




NEXT ACT  
THEATRE  
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# DINNER WITH THE DUCHESS

BY  
**NICK GREEN**

DIRECTED BY  
**SAMANTHA  
MARTINSON**



**Cody Estle**  
Artistic Director

**Libby Amato**  
Managing Director

Presents

# DINNER WITH THE DUCHESS

by Nick Green

**Directed by**  
Samantha Martinson

**Scenic Design**  
Lisa Schlenker\*

**Lighting Design**  
Maaz Ahmed

**Costume Design**  
Rachel Laritz

**Sound Design**  
Andre Pluess\*

**Properties Design**  
Abbey Pitchford


**Stage Manager**  
Nat Goeller^



\*Member of United Scenic Artists Local 829  
^Member of Actors' Equity Association

**April 22 – May 17, 2026**

Co-Sponsors Margaret Dethloff and Terri Zeh,  
Mary Jo and Guy McDonald, and Susan and Howard Schoenfeld

Media Partner  WISCONSIN PUBLIC RADIO

Next Act Theatre's 2025-26 Season is supported in part by a grant from the Wisconsin Arts Board with funds from the State of Wisconsin and the National Endowment for the Arts.



DINNER WITH THE DUCHESS was developed with support from Here For Now Theatre Company. The play received a workshop production at the Toronto Fringe Next Stage Festival in January 2019, and the World Premiere was produced by Here For Now Theatre in August 2024.

DINNER WITH THE DUCHESS is produced by permission of the Playwright and Marquis Literary (Colin Rivers) [www.MOLit.ca](http://www.MOLit.ca)

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Next Act Theatre | 255 S. Water Street | Milwaukee, WI 53204 | 414.278.0765 | [info@nextact.org](mailto:info@nextact.org)

## THE CAST



<i>Laura Gordon*</i> .....	Margaret
<i>Mai Abe</i> .....	Helen
<i>Andrew May*</i> .....	David

### Understudies

Margaret – Leslie Fitzwater, Helen – Heather David, David – Scott Howland

*Understudy will not substitute for listed player unless a specific announcement is made at the time of the performance.*

\*Member of Actors' Equity Association



**TIME:**  
**Present Day.**

**The play will be performed without intermission.**

## ADDITIONAL PRODUCTION STAFF

<i>Assistant Director</i> .....	Laura Kloser
<i>Assistant Sound Designer</i> .....	Martilia Marechal
<i>Production and Facility Manager</i> .....	Katie Anderson
<i>Calling/Assistant Stage Manager</i> .....	Star Howard
<i>Assistant Stage Manager</i> .....	Hope Jackson
<i>Technical Directors</i> .....	Aaron Sewell, Steve Watson
<i>Wardrobe Manager</i> .....	Shelby Kaishian
<i>Scenic Artist</i> .....	Carri Dahl
<i>Light Board Operator</i> .....	Nicole Wolf
<i>Lighting Technicians</i> .....	Isaac "Izzi" Brust, Merit Glover, Rollie Layman, Beck Trumbull, Kira Neighbors
<i>Scenic Carpenters</i> .....	Aaron Sewell, Rollie Layman, Jude Langhammer

## ADDITIONAL NEXT ACT THEATRE STAFF

<i>Artistic Associate</i> .....	Elyse Edelman
<i>Administrative Volunteer</i> .....	Thomas Darrow
<i>Marketing Director</i> .....	A.J. Magoon
<i>Marketing Intern</i> .....	Khalid Rodgers*
<i>Patron Services Manager</i> .....	Wyatt Meyer
<i>Administrative and Artistic Manager</i> .....	Caroline Norton
<i>Development Manager</i> .....	Tawnie Thompson
<i>Volunteer Art Coordinator</i> .....	Jim Toth
<i>Ticket Office Staff</i> .....	Jennifer Averitt-Zweber, Audwin Short, Christine Yünderm
<i>House Management Staff</i> .....	Kaylene Howard, Ariana Manghera, Audwin Short, Barbara Slagter, Elisebeth Sparks, Matthew Torkilsen

\*Participant in Next Act Theatre's Inclusion, Equity and Opportunity Internship

## PHOTO POLICY



Please note: **photography and video recording are strictly prohibited during the performance.** Photos of the stage are not permitted if an actor is present.

Next Act Theatre welcomes you to take photos in the theatre **before and after** the performance! Feel free to capture and share your experience. However, if you are sharing images to social media, in addition to tagging Next Act Theatre, we ask you to please credit the production designers below:

Lisa Schlenker  
Scenic Design

Maaz Ahmed  
Lighting Design

Abbey Pitchford  
Properties Design

## SPECIAL THANKS

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Elyse Edelman at [elyse@nextact.org](mailto:elyse@nextact.org)



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What is the cost of pursuing excellence? When our identity is intertwined with our craft, can we ever separate the two? And when confronted with our own reflection, do we accept it, reshape it, or turn away?

Nick Green's *DINNER WITH THE DUCHESS* frames these questions through the life of a brilliant, complicated artist, in turn inviting all of us to reflect on our relationship to passion, identity and legacy. Told through a distinctly feminine lens, the play considers how gender complicates and heightens the interconnectedness between authenticity and vulnerability. Over the course of an evening, a singular conversation between two women with two different world views explodes into a critical exploration of the beauty of artistic mastery—and the complicated systems that shape who thrives and suffers within it.

This play resists resolution and, frankly, I love it for that. Both intimate and expansive, the women's unique perspectives ultimately bring to light more questions than answers. But within these questions, the story offers us space and opportunity to listen more deeply to the complicated music of our own lives.



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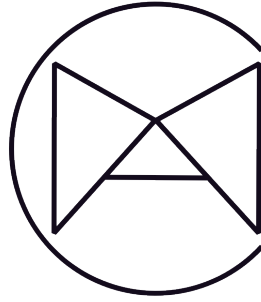
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**T-Coil Listeners:** Simply set your hearing device to the Loop setting and enjoy the show.

**Conventional Listeners:** Check out a receiver and headphone set at the Concessions Counter. The House Manager can instruct you on its use, but here are some simple instructions.

Like a transistor radio, the small box has an off-on and volume knob; turn on and adjust for your comfort level. You will need to be in the seats to receive the Loop signal.

The box works directionally; that is, it matters which way it is pointing.

- **In most of our seating,** the box works best when held up straight, with the volume knob on top, and the flat back pointing toward the stage.
- **In the front rows,** you will get the strongest signal with the box laying flat on your leg, with the flat back pointing straight to the floor.

Please ask the House Manager for assistance, if needed. We hope you enjoy the show.

Our Induction Loop listening system was a gift from longtime supporter Milan Racic, honoring his beloved late wife Gordana. Special thanks are also due to Nancy Einhorn for her advocacy and support of this project.

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**NICK GREEN (Playwright)**

Nick is a Dora Award-winning playwright from Toronto. After premiering at the Stratford Festival of Canada in 2023, his play CASEY AND DIANA, which will be playing at American Players Theatre later this year, has had productions in 13 cities across Canada and the United States. Other credits include DINNER WITH THE DUCHESS (Crow’s Theatre, Next Stage Theater); IN REAL LIFE (book, Theatre Sheridan); EVERY DAY SHE ROSE (Nightwood Theatre, Black Theatre Workshop, ZeeZee Theatre); DR. SILVER (book, South Coast Repertory - Pacific Playwrights); BODY POLITIC (Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, winner of Dora Mavor Moore Award for Outstanding New Play); and POOF! THE MUSICAL (book, Capitol Theatre).



**SAMANTHA MARTINSON (Director)**

Samantha is a Midwest-based director. Select directing credits: IT’S A WONDERFUL LIFE:

LIVE FROM DOOR COUNTY, Third Avenue PlayWorks (upcoming); SANDRA, Two Crows Theatre Company; GREAT EXPECTATIONS, Door Shakespeare; GLORIA, University of MN, BFA; SHE KILLS MONSTERS, First Stage; FML: HOW CARSON MCCULLERS SAVED MY LIFE, Carthage College; THE WOLVES, Marquette University; ‘NEATH THE HILLS OF BASTOGNE, Sunstone Studios MKE; THE TEMPEST, Mad Rogues. Select staged readings: CASEY AND DIANA, American Players Theatre; ESCAPEGOAT, Jungle Theater. Select assistant directing: RING ROUND THE MOON, American Players Theatre; A YEAR WITH FROG AND TOAD, Children’s Theatre Company; ARTEMISIA, Forward Theater. Samantha is the Festival Producer for World Premiere Wisconsin, a yearlong statewide new works festival celebrating new plays and musicals.

She has worked on the administrative and artistic staff with Playwrights’ Center, American Players Theatre, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, Milwaukee Chamber Theatre, Door Shakespeare, Milwaukee Ballet and First Stage, Kennedy Center Directing Intensive alumni. For MC and JS. samanthamartinson.com



**LAURA GORDON (Margaret)**

A Milwaukee-based actor and director, Laura is pleased to return to Next Act, where her credits include RECKLESS

(the very first Next Act show!), AND A NIGHTINGALE SANG, EVELYN AND THE POLKA KING and GOING TO ST. IVES. Her work has been seen at the Milwaukee Rep, Renaissance Theaterworks, Milwaukee Chamber Theatre, Forward

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Theater, Third Avenue PlayWorks, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, Baltimore Center Stage and Santa Cruz Shakespeare, among others. Favorite roles include Martha in WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?, Prospero in THE TEMPEST, the Stage Manager in OUR TOWN and Margie in GOOD PEOPLE. A member of SDC and Actors Equity Association, she received her MFA in Acting from the University of Iowa and is a Lunt-Fontanne Fellow.



**MAI ABE (Helen)**

Mai (she/her) is delighted to be making her Next Act Theatre and Milwaukee debut! Based in Oakland, CA, favorite past credits include Little

Red in INTO THE WOODS (Santa Cruz Shakespeare), Marcy Park in THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE (TheatreWorks Silicon Valley) and Daphne in THE GODS OF COMEDY (The Pear Theatre). It's her first time in Milwaukee, so she welcomes any outdoor adventure and museum recommendations! With endless love and gratitude to Jade and Dilla.



**ANDREW MAY (David)**

This is Andrew's debut at Next Act. Other credits include the Broadway National Tour of WAR HORSE, Guthrie

Theater, Williamstown Theatre Festival, Pearl Theater, Milwaukee Repertory Theater (six seasons), Great Lakes Theater (nine seasons), Utah Shakespeare Festival (three seasons), Idaho Shakespeare Festival (five seasons), Studio Theatre DC, Cincinnati Playhouse In The Park, Barrington Stage Company, Goodman Theatre, Cleveland Play House (six seasons), City Theater Company (four seasons) and many more. Film and television credits include STRIKING DISTANCE, BIG LOVE, 227, DUET, BABE RUTH and WHAT SHE DOESN'T KNOW.

**NAT GOELLER (Stage Manager)**

Nat (they/them) is incredibly proud to be a Milwaukee-based stage manager. Their commitment to the bit has granted them the opportunity to wear many hats, but their favorite hat will always be a storyteller. Select previous credits at Next Act include SWING STATE (SM), BOSWELL (SM), SANCTUARY CITY (SM), CIRCLE MIRROR TRANSFORMATION (SM), THE CHILDREN (SM) and THE ELABORATE ENTRANCE OF CHAD DEITY (SM). Other worlds Nat has worked with include Door Shakespeare, Renaissance Theaterworks, Black Arts MKE, She/Her Productions, Summit Players Theatre, Kohl's Wild Theater, Waukesha Civic Theatre, Princeton University Festival and Carroll University. They would like to recognize Celeste, Francisco and Emilio for keeping the good times rolling.

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**LISA SCHLENKER (Scenic Designer)**

Ms. Schlenker is delighted to return to Next Act to explore these complicated characters with such a smart and wonderful group of collaborators. By day, Lisa serves Northern Sky Theater as Resident Scenic Designer and Production Manager, telling stories in the north woods of Wisconsin. For over three decades, Lisa has devoted time and passion to advancing skills in prop making, scenic design and production management. A proud member of United Scenic Artists Local 829 IATSE, the Production Managers Forum and the Society of Prop Managers, Lisa's book with co-author Sandra Strawn, *The Properties Director's Tool Kit*, is available through Focal Press and on Amazon.com. Her scene design work can be glimpsed from time to time on stages including Northern Sky, Renaissance Theaterworks, Milwaukee Chamber Theatre, First Stage, Florentine Opera, Milwaukee

Opera Theatre, Third Avenue PlayWorks, Milwaukee Rep, Forward Theater and Opera Lafayette. Thanks for coming out to support live local theater!

**MAAZ AHMED (Lighting Designer)**

Maaz is so glad to be back in the Midwest to hang out with the good folks as Next Act! They are a newly-NYC-based Lighting Designer and work as an Associate Lighting Designer with Studio RRD. They made their Broadway debut earlier this year as the Lighting Design Fellow on Manhattan Theatre Club's production of *BUG*, designed by Heather Gilbert. Additionally, Maaz served as the Lighting Supervisor at Williamstown Theatre Festival in 2025 and as the Assistant Lighting and Sound Director at the Milwaukee Repertory Theatre in the 24-25 season. Regional credits include PRIMARY TRUST (Forward Theater Company);

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2026-27 SEASON

# OFF THE MAP



**Oct 18 - Nov 8, 2026**  
(Previews Oct 16 & 17)



**January 10 - 31, 2027**  
(Previews Jan 8 & 9)



**March 21 - April 11, 2027**  
(Previews March 19 & 20)

I AM MY OWN WIFE, TOPDOG/ UNDERDOG, CLYDE'S (Milwaukee Chamber Theatre); AIN'T MISBEHAVIN', THE LAST FIVE YEARS (Milwaukee Repertory Theater); and CIRCLE MIRROR TRANSFORMATION, THE ELABORATE ENTRANCE OF CHAD DEITY, KILL MOVE PARADISE (Next Act Theatre). They'd like to thank YOU for being a patron of live arts! [www.maazahmedLX.com](http://www.maazahmedLX.com).

**RACHEL LARITZ (Costume Designer)**

Rachel is thrilled to be joining Next Act for the fourth time after a brief hiatus. Her previous designs here include MOTHERHOOD OUT LOUD, SYLVIA and FOUR PLACES. She is delighted to be joining this fabulous team of friends and collaborators. Rachel has designed costumes for over 100 productions locally, nationally and internationally at a variety of regional and Off-Broadway theaters as well as for television and commercials. She lives outside of Chicago with her husband and stepson and sells vintage clothing on Etsy through her shop, RaLaVintage.

**ANDRE PLUESS (Sound Designer)**

Broadway credits: GOOD NIGHT, OSCAR (Belasco); THE MINUTES (Studio 54); 33 VARIATIONS (Eugene O'Neill); I AM MY OWN WIFE (Lyceum) and METAMORPHOSES (Circle in the Square); as well as the World Premiere of THE CLEAN HOUSE (Yale Repertory/Lincoln Center.) Based in Chicago, he's worked frequently with Northlight, Goodman, Steppenwolf, Court, Chicago Shakespeare, TimeLine and Lookingglass, where he is an ensemble member. Regional credits include multiple productions with the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Center Theatre Group, Yale Repertory, McCarter Theatre, Berkeley Repertory, Williamstown Theatre Festival, La Jolla Playhouse, Huntington Theatre and South Coast Repertory.

**ABBEY PITCHFORD (Properties Designer)**

Abbey is honored to be back at Next Act this season! Most recent credits include the Fireside Dinner Theatre's 2025 Season (Props Design), FREUD'S LAST SESSION (Scenic Paint /Props Design - Acacia Theatre), SCARECROW and GOD'S SPIES (Props Design - Next Act). Thank you, Samantha, for your trust and friendship. May the beauty we created here last for always. "Further up and further in."



**CODY ESTLE (Artistic Director)**

Cody Estle became the Artistic Director at Next Act Theatre in December 2022. Previously, he served as the Artistic Director at Raven Theatre in Chicago. His directing credits include SWING STATE,

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CIRCLE MIRROR TRANSFORMATION and THE TREASURER at Next Act Theatre; EVERY BRILLIANT THING at The Weidner; THE LUCKIEST (2022 Jeff Award nominee for Best Production and Best Director), SUNDOWN, YELLOW MOON, HOW I LEARNED TO DRIVE (named by Windy City Times as the best of Chicago theatre in 2019), THE GENTLEMAN CALLER (2019 Jeff Award winning new play by Philip Dawkins), THE ASSEMBLED PARTIES, A LOSS OF ROSES (named by Chicago Tribune honorable mention as one of the year's best in 2016), DIVIDING THE ESTATE, VIEUX CARRÉ (named by Chicago Tribune as one of the year's best in 2014), GOOD BOYS AND TRUE, BRIGHTON BEACH MEMOIRS, BOY GETS GIRL and DATING WALTER DANTE at Raven

Theatre; THE GARBOLOGISTS and BY THE WATER (named by Chicago Sun-Times honorable mention as one of the top theatre productions of 2017) at Northlight Theatre; DAMASCUS at Strawdog Theatre; FIVE MILE LAKE at Shattered Globe Theatre; AMERICAN HERO at First Floor Theatre; SCARCITY at Redtwist Theatre; THE SEAGULL and WATCH ON THE RHINE at The Artistic Home; DON'T GO GENTLE at Haven Theatre; UNCLE BOB at Mary-Arrchie Theatre and HOSPITALITY SUITE at Citadel Theatre. Cody has been named a "Person to Watch" by American Theatre Magazine and a "Notable Leader in Arts and Entertainment" by BizTimes Milwaukee. He is a member of SDC and an alumnus of Columbia College Chicago.



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**LIBBY AMATO**  
**(Managing Director)**

Libby Amato joined Next Act Theatre in 2004 as a House Manager and has worked continually for the company in a variety

of roles, including Ticket Office Attendant, Actor, Deck Manager, Administrative Coordinator and Business Manager, before being promoted to Managing Director in 2023. Libby has worked extensively in the Milwaukee theatre community, including as Development Associate for Skylight Music Theatre from 2016 to 2018 and as Co-Founder and Company Director of Umbrella Group Theatre, a small non-profit theatre company, from 2014 to 2017. Over the years, she has worked with many local theatre companies in areas including acting, stage managing, directing and teaching. These companies include First Stage, Renaissance Theaterworks, Milwaukee Chamber Theatre, Forward Theater, In Tandem Theatre, All In Productions and Milwaukee Irish Arts, among others. She also made a brief foray outside of the arts world to work with Independence First, a local non-profit organization serving people with disabilities. In addition, Libby owns and operates Abbondanza Soap Co., a natural soap and body product company. She is a graduate of Carroll University.

**ACTORS' EQUITY ASSOCIATION**  
**("Equity")**

Equity, founded in 1913, is the U.S. labor union that represents more than 51,000 professional Actors and Stage Managers. Equity fosters the art of live theatre as an essential component of society and advances the careers of its members by negotiating wages, improving working conditions and providing a wide range of benefits, including health and pension plans. Actors' Equity is a member of the AFL-CIO and is affiliated with FIA, an international organization of performing arts unions.

Equity is governed by its own members through an elected Council, representing principal actors, chorus actors and stage managers living in three regions: Eastern, Central and Western. Members-at-large participate in Equity's governance through a system of regional Boards and Committees. Equity has 28 designated area liaison cities with over 100 members each.



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## Mission

Next Act Theatre engages the hearts and minds of audiences with intimate, compelling productions intended to stimulate thought, foster the exchange of ideas and promote the development of new perspectives and understanding.

## CHARLES D. KAKUK LEGACY SOCIETY

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Michael and Ericka Burzynski	Norm and Sherry Malmon	Bettie Zillman*
Judges John and Jean DiMotto	Paul Mandel and Jane Barclay Mandel*	
Dave Glenn	Sally Marks*	*Bequest Received
Clifford Heise	Jan Martin*	

The Charles D. Kakuk Legacy Society, named for the late Charles D. Kakuk, long-time Next Act Theatre Managing Director, recognizes individuals who have made a lasting impact on Next Act Theatre through their generous planned gift. To learn more about including Next Act Theatre in your estate planning, please call Tawnie Thompson, Development Manager, at 414-278-7780 x7 or email [tawnie@nextact.org](mailto:tawnie@nextact.org).

**Generously giving since April of 2025.**

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**FOOD AND BEVERAGES** – Drinks may be taken into the theatre, but food is not permitted.

**LATECOMER POLICY** – Latecomers will not be seated until an appropriate time. **Seating will not be permitted 30 minutes after the start of a performance. If you are running late, please call the Ticket Office at 414-278-0765.**

**TICKET EXCHANGES** – Subscribers may exchange their tickets, without fee, up to 48 hours prior to the performance (price adjustments may apply). Single ticket buyers may exchange their tickets for a fee of \$5 per ticket up to 48 hours prior.

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