE TICKETS ON SALE AUGUST 1



The Longest-Running Play In History? The Enduring Power of Agatha Christie's *THE MOUSETRAP*

By 1947, Agatha Christie had already made quite a name for herself. She had introduced the world to detectives Hercule Poirot and Miss Jane Marple, published timeless novels including *Murder on the Nile* and *Murder on the Orient Express*, and even had her own mysterious, temporary disappearance.

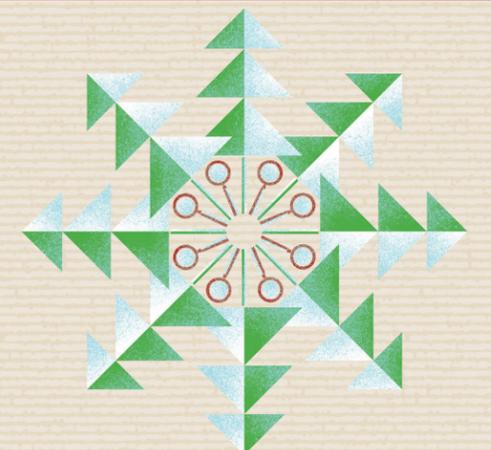
It should be no surprise, then, that Christie was commissioned in 1947 to write a radio play in celebration of Queen Mary of England's 80th birthday. (Queen Mary's granddaughter, Queen Elizabeth II, had ascended to the throne earlier that same year.) The radio play, a thriller full of intrigue and mystery, later became the basis for *THE MOUSETRAP*, Christie's most successful play.

THE MOUSETRAP opened on London's West End in 1952. While the play starred Richard Attenborough as Detective Sergeant Trotter, Christie did not express much confidence in it - in fact, she believed the play would close within eight months.

Of course, the play has run far longer than Christie's initial prognosis. In 1955, the West End production of *THE MOUSETRAP* celebrated its 1,000th performance, and in 1957, it became the longest-running West End play in history. Now in its 71st year on the West End, it is definitively the longest-running play in history. While the production was interrupted during the COVID-19 pandemic, it re-opened in May 2021 and has been going strong ever since.

This world-famous play boasts a similarly famous twist ending! For more than 70 years, audiences have been eager to find out whodunnit - and we're not giving away any hints! We hope that when you join us for this clever thriller, you'll help us keep Dame Agatha's secret.

THE MOUSETRAP runs Nov. 22 - Dec. 17, 2023 at Next Act Theatre.



Who's Who in our Whodunnit?

THE MOUSETRAP boasts a fantastic team of familiar faces. Have you seen these actors before?

Photo by Ross Zentner Photo by Timothy Moder. **Casey Hoekstra** (Detective Sergeant Trotter) was seen at Next Act in **BLOOD AT THE ROOT** (2018) and **9 CIRCLES** (2021).

She's not just our Interim Managing Director - **Libby Amato** (Miss Casewell) also appeared onstage in **GRACE** in 2013!

Jonathan Gillard Daly (Mr. Paravicini) returns to our stage for the first time since 2011's **ONE TIME**.

Also pictured: Rick Pendzich

Also pictured: Linda Stephens

Doug Jarecki (Major Metcalfe) has been seen on our stage **five times** before!

Director Mary MacDonald Kerr has directed **9 plays** at Next Act and appeared in **more than a dozen!**

UN SILENT NIGHT (2016) Photo by Ross Zentner

MOTHERHOOD OUT LOUD (2016) Photo by Timothy Moder

HERESY (2014) Photo by Timothy Moder

RED HERRING (2021) Photo by Mark Frohna

SYLVIA (1996) Also pictured: Mark Ulrich

THERE IS A HAPPINESS THAT MORNING IS (2023) Director Pictured: Neil Brookshire, Cassandra Bissell Photo by Ross Zentner

7 STORIES (2009) Photo by Dan Zaitz Photography Also pictured: Tami Workentin

A SLEEPING COUNTRY (2011) Also pictured: Betsy Skowbo, Angela Iannone

...and introducing three newcomers to our stage!

Josh Krause (Giles Ralston) appeared in **EQUIVOCATION** in 2018. Photo by Ross Zentner

Lillian Brown (Mollie Ralston)

Margaret Casey (Mrs. Boyle)

Rudy Galvan (Christopher Wren)

Finding Home

Heidi Armbruster's **SCARECROW** Comes Home to Wisconsin

Milwaukee theatergoers may recognize Heidi Armbruster - during the 2022-23 season, she appeared in both **WIFE OF A SALESMAN** and **GOD OF CARNAGE** at Milwaukee Repertory Theater. She's no stranger to New York City audiences either - in addition to appearing in **TIME STANDS STILL** on Broadway and the Lincoln Center's production of Ayad Akhtar's Pulitzer Prize-winning play **DISGRACED**, she has credits with Rattlestick, Keen Company, Second Stage, Primary Stages and others. On TV, she's been seen in a variety of shows, from "The Blacklist" and "Blue Bloods" to "Daredevil" and "30 Rock."

Heidi returned to Wisconsin, and to her family's dairy farm, from New York to be with her father, her "most important person," during the last 33 days of his life. His death, the aftermath and the start of the COVID-19 pandemic turned

Finding Home, cont.
33 days into two years, during which time Heidi began to write essays about the experience.

With the help of Dorset Theatre Festival Producing Artistic Director Dina Janis and members of the Dorset Theatre Festival's Women Artists Writing group, Heidi workshopped these essays into **SCARECROW**, a rip-roaringly hilarious and unbelievably touching one-woman journey through her experience during, and after, her father's last days.

SCARECROW was workshopped at Dorset Theatre Festival in the summer of 2021 and had its world premiere as part of the Festival's 2022 season, directed by Janis. A review of the premiere called it "a triumphant, life-affirming, tonic of a story coming out of the darkest, lonliest despair and finding the path to move forward with grace and humor."

In the year since her play got its premiere, Heidi has moved back to Wisconsin and now resides in Milwaukee full-time. When **SCARECROW** takes the Next Act stage in February 2024, it will be the first time the play is

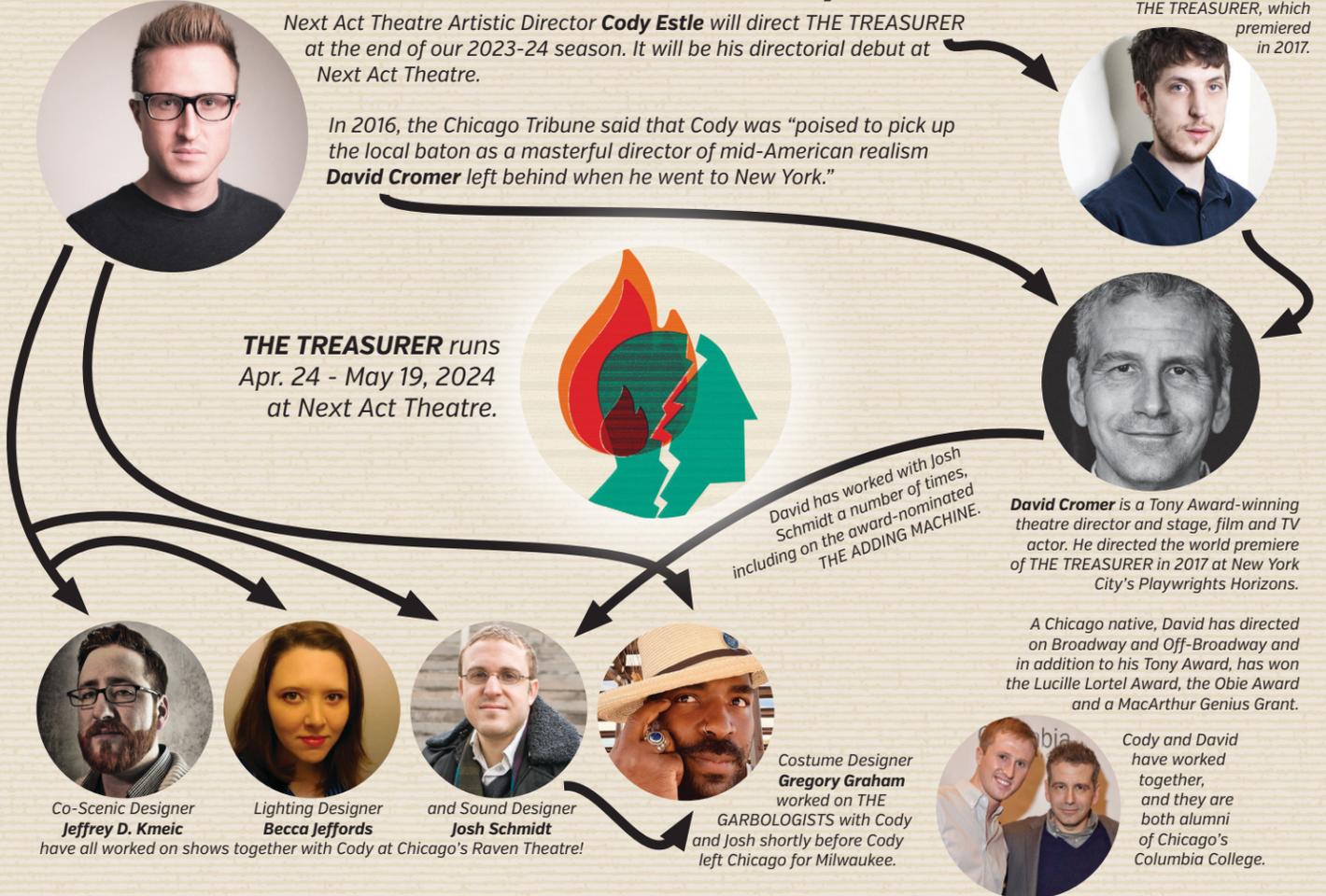


presented in Wisconsin. Heidi's story of herself and her father, of the Packers and the Badgers, of roller coasters, kittens and cows, will come home to where it first began.

SCARECROW runs Feb. 21 - Mar. 17, 2024 at Next Act Theatre.

It Takes a Village

Faces of **THE TREASURER**, at Next Act and Beyond





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SEASON SPONSORS



Next Act Theatre 2023-24 Season

Artistic Director Cody Estle's first season at Next Act takes what you love about our theatre—local talent in entertaining, meaningful and well-designed productions—and adds a new energy to it. This coming season, you'll enjoy timeless revivals alongside the best of new American theatre.

SPLASH HATCH ON THE E GOING DOWN
by Kia Corthron | Sept. 20 - Oct. 15, 2023

THE MOUSETRAP
by Agatha Christie | Nov. 22 - Dec. 17, 2023

SCARECROW
by Heidi Armbruster | Feb. 21 - Mar. 17, 2024

THE TREASURER
by Max Posner | Apr. 24 - May 19, 2024

Season tickets now on sale
at (414) 278-0765 or online at nextact.org

Single tickets on sale August 1, 2023