

# CURTAIN RAISER

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Fall 2017

## 2017 - 2018 Season



(*Cinderella: The Remix*, Spring 2017. Photo by Michael Brosilow)

THE  
**THEATRE  
SCHOOL**  
.....  
AT DePaul University

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*The Kid Who Ran for President, Fall 2016*

## ***Curtain Raiser* for The Theatre School’s 2017-2018 Season**

Table of Contents.....	2
Letter from the Dean.....	3
Chicago Playworks for Families and Young Audiences 2017-2018 Season .....	4
The Theatre School 2017-2018 Season.....	5
<i>Into the Woods</i> , dramaturgy by Mariah Schultz & Jose Mogollon .....	6-7
<i>Native Son</i> , dramaturgy by Briana Schwartz.....	8-9
<i>Three Sisters</i> , dramaturgy by Grace Grindell.....	10-11
<i>Seven Homeless Mammoths Wander New England</i> , dramaturgy by Rachel Perzynski & Grace Melon.....	12-13
<i>Mr. Burns, a Post-Electric Play</i> , dramaturgy by Trisha Mahoney & Mary Kate O’Gara.....	14-15
New Work, New Playwright Series, dramaturgy by Rachel Perzynski & Mary Kate O’Gara.....	16-17
New Work, MFA, dramaturgy by Hannah Greenspan & Jose Mogollon .....	18-19
Season Schedule .....	20



*Wig Out!*, Spring 2017



*Romeo and Juliet*, Fall 2016

(All Production Photos by Michael Brosilow)

Faculty Advisor .....Isaac Gomez, Rachel Shteir, Kristin Idaszak  
 Staff Editors/Designers..... David Keohane, Leslie Shook

# Letter from the Dean

Join us for our 2017-18 season where we will explore 1930s South Side Chicago and a post-apocalyptic future. We will dive deep into the woods, travel to a New England college town, and voyage back in time to 1900s Russia. Each and every adventure is student derived, both on stage and behind the scenes. We are proud to present the work of the next generation of theatre artists – right in the heart of Lincoln Park.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Culbert".

**John Culbert**  
Dean and Executive Producer



*Cinderella: The Remix*, Fall 2016



*Eurydice*, Fall 2016



*Michael Jordan in Lilliput*, Spring 2016



*We Are Proud to Present...*, Winter 2017

(All Production Photos by Michael Brosilow)

# Chicago Playworks Season for Families and Young Audiences

Jeff Mills, Artistic Director

## *Augusta and Noble*

by Carlos Murillo

directed by Lisa Portes

**October 5 - November 11, 2017**

Recommended for ages 8 & up

## *Dr. Seuss's The Cat in the Hat*

directed by Jeff Mills

**April 19 - May 26, 2018**

Recommended for ages 4 & up

## *Junie B. Jones Is Not a Crook*

by Allison Gregory

adapted from the book series by Barbara Park

directed by Krissy Vanderwarker

**January 11 - February 17, 2018**

Recommended for ages 5 & up



*Night Runner, Winter 2017 (Photo by Michael Brosilow)*

at DePaul's Merle Reskin Theatre, 60 E. Balbo Drive, Chicago (*Not a mailing address*)

Chicago Playworks for Families and Young Audiences was founded as the Goodman Children's Theatre in 1925. Chicago's longest continuously producing children's theatre opens our 92nd season with *Augusta and Noble*.

Our history is rich in creativity and connections with young people. We have served Chicago's young audiences as the very first theatre experience for many, with total audiences numbering 1,407,348. We have performed in three major venues throughout our history, occupying our permanent home at DePaul's Merle Reskin Theatre since 1989.

We provide **Teacher Guides** for each of our Chicago Playworks productions, created by our dramaturgy students who have a strong interest in theatre for youth. Guides are available on the web; if you would like a printed guide, please let us know.

### **Chicago Playworks Program Goals:**

- To provide a live theatre experience for students, teachers, administrators and families in the Chicago metropolitan area.
- To provide theatre of the highest quality that is interactive, entertaining and relevant; theatre that reflects the life experiences of students who live in an urban, multi-racial and multi-cultural city.
- To serve principals, teachers, and students in their pursuit of Illinois learning standards.
- To integrate performances and teacher guide information/activities into the classroom curriculum.
- To offer our performances within a workable, convenient time frame.
- To contact principals and teachers with valuable and solid information that will help them to make choices that fit their students' needs.

**Join us for Chicago Playworks 2017-2018 Season at DePaul's historic Merle Reskin Theatre.**

### **SCHOOL BUS TRANSPORTATION**

If schools would like to apply for school bus transportation reimbursements in our 2017-2018 season, please contact us at [theatregroupsales@depaul.edu](mailto:theatregroupsales@depaul.edu). The bus reimbursement program is supported, in part, by Lewis and Hilary K. Josephs, in memory of Ruth and William Josephs.

# The Theatre School

2350 N. Racine Avenue, Chicago, IL 60614

Dexter Bullard, Artistic Director

## On the Fullerton Stage

### *Into the Woods*

music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim  
book by James Lapine  
directed by Barry Brunetti  
musical direction by Mark Elliott

**November 3 – 12, 2017**

Richard Wright's

### *Native Son*

adapted by Nambi E. Kelley  
directed by Mikael Burke

**February 9 – 18, 2018**

Anton Chekhov's

### *Three Sisters*

translated by Curt Columbus  
directed by Jacob Janssen

**April 13 – 22, 2018**

*World Premiere!*

### *Growing Up Blue*

by Chloë Martens  
directed by Shade Murray

**May 18 – 26, 2018**



*Wig Out!*, Spring 2017  
(Photo by Michael Brosilow)

## In the Healy Theatre

### *Seven Homeless Mammoths*

### *Wander New England*

by Madeleine George  
directed by April Cleveland

**October 20 – 29, 2017**

### *Mr. Burns, a Post-Electric Play*

by Anne Washburn  
music by Michael Friedman  
directed by Jeremy Aluma

**January 26 – February 4, 2018**

*World Premiere!*

### *Satyagraha: Gandhi/King*

An ensemble performance  
created by MFA III actors  
directed by Dexter Bullard

**May 4 - 5, 2018**



*Richard III*, Winter 2017  
(Photo by Michael Brosilow)

*Selected performances in our season will have Audio Description, American Sign Language, and Sensory Friendly accommodations. For more information visit: <http://theatre.depaul.edu/on-stage/plan-your-visit/>*

# INTO THE WOODS

music & lyrics by  
Stephen Sondheim  
book by James Lapine

directed by Barry Brunetti  
musical direction by  
Mark Elliott

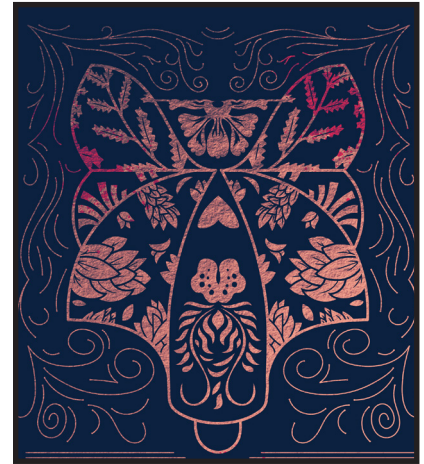
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On the Fullerton Stage

Dramaturgy by  
Mariah Schultz,  
BFA4/Dramaturgy/Criticism;  
Jose Mogollon,  
BFA2/Theatre Management

## From Tales as Old as Time, *Into the Woods* Introduces a Timeless Lesson

Fairy tales are some of the first stories we are told as children. Maidens waiting for princes or siblings outwitting clever witches once lulled us to sleep. *Into the Woods* takes these stories and weighs the value of good versus evil through our heroes' choices.



(Photo from behance.net)

Fairy tales have always been dark in origin, and *Into the Woods* is not exempt from this. The play, however, chooses to extract those gritty details and examine why darkness shapes these heroes' dispositions. Cinderella couldn't have discovered independence without her horrid step family (*On the Steps of the Palace*). Little Red wouldn't have grasped the cost of curiosity without the wolf (*I Know Things Now*).

As for their backstories, Cinderella's tale opens with her grieving over her deceased mother, being ignored by her father, and working like a slave to her new stepmother. Horror continues when Cinderella's stepmother cuts her daughters' heel and toes off to ensure the prince chooses them. Cinderella's stepsisters also have their eyes pecked out by her deceptively sweet songbirds, to great comedic effect.

In a different story, Little Red Riding Hood and her grandmother are devoured by a wolf. They manage to escape thanks to a huntsman (in our case, baker) who frees them with his axe. Little Red and Granny then fill the wolf's stomach with bricks ensuring a slow, painful death, with Granny delighting in their sweet revenge.

While the misfortune that befalls these characters strengthens their quest for joy in the original tales, Stephen Sondheim (music/lyrics) and James Lapine (book) demonstrate through self-reflective song how darkness is an essential and continual part of life. Act Two especially shows there are no happy endings. The characters learn to accept that happiness, albeit temporary, means there are always more adventures, wishes or moments to discover that make life worth living. It's a part of navigating through these dark, confusing woods, a journey we can all learn to embrace in our own lives.



(Photo from shughal.com)

## Interview with the Director, Barry Brunetti

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Barry Brunetti serves as the Head of Theatre Arts at The Theatre School at DePaul University. Before teaching, he performed Off-Broadway, and directed regionally and in Chicago. His previous directing credits at The Theatre School include *The Burial at Thebes*, *Dinner at Eight* (along with Donald W. Ilko), and *Pinocchio 3.5*. He also directed *The Kingdom of Grimm* and *Life's A Dream*, both previous collaborations with *Into the Woods'* musical director, Mark Elliott.



**Barry Brunetti**  
(Photo by Andrea Tichey)

**Mariah Schultz:** *What inspired you to direct Into the Woods?*

**Barry Brunetti:** I've been in love with Sondheim's talents for some time and think that his music and lyrics for *Into the Woods* are among his best. Also, the themes of parent-child relationships, wish fulfillment, and the consequences of the choices that we all must make intrigued me from the outset. In addition, I wanted to work with Mark on a musical that would allow us to make use of as diverse a cast of actors as possible, and *Into the Woods* seemed a perfect choice.

**MS:** *Into the Woods centers on beloved fairy tale characters from our childhood but is a musical aimed at adults. What do you find compelling about this concept?*

**BB:** I don't think it's any accident that the show is geared toward adult audiences, many of whom are parents with their own children. The fairy tale motif, while typically thought of as "stories for children," are actually stories with a very dark edge to them—at times violent, sexual, and disturbing. These are all concepts that appeal to my own artistic vision, so again, *Into the Woods* seemed a logical choice for me.

**MS:** *What was your favorite fairy tale when you were younger? Why?*

**BB:** Both *Cinderella* and *Jack and the Beanstalk* were favorites when I was younger, most likely because both characters are attempting to battle their stations in life, are up against a number of obstacles, and yet they both continue to work to better themselves and to make life better than the "deck of cards" that they were originally dealt.

**MS:** *Given its musical nature, what opportunities do you feel musicals have for profound storytelling?*

**BB:** One of the reasons why Sondheim is such a favorite of mine is that his songs are not simply breaks in the scene work in order to inject, sometimes rather illogically, a musical number. Rather, Sondheim's music, and it's a notable part of *Into the Woods*, is part of the narrative through-line of the story. And when it is not, then the musical numbers, typically solos in this show, are moments when characters are allowed the chance to reflect on the choices they've made. In the case of this musical, this is especially true for Cinderella, Jack, Little Red, and the Baker's Wife.

**MS:** *What message do you want audience members to take away from Into the Woods?*

**BB:** Two things: Careful of what you say because children are listening, and no one is truly alone.

**MS:** *Every character declares a wish at the opening of the show. What is a wish you have as we enter the last months of 2017?*

**BB:** Without the intention of this sounding trite, I wish for a safer and calmer world in which diplomacy, inclusion, and tolerance supersede ignorance, exclusion, and intolerance.

# NATIVE SON

by Richard Wright      adapted by Nambi E. Kelley  
directed by Mikael Burke

On the Fullerton Stage

Dramaturgy by  
Briana Schwartz,  
BFA3/Dramaturgy/Criticism

## About the Play

The critic Frantz Fanon writes “Bigger Thomas acts. To put an end to his tension, he acts, he responds to the world’s anticipation.”

Bigger Thomas is our protagonist in *Native Son* as well as an everyman of Black men of 1930s South Side Chicago. He is not a role model but an example and product of his time. While he works to support his family, he participates in his fair share of trouble. One instance of trouble that involves his white boss’s daughter begins his destruction. Fanon and Richard Wright, the author of *Native Son*, present Bigger’s world as one where social systems at play influence the inevitability of the actions.

The segregated Chicago in *Native Son* does not differ much from the one we live in today. While there are no laws dividing people of color and white people, informal borders among communities remain. Some of those in places of privilege make statements about harmful stereotypes and assumptions about the South Side of Chicago, causing fear and dividing people. In addition, citizens of the South Side are left without access to resources. Their communities are gentrified and excluded from community planning.

In a psychological thriller centering on race relations, Richard Wright’s novel, adapted for stage by Nambi Kelley asks the question: Can we escape our destiny?



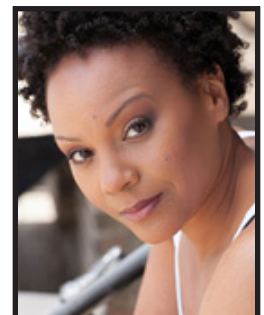
**Richard Wright**  
(Photo from  
biography.com)

## About the Author, Richard Wright

Richard Wright is a twentieth-century American writer. His books focus on race relations, specifically the African American experience in the South and in segregated cities. He was born on a plantation in Mississippi and moved to Chicago at age 19. He participated in the Federal Writers Project and was heavily influenced by the Communist Party. Richard Wright played the role of his own Bigger Thomas in the first movie adaptation. He went on to write a book solely on his experience as an African American male titled *Black Boy*. He was a major influence for writers including Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin.

## About The Playwright, Nambi E. Kelley

Nambi E. Kelley, alum of The Theatre School at DePaul University’s Playwriting program (BFA ‘95), has been active in the theatre scene as a playwright and an actor. Her plays have been performed nationally and internationally. In Chicago, Nambi is a graduate of the Playwright’s Unit at the Goodman Theatre. She has also written plays for Steppenwolf and American Blues Theatre. As an actor, she was most recently seen in the role of Risa in *Two Trains Running* at the Goodman. Additionally, Nambi was recently named playwright in residence at the National Black Theatre in New York.



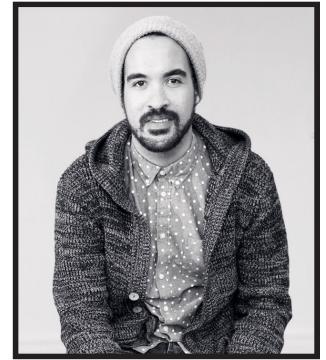
**Nambi E. Kelley**  
(Photo from  
Nambi E. Kelley)



# Interview with the Director, Mikael Burke

**Briana Schwartz:** *What came first for you, the play or the book?*

**Mikael Burke:** It's such an excellent novel, but crazily enough, the play came first for me. I'd never *encountered* the novel before I fell in love with this adaptation. Most people that I know who had read the book or at least heard of it beforehand were introduced to it in their high school or college English classes. Somehow it never once entered my scholastic sphere. (I chalk it up to growing up in the South where educational discussions of race-related topics were few and far between...) Having now read the novel, I'm amazed at how excellently Nambi translated the harrowing, raw tone of the novel into a theatrical event. It really is a masterful work, and I'm thrilled to be given the opportunity to bring it to life.



**Mikael Burke**  
(Photo from Mikael Burke)

**BS:** *What first drew you to the play/book?*

**MB:** Every Black man in America knows what it feels like to be a black rat. We're monsters. When we walk down the street at night, people cross to the other sidewalk or lock their car doors. We're automatically considered more violent and less hard-working. These ideas are perpetuated and mediated by the white-centric society we live in. So, when I first read the play, it maybe isn't surprising that I found myself simultaneously amazed and disgusted – amazed from an artistic standpoint, yet disgusted from a personal standpoint. What turned me off at first is what is most impossible to ignore: Bigger Thomas is not a good kid. He's irresponsible, ornery, and ultimately becomes a murderer and rapist! He's problematic – as a person and as a symbol. Black men already get a bad wrap in this country, and this is the depiction of blackness we want to put on stage? In Trump-merica?? And yet. What is so genius about the novel and this adaptation is that it is asking us the hard question: Is Bigger born a black rat, or is his monstrous behavior the result of the society's treatment of him? As a fellow rat, I recognize Bigger's plight in myself. Bigger Thomas is not the role model we want, but he's the example we need to see the real monster: Racism. In all of its guises.

*“ Is Bigger [Thomas] born a black rat, or is his monstrous behavior the result of the society's treatment of him?”*

*~Mikael Burke*

**BS:** *What does this period piece do for our current Chicago? Lincoln Park, the South Side, and beyond?*

**MB:** Art must respond to the world around it. As Americans, we are living in a world of overt racism that we have not seen since the 1960s. Over half of the voting public put a man into the Presidency who continually refuses to condemn (read: approves of) the outright hateful actions of Nazis, Klansman, and white supremacists against people of color. These are the people who readily propagate the distinctly negative ideas of Blackness, and instead of being forced to confront their massive role in the oppression of black people and people of color, they are being lauded and celebrated! As an artist, I can't stand by and watch that happen. This production, *Native Son*, is my protest. Racism is a poison that destroys everything it touches, and people – white people especially – have to recognize and confront their role in it. Is it problematic for audiences? Certainly. Uncomfortable? Absolutely. But it is nonetheless true. And as more and more Black lives hang in the balance over racist thinking, we should all do what we can to expose and undermine racism, even if that means taking a good hard look in the mirror.

**BS:** *Describe our protagonist, Bigger Thomas, in one sentence.*

**MB:** Bigger Thomas, a man who never learned to trust or love because the world never loved or trusted him.



## On the Fullerton Stage

Dramaturgy by  
Grace Grindell,  
BFA3/Theatre Arts

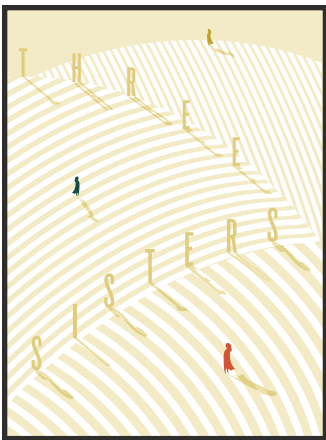
by Anton Chekhov  
translated by Curt Columbus  
directed by Jacob Janssen

Sponsored by **GEICO**

# The Beauty in the Boring

*"Don't tell me the moon is shining; show me the glint of light on broken glass."*

~Anton Chekhov



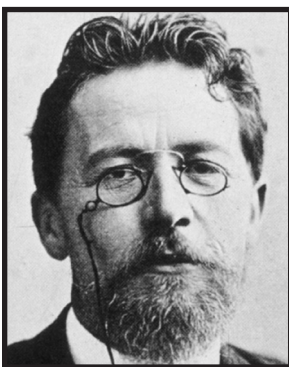
In *Three Sisters*, time is either anticipatory or reflective. Chekhov's play lives in the parts of existence that are deemed in-between, before, and after. It empowers these moments with shifts and events, making us question what we give importance to in our own lives. *Three Sisters* is about what is happening while love blossoms and dies, vows are promised and broken, work is completed and ignored, and dreams flourish and dissipate. Whether full of joy or grief, Chekhov's play invites audiences to rediscover the truth of the everyday.

Today, blind to the beauty of the mundane, people are distracted from their humanity by the speed of 2017 life. Smart phones, sound bites, and streaming create constant stimulation

that eliminates stillness, discouraging introspection. Lost in the ceaseless buzzes, blips, and bleeps, time passes silently and more quickly than ever, unnoticed. The quiet moments of hope and reflection that Chekhov's play provides are in short supply, replaced with thumbs on screens and ear buds in heads. Through characters that are wheeling in the whiplash of their distractions, Chekhov ruminates on what it means to be alive.



Chekhov reading to his cast at the  
Moscow Art Theatre  
(Photo from [radioopensource.org](http://radioopensource.org))



**Anton Chekhov**  
(Photo from [biography.com](http://biography.com))

## About the Author: Anton Chekhov (1860-1904)

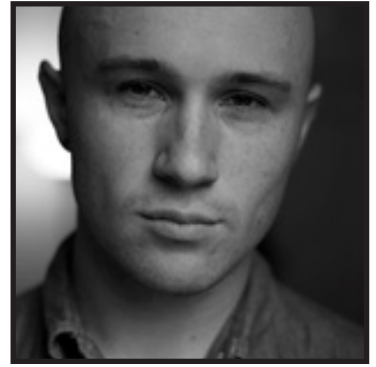
Anton Chekhov was born in a small seaport town in southern Russia in January of 1860. Raised by a merchant father and devoted mother, Chekhov did not study the writing that made him famous, but instead became a doctor of medicine at the age of twenty-four. After getting his degree, Chekhov began writing and publishing short stories and comical anecdotes for magazines. In 1887, he broke into the world of theatre when his first play was performed. Unlike his short stories, Chekhov's plays, dedicated to the trifles of daily life and regular people, did not receive immediate success. Not until the Moscow Art Theatre and the director Konstantin Stanislavsky met the dramatic works of Chekhov in 1896 did the plays receive popularity and recognition. Chekhov's four major plays, of which *Three Sisters* (1901) is the third, altered the landscape of dramatic literature, introducing a theatre of distilled naturalism close to human experience. Chekhov died young at the age of forty-four in 1904 from tuberculosis, leaving behind an immovable fingerprint on the shape of the modern theatre.

## Interview with the Director, Jacob Janssen

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**Grace Grindell:** *What inspired you to choose Three Sisters?*

**Jacob Janssen:** I have always been interested in Chekhov's work. I've been drawn to plays that are in the canon of those great works. They tend to offer the most complexity, depth of detail, and the greatest challenge for artists. And *Three Sisters* for me is the one that speaks most closely to folks who are at The Theatre School – young people trying to understand their place in the world and their relationship to each other, to the future and to the past. Chekhov has always been one of those writers that I look to and I say, "yeah, those are some good plays" (*laughs*). He intuited something about the way you build a world on stage that sometimes mirrors our own and in some ways does not at all, and that creates these beautiful moments of ephemerality.



**Jacob Janssen**  
(Photo from [jacobjanssen.com](http://jacobjanssen.com))

*"There's a dream of the future that constantly haunts the present."*

~Jacob Janssen

**GG:** *You have a reputation for working on the classics and have a lot of Shakespeare training. What is it about Chekhov's writing that fascinates you?*

**JJ:** I am drawn to language, and Chekhov was a writer who was also very enamored of language. What captivated him more than anything else was people. What Chekhov does better than any other writer of his era is draw these beautifully detailed studies of people. And what draws me to him so profoundly is that he had a huge amount of compassion and empathy for the people within his world. Like many writers we think of in the classical canon, there is a scope and a breadth to what Chekhov does. But it feels very much like us and can feel almost small in scale, but then at a certain point you understand the totality of what he's doing, and it becomes absolutely immense. It becomes this almost metaphysical experience of being lost in our own lives. I think the magic of Chekhov is that he is able to take the ephemera of everyday and make it into a monumental experience. And it takes a certain genius to translate everyday life into something that reveals a grander truth. And that speaks to everybody, whether in 19th century Russia or 21st century Illinois.

**GG:** *There are a lot of big themes in Three Sisters—endurance, work, loss, time—what theme are you the most drawn to?*

**JJ:** The thing that speaks to me the most about this play is the relationship to time. And the relationship to a potential future and what was past. I think how we define ourselves against the past and toward the future is really important in this world. That is the thing that eats throughout this play most profoundly for me. Because we aren't who we once were, and that's the thing that everyone in this play is struggling with. They have to reinvent themselves in a present that is different than they imagined it would be. There's a dream of the future that constantly haunts the present. And, I am also interested in this play because I grew up in a small town in the middle of nowhere. I know what it feels like to be far from the center of things, to be a provincial person and how much you long to be back at the center of things and how frustrating it can be. This urban rural divide between country folk and city folk has been a part of human culture as long as we have been living in cities. And, the distance from what we perceive to be the center of cultural life is very important to me in this play, this almost dislocation from where we feel we are meant to be.

SEVEN

HOMELESS

MAMMOTHS WANDER

NEW ENGLAND

In the Healy Theatre

Dramaturgy by  
Rachel Perzynski,  
BFA4/Dramaturgy/Criticism;  
Grace Melon, BFA3/Theatre Arts

by Madeleine George

directed by April Cleveland

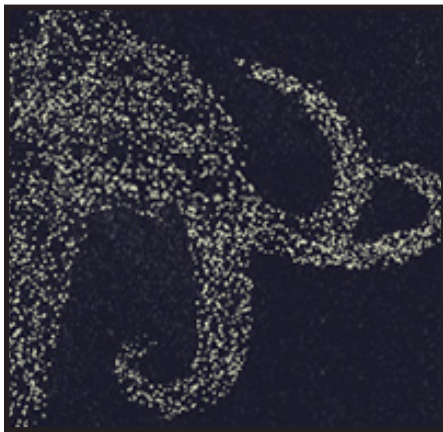
## Queering *Friends*

In *Seven Homeless Mammoths Wander New England*, there is no shortage of love triangles, cheesy pick-up lines, and stolen kisses. In many ways, the play mirrors the kind of situational humor you would find in the American sitcom *Friends*, a show that also happens to be a personal favorite of a Phoebe-like character named Andromeda. As Andromeda describes the premise of the series – a group of friends who “keep falling in and out of love with each other” – the audience is reminded of the play’s own setup, with the exception of one glaring difference: the three main characters are queer women.



Cast of *Friends*  
(Photo from nbc.com)

From 1994 to 2004 during the run of *Friends*, lesbians were frequently the butt of the joke and portrayed as sexual objects by the straight men of the show. When Ross’s ex-wife Carol announces her engagement to another woman, for example, Ross responds with a punchline that sends the studio audience into a fit of laughter: “As in, ‘I now pronounce you wife and wife’ married?” The prospect of a lesbian marriage is portrayed as absurd, and the womens’ relationship never develops beyond a funny plot device.



In *Mammoths*, playwright Madeleine George has reclaimed the ensemble-based sitcom style that made *Friends* famous and given the spotlight to a group of characters who wouldn’t have made the cut in starring roles twenty years ago. Their queerness isn’t even up for debate – it’s just a given in the world of the play.

While *Mammoths* provides a healthy amount of silly innuendos in the college student hookup scenes, George endows her three female characters with sharp, scholarly wits. As they cope with the closing of the natural history museum and Greer’s cancer, the women discuss how to adapt and evolve through sophisticated metaphors and philosophical theories. Rarely does the set-up of a joke depend upon some hackneyed lesbian stereotype.

By inserting the stories of these brilliant queer women into a *Friends* structure, George is rewriting a previously homophobic narrative. Although *Mammoths* may not be overtly political, the play challenges audiences to broaden their perspective of normality – a radical step toward inclusivity.

*“I take it as a charge to write stories in which queer characters occupy themselves with the full spectrum of human affairs, including, you know, politics, ethics, ambition, despair, climate change, pet care, struggling to make ends meet, acts of cruelty, acts of kindness, acts of pettiness, etc. In many ways I think this is the best political – and artistic – work theatre can do: to expand and deepen what audiences understand as human, as worthy of their care.”*

~Madeleine George in a *Playbill* Interview

## Interview with the Director, April Cleveland

**Rachel Perzynski:** *What drew you to Seven Homeless Mammoths? What makes this play stand out from other comedies that you've seen on stage?*

**April Cleveland:** *Mammoths* stuck out because it is a love story of monumental proportions: between each of the two women in the triangle of three; a love story between a town and its museum; a love story between several pairs of hormonal students. I'm not usually drawn to romance, but the love in this play struck a chord. Perhaps because the love stories in this play are quirky, eccentric, and unorthodox. The situations can be pretty silly (it's not surprising that shenanigans ensue when a woman is sharing her house with her current girlfriend and her ex-girlfriend of 20 years) but the sentiment is relatable. Maybe it's so relatable because relationships are messy, people get older, they get tired of each other, and sometimes they keep loving each other anyway, even after they've separated. Madeleine George is a whip-smart playwright who writes her women as intellectual as she is. The women in the play talk about everything from philosophy and academic administration to Terry Gross. They are also hilarious.



**April Cleveland**  
(Photo from April Cleveland)

*"Mammoths illuminates the relationship between the natural world and our human affairs."*

~April Cleveland

**RP:** *How would you describe the world of the play?*

**AC:** It's a world with no shortage of light, stars, fireflies, and galaxies. *Mammoths* illuminates the relationship between the natural world and our human affairs. The backdrop of the closing of the beloved natural history museum and the potential destruction of seven homeless mammoth skeletons illuminates the last stage of life for Greer, one of our main characters who has just been diagnosed with stage four cancer.

**RP:** *Why this play now?*

**AC:** These women are dealing with weighty concerns about health, work, and politics, but ultimately this is a comedy! It's exciting and energetic and it's female-centric. This is a funny, joyful opportunity to bring an energy, not just a gravity, to the complexities of female relationships without the anchor of a man. And despite being one of very few comedies with queer female main characters, there's a powerful universal truth that everyone can relate to! No matter how progressive, educated, and tolerant you are, relationships are complicated beasts that fill our lives with pain but also (the pain, too) makes life worth living.

**RP:** *What excites you the most about this particular production?*

**AC:** We went into it with really open minds because it's an unorthodox play. What we came up with was, "How do we support this unorthodox world?" And we're doing it by creating a magical space where places and people sometimes float together. I think one of the coolest things about this production is that the particular cast that we have embodies the magical spirit that we had in conversations about design. So it's really like the perfect group of people to compliment the kind of world that we want to build.



# a Post-Electric Play

by Anne Washburn      music by Michael Friedman  
directed by Jeremy Aluma

In the Healy Theatre

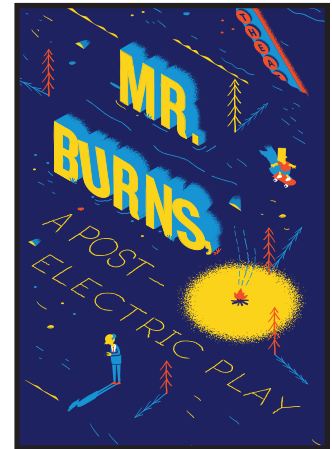
Dramaturgy by  
Trisha Mahoney, BFA4/  
Dramaturgy/Criticism;  
Mary Kate O’Gara, BFA2/  
Dramaturgy/Criticism

Sponsored by **GEICO**

## Survival Through Story

You are scientifically more likely to remember a potential danger if it is told to you in story form. It makes more of an emotional impact on you if you learn the story of your friend’s/cousin’s/nephew’s awful demise because of that dragon in that one particular cave in the mountain. Much more of an impact than if someone just told you to avoid that cave. This is because human beings use stories to convey information that is too important to forget.

So how does Anne Washburn turn a three-act retelling of an episode of *The Simpsons* into a statement on the necessity of storytelling for survival? I’m glad you asked. The characters within Washburn’s play not only use the story of *The Simpsons* to distract themselves from their post-apocalyptic horror of a world, but as a way to regain the life that they had before. In a world where they have been thrust into horror, they use their stories to connect with each other in a way that they otherwise would not be able to do when they are unsure of where the next threat is coming from. Storytelling, whether a personal story or the 83rd episode of *The Simpsons*, has a habit of revealing the humanity in other people, a humanity that we tend to ignore in tumultuous times.



This speaks to the strength and importance of those who create and spread stories. In the tumultuous times that we live in now, how do we find the humanity that many have felt that we have lost in this country? We have to continue to ensure that stories are told. They are a necessity of survival, after all.

~Trisha Mahoney



Anne Washburn  
(Photo from [herbalpertawards.org](http://herbalpertawards.org))

## Get To Know Anne Washburn

From humble beginnings, Anne Washburn has had her work produced nationwide. As the daughter of a painter, she was brought up in a creative home and quickly showed her aptness for great creativity as well. An alumni of Reed College and New York University, Washburn’s most notable works include *A Devil at Noon*, *Apparition*, *10 Out Of 12*, *The Internationalist*, and *The Communist Dracula Pageant*. Washburn has also adapted Euripides’s *Orestes* and *Iphigenia in Aulis*.

Washburn has been quoted in an interview saying that *Orestes* shaped her play, *Mr. Burns, a Post-Electric Play*. “*Orestes* is mayhem...It’s this mad and almost corrupt mash-up of the tragic and the comic and the ironic and the thriller-y, and has a more sophisticated command of tonal shift and just pure bravura entertainment than any contemporary play or performance text I know.”

In 2012, Washburn received a Drama Desk Nomination for Outstanding Production for *Mr. Burns, a Post-Electric Play*. Washburn has also received a Guggenheim fellowship, the Herb Alpert Award in the Arts and Theatre, and the Whiting Award. Chicago has most recently seen her work with Theater Wit’s 2017 production of *10 Out of 12*.

~Mary Kate O’Gara

# Interview with the Director, Jeremy Aluma

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**Trisha Mahoney:** *How would you describe Mr. Burns in one sentence?*

**Jeremy Aluma:** A post-apocalyptic play about humanity's ability to survive through storytelling.

**TM:** *What drew you to direct this particular play?*

**JA:** I'm constantly checking in with my peers about what plays I should read and what plays I should direct. Last summer, I emailed five people I trust, and three of the five recommended *Mr. Burns* to me. So already, I knew I had to read this play. Everyone says it's a great play.

Then I sat down and read the script. I usually give myself two reads to figure out if I really love the play. The first read can be tough because I immerse myself in the story. I love stories and so I'm not always able to discern the merits of a play based on a first read. But with this one, I was just blown away from start to finish; I could not get enough of it. Stylistically, it was right up my alley because it's very theatrical. It involves all the things I like to play with in theatre: mask, narration, ensemble, movement, high concept, and design.

For me, both the troupe of actors (The Civilians) who helped Anne Washburn build this show and the group of people within the play, both have an ensemble feel, a team mentality, which is something I am fascinated by, have experimented with, and want to do more of. That sense of community – a group of people creating something together – is very important for me as an artist.

**TM:** *Why do you think that this is an important story to tell now, in this season, in this school, in Chicago?*

**JA:** It is important because we are questioning whether theatre has an impact on society or not. For the last eight years we have been somewhat complacent in the theatre. This is a huge generalization, of course. But I think we are now realizing theatre should and can have an impact on people and the world. Figuring out how we do that is our primary job. At least, for me it is. We're not in an apocalyptic scenario, though we are beginning to see society tear apart, and we have to figure out how to put the pieces back together in a vision of what we want. As America splits at the seams, we have to figure out what is going to hold us together and how we are going to tell stories that help shape our future. It is an important thing for an artist to consider.

As for location, what I like about Chicago is that it seems to be a mix of the right and the left politically; the city proper is pretty liberal, but the surrounding area is more conservative. I think that is somewhat unique compared to other major cities, like Los Angeles, San Francisco, or New York. I think we have to speak to everybody; we can't just speak to like-minded audiences. If we are not actually doing anything, what is the point?

**TM:** *What is your favorite line from Mr. Burns?*

**JA:** "The whole world unfurls before me/ A great adventure lies before me/ I'm reaching out for everything/ I'm calling out to everything/ There's nothing I'm afraid to be/ The world is new and glittery/ I run to meet it hopefully."

Bart is referring to a past when everything was doomed, nothing was possible. Then all possibilities open up. The world deteriorated, and somehow anything becomes possible. That sentiment, the idea that anything is possible, is one I live everyday. I'm an optimist at heart. I believe within the confines of how the world exists, we can make anything happen. I think Bart hits on this point beautifully.



**Jeremy Aluma**  
(Photo from [jeremyaluma.com](http://jeremyaluma.com))

# *New Work at The Theatre School*

## **New Playwrights Series (NPS)**

Dramaturgy by  
Rachel Perzynski,  
BFA4/Dramaturgy/Criticism;  
Mary Kate O’Gara, BFA2/Dramaturgy/Criticism

Every year since 2004, the New Playwrights Series has featured the world premiere of a play written by a fourth-year playwright or recent graduate, selected by Theatre School faculty. The playwright is given the opportunity to develop their play in collaboration with a team of actors, designers, dramaturgs, and directors. This year, *Growing Up Blue* by 4th year playwright Chloë Martens was chosen for production and will be directed by Shade Murray.

## **Interview with the Playwright, Chloë Martens**

Playwright Chloë Martens chats with dramaturg Rachel Perzynski on the experience of growing up in fear, the underrepresentation of transgender/gender non-conforming (GNC) artists, and the challenges and triumphs of the new play process.

**Rachel Perzynski:** *What is the story of Growing Up Blue?*

**Chloë Martens:** *Growing Up Blue* focuses on Blue Johnson and their family living in the town of Hometown, USA. The play begins with Blue at the precipice of their 13th birthday, mothering their pet rock, Rock. When the people in Blue’s town find out that Blue wants to be a mother, all hell breaks loose as Blue is branded a freak because people suspect Blue may be transgender. The slaughterhouse that Blue’s parents work at offers Blue’s family an opportunity to star on their new reality TV show (yes, the town’s slaughterhouse has a television show). These events force Blue to question who they are and decide whether or not they are ready to be seen by the world.



**Chloë Martens**  
(Photo from Anna Ables)

**RP:** *What inspired you to write Growing Up Blue?*

**CM:** I feel so lame saying it but, at first, I wanted to write a play for the younger version of myself. Through the process of writing, the play started to come together when laws restricting what restrooms trans/GNC people can use were being proposed around the country. I remember what it was like living a life in fear and being told constantly that I did not deserve to have a future. I wanted to write a play that showed what it felt like growing up in fear, as so many young people do today.

**RP:** *What made you choose a 13-year-old as your protagonist?*

**CM:** I’ve always loved writing from the perspective of younger protagonists. Being able to see someone grow up, learn things and figure out difficult life lessons throughout the course of a story or a play has always been fascinating to me. One of my goals with *Blue* was to write a protagonist who was transgender but still figuring things out. In many stories with transgender/GNC people, the trans/GNC characters always know exactly what to say, how to educate people and resolve issues, all with a witty one-liner. This is not always realistic. Trans people are always held up to an unattainable standard of perfection, otherwise their validity is questioned. My goal with *Blue* was to write a character who wasn’t perfect.

(Continued on following page)



**RP:** *Who is your ideal audience for this play? When did you start to think about the audience during your writing process?*

**CM:** This was a really difficult question for me while writing this play! I grappled with writing a play that was educational for people who know nothing of trans-people or for people like myself and my friends, who are trans/GNC or are close with trans/GNC people and want something more than the stereotypical trans/GNC characters. I hope my play reaches both types of people and pushes the audiences conceptions of who or what a trans/GNC person can be.

**RP:** *What has the process of working on Growing Up Blue been like so far?*

**CM:** I worked on this play for a year with Carlos Murillo, who has helped me so much throughout the process of turning this play from a huge mess into something that is ready to be worked on by others. The process was a lot of trying weird things out, watching videos of cows and pigs, and reading books and stories from other trans, queer or gender non-conforming writers and artists for inspiration. There are so few plays written by transgender/GNC (there are many written *about* transgender/GNC people, but not always written *by* trans/GNC people) so it often felt scary to figure out how to make something so personal to me make sense to so many different groups of people.

**RP:** *Has the current political landscape affected your writing process?*

**CM:** Oh, definitely. To me, theatre, art, and writing especially is always political. It is wild how my play was inspired by the “bathroom laws” and just a month ago, Trump passed a ban on transgender folks serving in the military, another effort to instill the idea in people’s minds that transgender people are a burden. It’s still hugely relevant. I hope too that the play addresses the ways that people from different intersecting identities experience oppression differently and what it means to work together collectively--whether it’s with a blood family or a chosen family--in healing.

**RP:** *As a trans artist, do you feel a certain responsibility with your art to educate those outside the trans community? How do you navigate between that kind of responsibility and making the art you want to make?*

**CM:** Yeah, this was a big question for me, and still is today. I think I’ve settled on taking it one step at a time. This is my first full length play and first production of something I’ve written. I definitely don’t want to be responsible for everyone’s basic understanding of transgender/GNC people because it’s exhausting to have to educate everyone when there are so many resources out there. If I ever get exhausted from it, I just remember the things I love and make me happy: weird science fiction, absurdist black humor, cows and pigs, and tender moments. I tried taking moments of seriousness and “education” and pairing it with those things. It doesn’t always have to be so serious. I’m going to make mistakes, say the wrong things when trying to correct/educate someone, and be a little messy. I’m still young. My dad always told me, one step at a time and do what makes you happy. Sounds good to me!!!

### **Ingredients for *Growing Up Blue***

Chloë Martens lists some of her other influences:

- Bjork
- Young trans children who are confident enough to live their truth despite ignorant adults questioning their authenticity
- My dog Crouton
- *Phantom Tollbooth*
- Anne Carson’s *Autobiography of Red*
- Actress Candy Darling
- *Keeping up with the Kardashians*

# New Work at The Theatre School

## MFA 18

Dramaturgy by  
Hannah Greenspan,  
BFA4, Dramaturgy/Criticism;  
Jose Mogollon, BFA2/Theatre Management

*World Premiere!*

### **SATYAGRAHA: GANDHI / KING**

directed by Dexter Bullar

*Every spring at The Theatre School at DePaul University, the graduating MFA actors perform in their final production assignment. SATYAGRAHA: Gandhi / King is this year's devised piece that will be created by the graduating MFA acting ensemble. Creating a piece of theatre together allows the graduating class to not only showcase an original work, it also shows their creativity and strength as an ensemble. It is presented as the final production in the Healy Theatre.*

## What is Satyagraha?

In English, it is loosely translated as “insistence on truth” “loyalty to the truth” or “holding onto truth.” **Satyagraha** is a policy of passive political resistance that was coined and developed by Mahatma Gandhi against British rule in India. According to Gandhi, satyagraha differs from passive resistance, saying, “Satyagraha is a weapon of the strong; it admits of no violence under any circumstance whatsoever; and it ever insists upon truth.” Satyagraha theory influenced Martin Luther King Jr.’s campaign during the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, and many other social justice movements. Someone who practices satyagraha is a satyagrahi.

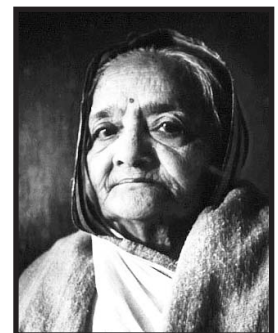
This ensemble driven devised piece explores the practice of Satyagraha through the lives of these historical figures:



**Mahatma Gandhi**  
(Photo from  
gettyimages.com)

**Mahatma Gandhi** was the leader of the Indian independence movement against British rule. He led India to independence and inspired movements for civil rights and freedom across the world by employing nonviolent civil disobedience. Gandhi famously led Indians in challenging British-imposed policies and was imprisoned for many years for a wide variety of charges, sometimes in both South Africa and India.

**Kasturba Gandhi** was not only of wife of Mahatma Gandhi but also a political activist involved in the Indian independence movement in British-ruled India. She often took her husband’s place in the movement if he was in prison. Since Kasturba assisted her husband and participated in civil disobedience campaigns and marches, she was arrested and put in jail on multiple occasions.



**Kasturba Gandhi**  
(Photo from yourstory.com)



**Martin Luther King Jr.**  
(Photo from  
*kids.nationalgeographic.com*)

**Martin Luther King Jr.** was an American Baptist minister and activist who became the most visible spokesperson and leader in the Civil Rights Movement. Martin Luther King is best known for using the tactics of nonviolence and civil disobedience based on his Christian beliefs and the nonviolent activism of Mahatma Gandhi in the advancement of civil rights.

**Coretta Scott King** was an American author, activist, civil rights leader, and the wife of Martin Luther King Jr. Coretta played an influential role in the years after her husband's assassination by taking on the leadership of the struggle for racial equality and became more active in the Women's Movement. She later broadened her scope of activism by opposing apartheid and supporting for LGBTQ rights.



**Coretta Scott King**  
(Photo from *blacklist.org*)

## Debunking Devised Theatre

In traditional theatre, everything starts with a play. The playwright types away at their computer, creating a script. Before the play gets produced, it goes through a vigorous revision process (that sometimes takes several years) through new play festivals or workshops. Eventually, if a theatre selects the play for a production the Artistic Director commissions a director, who in turn is like a nucleus to the actors, designers and other collaborators. Essentially, in traditional theatre, the art comes before the artists.

Devised theatre, by contrast, is an elusive thing to define. It is built from the ground up. Actors, designers, writers, directors, and dramaturgs all work together to create a new piece of theatre. All of the collaborators have an authorial investment within the process. In devised theatre, the artists come before art. Who these artists are really matter because they all fundamentally shape the piece. The final product would be a different piece without these specific artists.

Everyone on the creative team wears many hats, because devised theatre demands hybrid artists. According to playwright and deviser Deborah Stein, author of *What I Mean When I Talk About Collaboration*, "[Devised theatre] breeds hybrid artists. Writer-directors. Director-designers. Actor-director-designer-producers. Because what is at stake is the performance event, and you're going to throw every ounce of your best self at the problem."

One misconception about devised theatre is the language used. Sometimes devised theatre uses found text in order to create a story, similar to that of traditional theatre and other times there is no written text to perform. It all depends on what the ensemble creates during their process.

Another common misconception about devised theatre is that it's all consensus based. While that is sometimes the case, often two or three of the artists are the lead collaborators in order to help keep the process moving forward.

2017-2018 Chicago Playworks Season  
at DePaul's Merle Reskin Theatre, 60 E. Balbo Drive, Chicago

*August and Noble*

by Carlos Murillo

directed by Lisa Portes

recommended for ages 8 and up

**October 5 - November 11, 2017**

*Junie B. Jones is Not a Crook*

by Allison Gregory

based on the book series by Barara Park

directed by Krissy Vanderwarker

recommended for ages 5 and up

**January 11 - February 17, 2018**

*Dr. Seuss's The Cat in the Hat*

directed by Jeff Mills

recommended for ages 4 & up

**April 19 - May 26, 2018**

Box Office and Group Sales: (321) 922-7900

2017-2018 Theatre School Season

at 2350 N. Racine Avenue, Chicago

**ON THE FULLERTON STAGE**

*Into the Woods*

music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim

book by James Lapine

directed by Barry Brunetti

musical direction by Mark Elliott

**November 3 - 12, 2017**

*Native Son*

by Richard Wright

adapated by Nambi E. Kelly

directed by Mikael Burke

**February 9 - 18, 2018**

*Three Sisters*

by Anton Chekhov

translated by Curt Columbus

directed by Jacob Janssen

**April 13 - 23, 2018**

*Growing Up Blue*

by Chloë Martens

directed by Shade Murray

**May 18 - 26, 2018**

**IN THE HEALY THEATRE**

*Seven Homeless Mammoths*

*Wander New England*

by Madeleine George

directed by April Cleveland

**October 20 - 29, 2017**

*Mr. Burns, a Post-Electric Play*

by Anne Washburn

music by Michael Friedman

directed by Jeremy Aluma

**January 26 - February 4, 2018**

*Satyagraha: Gandhi/King*

devised by MFA III graduates

directed by Dexter Bullard

**May 4 - 5, 2017**

*Check the web for performance  
dates and times.*

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