

WHAT'S NEXT

THE NEWSLETTER OF NEXT ACT THEATRE

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BOSWELL'S TRAVELS

BRIAN MANI AND JOSH KRAUSE ON THE MANY JOURNEYS OF ONE PLAY

"This play's all about journeys, isn't it?", asks Josh Krause, referring to *BOSWELL* by Marie Kohler. The play itself has had quite the journey over the past 20 years. Additionally, actors Josh Krause (playing James Boswell) and Brian Mani (playing Samuel Johnson) have taken fascinating journeys to our Next Act production: Josh appeared in the play Off-Broadway at 59E59 in 2022, and this is Brian's fourth version of the play, starting with a previous iteration, *BOSWELL'S DREAMS*, at Renaissance Theaterworks in 2005.



Brian Mani (L), Abbey Siegworth, Colleen Madden and Brian Gill in *BOSWELL'S DREAMS*.

"It was in the spring of 2005 that we first did [*BOSWELL'S DREAMS*]," said Brian. "I felt very knowledgeable at the time – in the summer of 2004, Marie and I took a trip to Scotland. We went to a few places that Boswell and Johnson [visited] on their tour of the Hebrides. I felt really in it."

Since then, Brian has returned to Johnson several times, and while some things have stayed the same, change is natural: "It was 20 years ago, and I can't remember some of the things. I think Johnson's part of the story pretty

much remains true to what was done 20 years ago, but since then... I was also 44 years old then, and I just turned 65. I am right in the pocket for Samuel Johnson right now. I've done much more research because of [the productions in] Edinburgh and New York.

Marie and I took a little trip to Lichfield [England] about a month ago. We went to London and saw some plays and then went to Lichfield where Samuel Johnson was born and raised. Got to visit the home that he grew up in, which is right next to the Lichfield market square, which is brought up in the play.

I've read much more about his life. I feel like I know that man so well. Playing him is a pleasure. He was an icon, and for me, still is this icon – he was the rock star of the 18th century in London. I'm excited to do [this role] again. I can't wait for audiences to get a taste of him, because he's got so much to say."

One of the big things that's changed? The other performers in the play:

"Josh [Krause] and I are the same [from Off-Broadway to Next Act]," he said, "but the other four actors, playing the numerous characters they play, are all different. That's another thing for me: it was a bigger play in 2005. More actors. In Edinburgh, it was smaller. In New



Brian Mani as Samuel Johnson in a promotional photo for *BOSWELL*.

York, I was the only one that was the same [from the previous productions].

Much of what we're going to do is based on what we did in Edinburgh and New York, but the actors bring different things. We're in the third day of rehearsals, and the ideas that are being brought forth are way different from what we did in New York, and they're all welcome. There's no one way to do this story. I'm excited to see how it plays."

Josh Krause, for his part, agrees: "Yeah, I'm stepping back into it, but those three years were big. Life happened, man. My wife and I brought a son into the world. My experience with work has changed.

Brian and I were talking about it day one: there's ghosts that exist for us. We can hear the past castmates and their cadence. I can hear myself and my cadence, but everything is so

Continued on page 3

One Night Only!

A Staged Reading of

Trayf

By

Lindsay Joelle

Directed By

Elyse Edelman



Monday, December 15, 2025

7:30 p.m.

Next Act Theatre

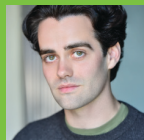
The day after *BOSWELL* closes, come enjoy a one-night-only staged reading of a charming, heartwarming and hilarious coming-of-age play: *TRAYF* by **Lindsay Joelle**, directed by **Elyse Edelman**. Tickets are only \$25!

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Photo courtesy of Violins of Hope.

Next Act is proud to partner with Violins of Hope - Wisconsin, presented by Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra (MYSO), during *TRAYF* to offer a lobby display of violins played by Jewish musicians during the Holocaust.

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What's Next is a publication of Next Act Theatre
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Brian Mani and Josh Krause in *BOSWELL* at 59E59. Photo: Carol Rosegg.

different. Not just the new people changing up the thing, but me, I'm so different. I'm clocking an internal growth for myself, that *Boswell* is just an entirely different version of that guy that I met three years ago, because I'm brand-new to him too.

It's a great shock to the system, and it's a great testament to this piece, and all theatre pieces - they have to hold human beings and the mayhem that they'll cause to a piece. The language has to be big enough that anyone can fit into it and find themselves and play around in it.

It's really fun getting to see Marie in the room again, hearing how she's different, what she's more in-tune with, the things she's fiddling with this time versus last time. She was doing a much bigger edit [before], so her concerns were wide-sweeping, and now it's this really itty-bitty stuff. And some of the minor changes that she's made for the “holiday” version of this show are quite charming and lovely too. It's all different.”

Regarding how he got involved in the production to begin with, Josh's journey is different from Brian's, but no less impactful: “This journey started a few years ago when, I think it was Laura Gordon, asked me to audition and be considered for the Off-Broadway production that Marie and Co. would take to 59E59.

That was where my journey with this piece began. Stepping into it, coming into a new version of this play. It's gone through many different iterations. Marie being the meticulous playwright that she is, she's constantly adapting her own piece to fit the people that are in the production, the place where it's being produced...

I got to experience, I think, the largest re-write. From the production when it went to the Edinburgh Fringe, and then when it went Off-Broadway, there was a very big re-write. Lots of scenes were being considered to be added or subtracted, so me and the rest of the company were part of the [brain trust] that got

to create that version of the play. And it's still going under new iterations now, so it's really good to come back to this one three years later and be on a new journey with it three years later, here at Next Act, which I think is a perfect place, honestly, to host this piece in particular.

The theatre we performed at in New York was a proscenium, we were so intimately close with the, maybe, 60-seat audience. It was very tiny, a true attic space of 59E59. So we were really just smack up against the front row of that audience. I love to get to stick with that intimacy, but we're “hugged” [on three sides], we're not just facing off with audiences. When I saw that Next Act was going to be producing it, even before I was talked to about it, I just knew, “oh, it's gonna be in good hands.”

There's plenty of journeys in this play's past—and this play is, after all, very much about the past—but Brian and Josh are both excited about the future - specifically, the Next Act production:

“There are going to be people who saw it 20 years ago, but then for a lot of people, that was the last chance they've had. We had one invited performance before we took the play to Edinburgh. We rehearsed it down at [UW] Parkside, and we set the stage up, we had an invited audience, it was packed, we had one show, and then we packed everything together and we flew to Edinburgh. So unless you were in that audience, you've not had the chance to see it in 20 years.

My wife, Marie Kohler, is the one who wrote it. I'm excited for her show to get seen. There were a lot of people who gave money to it to go to Edinburgh and New York, and I'm excited for them to finally get to see it.”

Meanwhile, as Josh said, “I'm most excited to share this with our specific Wisconsin, our Milwaukee audiences. The New York audiences were very lovely. I think the front row was maybe six inches away from the front of the stage. Once they were seated, it was like, “do not move, because you will run into us.” The intimacy of that allowed for more shock and awe on their parts, of like, “oh, this is direct address.” But New Yorkers don't like that: “don't look at me, don't talk to me. That's not what we do here in this town.” So I'm very excited to experience a Wisconsin direct address audience, where we've practiced that a little bit better, at least in our theatre. We choose to gather here.

And especially in our times of looking for any sort of handhold, any sort of hope or excitement anymore. I think this theatre in particular... The way the stage is designed, which is why I love coming here to see theatre and to be on the stage here, you get to see the audience directly across from you, especially on the sides. I love those sides. You get to see the action, and then you get to watch your fellows watch the thing. It's this really cool experience that I don't really get in too many other places, and it's really unique to Next Act's space.”

BOSWELL runs November 19 through December 14, 2025 at Next Act Theatre. Get tickets now at nextact.org or call (414) 278-0765.

WITH YOUR HELP, 2026 WILL BE SMOOTH SAILING

Our 2025-26 Season is halfway over, and we're speeding towards another year of impactful storytelling in 2026.

At this time of giving, please consider a gift to our annual holiday campaign to help us start the new year off strong! Your donation supports the entertaining, thought-provoking work that Next Act does all year.

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AUTHOR, AUTHOR!



If you can't get enough of Marie Kohler, we have good news: there are several opportunities to hear more from her during the run of *BOSWELL*.

Learn from Marie before a performance of *BOSWELL* at one of our **Personal Previews**. These conversations, featuring a guest from the current production, are moderated by a Next Act staff member and give patrons additional context and insight about a play before the performance. We allow both time for the guest to share thoughts and also time for patrons to ask questions. Personal Previews happen 30 minutes before curtain time of our Sunday Matinees (except Closing Sunday).

Marie will be present at all three Personal Previews on November 23, November 30 and December 7, all at 1:30 p.m. We can't wait to see you there!

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HOME(LAND) FOR THE HOLIDAYS

By A.J. Magoon, Marketing Director

Much of the story of *BOSWELL* follows a trip across Scotland, including some of the islands of the Hebrides, that James Boswell and Samuel Johnson took in 1773. Both kept, and published, extensive journals of the trip, and these accounts of their adventures and of their friendship provided inspiration for playwright Marie Kohler. Below is the path they took across Scotland (starting at Edinburgh and heading North), along with some notes on important locations!



SMASHING THE GOAL ON
NEXT ACT THEATRE'S
NEXT BIG THING
CAMPAIGN

By Tawnie Thompson, Development Manager



Next Act is incredibly excited to announce that we have surpassed the goal of our \$50,000 Next Big Thing Matching Campaign! With your help and generosity, it took us only 14 weeks to reach 106 percent of our goal, more than \$52,000 raised! That's just over half the original length of the campaign.

Beating this goal unlocked a matching gift from long-time patrons Val and Gary Zamecnik, whose \$50,000 contribution will be used to renovate Next Act Theatre's rehearsal hall, including a new floor and a new ceiling lighting grid. The rehearsal hall is used by Next Act Theatre, Renaissance Theaterworks and outside organizations for rehearsals, classes, workshops, meetings and even performances, and these updates will improve outcomes for artists, students and patrons. The rehearsal hall will be renamed The Val and Gary Zamecnik Studio following this renovation. Their funds will also support the acquisition of a new lighting board for Next Act Theatre, among other equipment improvements. Meanwhile, funds raised by our many generous donors will support our upcoming productions of BOSWELL, SWING STATE and DINNER WITH THE DUCHESS, ensuring our ability to provide you with entertaining and thought-provoking theatre for the rest of the season.

Thanks to the Generous Support of our Next Big Thing Donors

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Amaryllis Mi Amor by Shelly Rosenquist.

"I have tried too in my time to be a philosopher; but, I don't know how, cheerfulness was always breaking in." - James Boswell

Boswell embodied an ebullient, spirited view of the world. Guided by a wry sense of humor, he was ever open to experience from different perspectives and would most likely find the colorful, cheerful paintings of Shelly Rosenquist, our featured artist, exciting.

As she explains,

"I like to amplify elements of my subject matter. My goal isn't to be realistic, but to create a new way of focusing on the topic by providing an unusual angle, a different color palette or an unexpected relationship within the piece. In our hectic human existence, we have strayed from what makes this world a beautiful place. I like to use my work as a tool to remind people to look around them, to breathe the air, to appreciate the detail and miracles of the world around us."

To those artistic ends, Shelly not only creates vibrant art, she also provides a platform for other artists to shine in her brick-and-mortar gallery/creative space Rosenquist Fine Art located in South Milwaukee. Learn more at www.rosenquistfineart.com

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Midwestern Jungle by Shelly Rosenquist.

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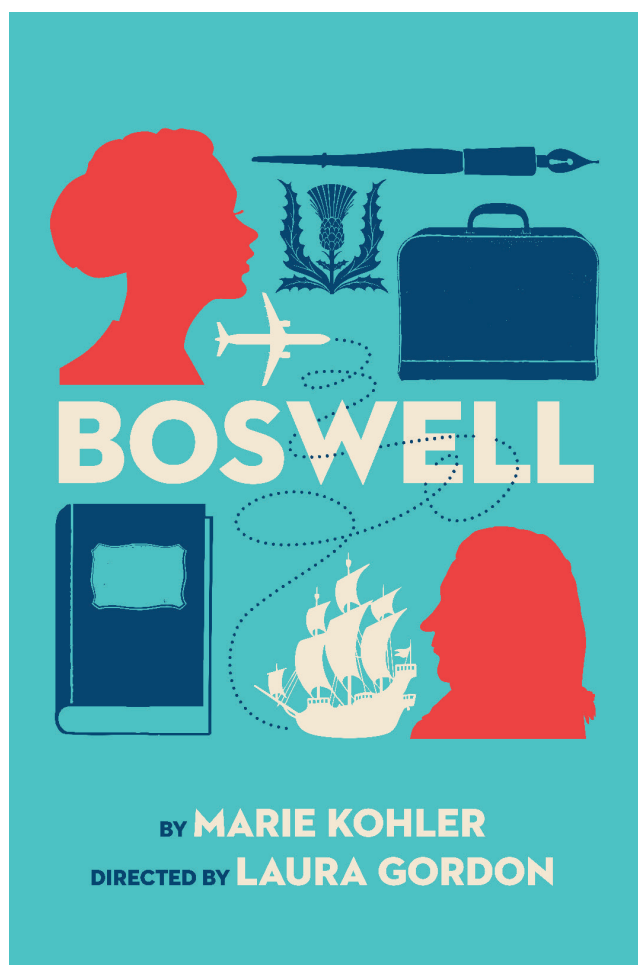


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23 2:00 P/T		25 7:30 T	26 1:30 7:30	Thanks- giving 7:30	28 7:30	29 4:00
30 2:00 P/T			3 1:30	4 7:30 T	5 7:30	6 4:00
7 2:00 P/T	8 PWYC 7:30		10 1:30	11 7:30 T	12 7:30	13 4:00
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