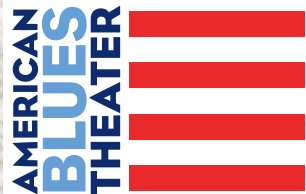


THE COLUMNIST

by David Auburn | directed by Keira Fromm



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PRODUCING ARTISTIC DIRECTOR NOTE



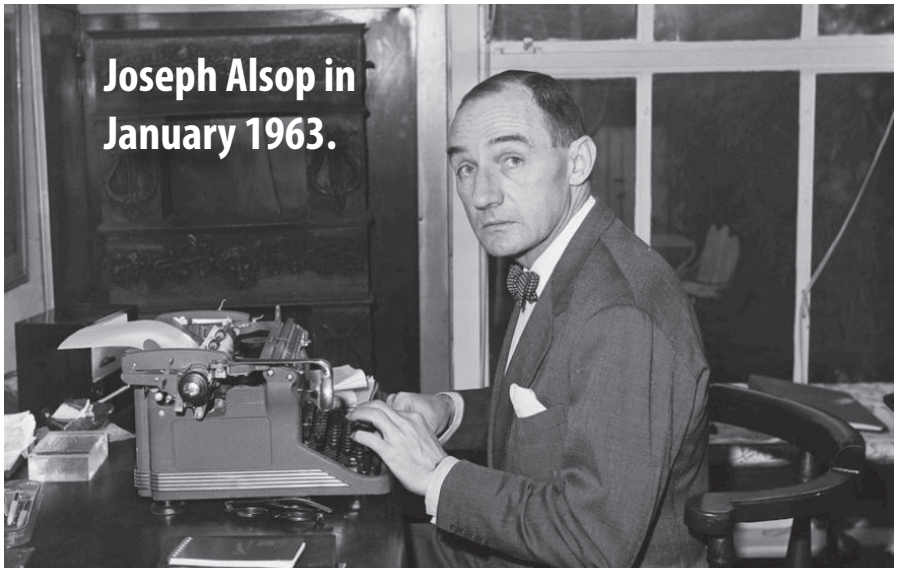
Welcome to American Blues Theater's 31st Season "Define Yourself". We are honored to present the Chicago premiere of *The Columnist* written by Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award winner David Auburn. It is a distinct privilege for our production team to collaborate with Mr. Auburn. To have him sit in rehearsals, accessible throughout the creative process with feedback, and participate with our audience is a singular gift to our storefront theater.

We first read *The Columnist* in 2012 and immediately sought the licensing rights. While unavailable for years, our passion to tell this narrative never waned as it spoke to our mission. American Blues tells stories about the American identity. We were struck by historical figure, American journalist Joseph Alsop's patriotism for his country; his belief that a newspaper column could influence U.S. policy and shape a nation; that his personal life needed to remain private to maintain his professional reputation. We read this script as a poignant reminder of how things were in America.

Five years since that first reading, we have experienced President Obama's second term in office, two years of vitriolic partisan campaigning, news that Russia tried to compromise our democratic process, and the inauguration of President Trump. Many Americans seemingly turned to news outlets that corresponded to their core values with data interpreted to their bias. Regardless of one's political views, there is a column to confirm your belief.

For hundreds of years, unification of the American people has been extraordinarily difficult. Perhaps it is not a politician to unite us, but a journalist – a person who presents the facts neutrally and gently like a salve for our divisive times.

— Gwendolyn Whiteside





What inspired you to tell Joseph Alsop's story?

A few years back I realized I knew very little about the Vietnam War, so I started to read. I went through a long list of titles. The names of the Alsop brothers showed up everywhere and in unexpected places. They were these very influential, now somewhat forgotten, backstage players, and they gave me a lens through which to view the whole era. Joe's personal travails let me look at another subject

I was interested in: the impact of one's emotional vulnerabilities – one's private life – on public action.

Does your writing process differ when tackling historical figures in a drama?

No. The process is the same. Try to understand the people you're writing about as fully as possible. Try to get as much of their complexity and contradictions into the writing as you know how.

Why is this play relevant today?

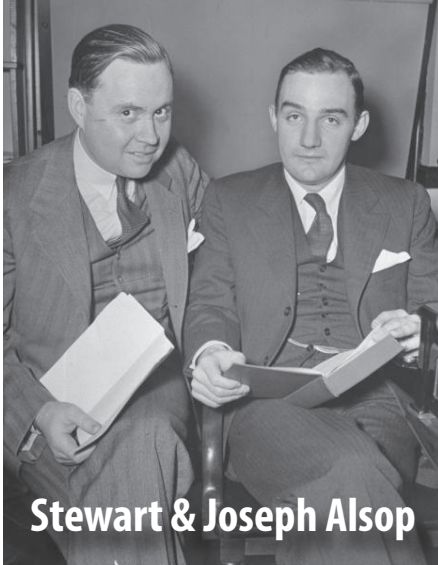
I'm not sure it is! That's up to the audience to decide. That said, I do think one question at the heart of the play – *why do people sometimes cling to terribly damaging ideas, even at the price of their own self-destruction?* – is perennial. We're also concerned more than ever now about the role the press plays (or fails to play) as a gatekeeper, truth-teller, and check on power in a time of political crisis.

VIETNAM WAR AND THE MEDIA

(Excerpt from Britannica.com/event/Vietnam-War)

By 1968, at the height of the war, there were about 600 accredited journalists of all nationalities in Vietnam, reporting for U.S. wire services, radio and television networks, and the major newspaper chains and news magazines. The U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) made military transportation readily available to newsmen, and some took advantage of this frequently to venture into the field and get their stories first-hand. That proximity to the battlefield carried obvious risks, and more than 60 journalists were killed during the war. The Vietnam conflict is often referred to as the "first television war." Film from Vietnam was flown to Tokyo for quick developing and editing and then flown on to the United States. The role of the media in the Vietnam War is a subject of continuing controversy. Some believe that the media played a large role in the U.S. defeat. They argue that the media's tendency toward negative reporting helped to undermine support for the war in the United States while its uncensored coverage provided valuable information to the enemy in Vietnam. However, many experts who have studied the role of the media have concluded that prior to 1968 most reporting was actually supportive of the U.S. effort in Vietnam. The February 1968 assessment by Walter Cronkite, the anchor of the *CBS Evening News* (known as "the most trusted man in America"), that the conflict was "mired in stalemate" was seen by many as the signal of a sea change in reporting about Vietnam.

ABOUT THE ALSOP BROTHERS



Stewart & Joseph Alsop

Joseph Alsop, born in 1910, was the older brother of Stewart Alsop, born in 1914, both of whom would come to be known for their work as political journalists for the *New York Herald Tribune*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, and *Newsweek*. Their mother, Corinne Robinson Alsop, was Eleanor Roosevelt's first cousin, and the Alsops maintained a relationship with the first lady until her death in 1962, despite sometimes breaking with her publicly on issues of policy, or even on issues of fashion and taste.

Joe and Stewart partnered after the war to produce their famous "Matter of Fact" column, which they wrote jointly from 1946 to 1958. It was during this period that the Alsop brothers earned the recognition and level of circulation of two of the most important political newspapermen of the twentieth century.

SCENES IN *THE COLUMNIST*

ACT 1

Scene 1

A hotel room. Moscow. 1954.

Scene 2

Alsop's house in Georgetown. January, 1961.

Scene 3

A bar in Saigon. September, 1963.

Scene 4 & 5

Joe's study. November, 1963.

ACT 2

Scene 1

New York, 1965. An auditorium, backstage.

Scene 2

Joe's study. November, 1965.

Scene 3

Winter, 1967. Outside a church.

Scene 4

Washington. Summer, 1968. The Mall.

Scene 5

Joe's study. Summer, 1968.



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Presents

THE COLUMNIST

Written by **David Auburn**
Directed by **Keira Fromm+**

Scenic Design..... **Joe Schermoly**
Lighting Design..... **Jared Gooding**
Costume Design **Christopher J. Neville***
Sound Design **Christopher Kriz, U.S.A.**
Properties Design..... **Alec Long**
Stage Management..... **Dana M. Nestrick^**

Featuring

**Ian Paul Custer*^, Coburn Goss^, Philip Earl Johnson^,
Kymberly Mellen^, Tyler Meredith, & Christopher Sheard^**

+ Member of Stage Directors & Choreographers Society

* Ensemble member or Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater

^ Member of Actors' Equity Association – the union of professional actors and stage managers

FEBRUARY 17 – APRIL 1, 2017 (previews 2/17 – 2/22)

Originally produced by the Manhattan Theatre Club (Lynne Meadow, Artistic Director; Barry Grove, Executive Producer) at the Samuel J. Friedman Theater on April 4, 2012. Lead support for THE COLUMNIST provided by MTC's Producing Fund Partner Andrew Martin-Weber. Additional support provided by The Blanche and Irving Laurie Foundation on New American Plays Award. Special thanks to the Harold and Mimi Steinberg Charitable Trust for supporting MTC. THE COLUMNIST was developed with the support of Tennessee Repertory Theatre through its Ingram New Works Fellowship and Residency. Manhattan Theatre Club wishes to express its appreciation to Theatre Development Fund for its support.

THE COLUMNIST is presented by special arrangement with Dramatists Play Service, Inc, New York.

American Blues Theater
4809 N. Ravenswood Ave., Suite 221, Chicago, IL 60640
Phone: (773) 654-3103 Box office: (773) 327-5252 AmericanBluesTheater.com

American Blues Theater is a constituent of the Theatre Communications Group, Inc – the national organization for nonprofit professional theaters, the League of Chicago Theaters, Arts Alliance Illinois, and Lakeview Chamber of Commerce.

American Blues Theater operates under agreements between Producers' Association of Chicago Area Theatres, Actors' Equity Association – the union of professional actors and stage managers, Stage Directors & Choreographers Society, and United Scenic Artists of America, Local 829 – AFL-CIO.

CAST (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

Joseph Alsop.....	PHILIP EARL JOHNSON^
Andrei/Philip.....	CHRISTOPHER SHEARD^
Stewart Alsop.....	COBURN GOSS^
Susan Mary Alsop.....	KYMBERLY MELLEEN^
Abigail.....	TYLER MEREDITH
Halberstam.....	IAN PAUL CUSTER*^

* Ensemble member or Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater

^ Member of Actors' Equity Association – the union of professional actors and stage managers

As a courtesy to the actors and your fellow patrons, please turn off your phone before the performance. The taking of photographs and the use of any type of recording device are not allowed in the theater during the performance and is a violation of state and federal copyright laws. Digital media will be deleted and tape or film will be confiscated.

SETTING

Place – various locations
Time – over the span of two decades

The performance runs 2 hours; there is a 10 minute intermission.

PRODUCTION STAFF

Production Manager.....	Sarah E. Ross*
Dialect Coach.....	Eva Breneman
Dramaturg.....	Sarah Illiatovitch-Goldman
Assistant Director.....	Spencer Ryan Diedrick
Assistant to Costumes.....	Rob Onorato
Assistant Stage Manager.....	Shandee Vaughan
Technical Director.....	Nic Belanger
Master Electrician.....	Michael Trudeau*
Scenic Painter.....	Amy Brooks

* Ensemble member or Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater

COMMUNITY SERVICE FOR THE COLUMNIST

American Blues Theater believes it is an honor and duty to serve our community. We raise awareness of other non-profit organizations' great causes through creative collaborations. We proudly collaborate with Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism and The Family Institute. We continue our "Pink Previews" to donate proceeds to The Lynn Sage Foundation for breast cancer research. To enrich your experience, visit AmericanBluesTheater.com.

SEASON SUPPORTERS

American Blues Theater is supported in part by The Davee Foundation, The MacArthur Funds for Arts & Culture at Prince, the Shubert Foundation, The Chicago Community Trust, SMART Growth Grant, Gaylord & Dorothy Donnelley Foundation, IL Arts Council Agency, Anixter Foundation, Actors' Equity Foundation, Northern Trust, Eurex, Benjamin Rosenthal Foundation, Seyfarth Shaw LLP, Blue Cross Blue Shield, and the Chip Pringle Fund. ComEd is the 2016-2017 Season Lighting Sponsor.

SPECIAL THANKS

The biggest Hoosier fans, Cathy Taylor Public Relations, Paula Conrad, Deborah Liverett, The Saints, X-Man, and the staff of Stage 773.

Video production services provided by The Stage Channel. Our ushers are provided by the Saints—Volunteers for the Performing Arts. For more information visit Saintschicago.org or call 773-529-5510.

BIOGRAPHIES



IAN PAUL CUSTER

(*Halberstam*) is a proud Ensemble member at American Blues Theater. Recent American Blues credits: *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!*,

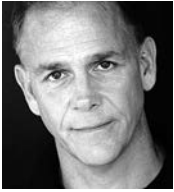
Little Shop of Horrors ("Orin Skrivello", Jeff Nom.—Best Production of a Musical, Midsize), and *Yankee Tavern*. Recent Chicago theatrical credits: *Bad Jews* (Theatre Wit, North Shore Center, Royal George); *33 Variations* (TimeLine Theatre, Jeff Award— Best Production, Midsize); *Annie Bosh is Missing* (Steppenwolf Theatre); *High Holidays* (Goodman Theatre); *To Master the Art* (Broadway Playhouse / TimeLine Theatre); *Strangers, Babies* (Steep Theatre); and *Fiddler on the Roof* (Paramount Theatre). Regional theatrical credits: *Hero: The Musical* (Asolo Rep Theatre), *Cymbeline* (Notre Dame Shakespeare), *Romeo and Juliet* (Cardinal Stage), and *Peter Pan* (360 Entertainment - London, England). Television credits: *APB*, *Empire*, *Chicago Fire*, and *Chicago PD*. Love to Shannon, my friends, and my family for all the support.



COBURN GOSS

(*Stewart Alsop*) is happy to make his American Blues Theater debut. Recent Chicago credits: *The Burials* (Steppenwolf Theatre

for Young Audiences), *Chimerica* (Timeline Theatre), and *The Diary of Anne Frank* (Writer's Theatre). Also with Steppenwolf: *Fake*, *Dead Man's Cell Phone*, *When the Messenger Is Hot* (also Off-Broadway at 59E59), *The Royal Family*, and *Absolution*. With the Goodman Theatre: *The Crowd You're In With* and *Vigils*; as well as *Luce* and *Dying City* with Next Theatre, *Shining City* with Irish Theatre of Chicago and *Freud's Last Session* with CRC Productions at the Mercury Theatre. TV credits: *Empire*, *Chicago Fire*, *Mind Games*, *The Mob Doctor*, *Boss*, *Reconstruction*, *The Chicago Code*, *E/R*, *The Beast*, and *Prison Break*. Film: *The Lucky Ones*, *What Women Want*, *Man of Steel*, and *Batman v. Superman: Dawn of Justice*.



PHILIP EARL JOHNSON (*Joseph Alsop*) This is Phil's first production with American Blues. Past Chicago productions include: *A Christmas*

Story (Paramount); *The Royale, The Big Meal* (ATC); *Danny Casolaro Died For You* (Timeline); *Dance Of Death, Old Glory* (Writers); *Tartuffe, Skylight, The Dead, The Passion Play* (Court); *Talking Pictures, The Actor, Brutality of Fact* (Goodman); *Picasso At The Lapin Agile* (Steppenwolf); *Conquest Of The South Pole* (Famous Door). National Tour: *Angels in America* (originating at Royal George). Recent television: *Chicago Fire, Chicago Med, Empire, Mind Games, and Underemployed*. When not working in Chicago, Phil tours the country with his one man vaudevillian clown act *MooNiE the Magnif'Cent: Juggler, Ropewalker, Foolish Mortal! Gesundheit!*



KYMBERLY MELLEN (*Susan Mary Alsop*) *The Columnist* marks Kymberly's American Blues Theater debut. She has recently been seen as "Ester Franz" in

The Price at Timeline Theatre, where she is also an Associate Artist. She is currently a Visiting Professor at DePaul University after returning to Chicago as Casting Director and Producing Associate at Writers Theatre. In addition to numerous films, commercials, industrials, voice-overs, and narrated books, Kymberly has been seen regionally at The Utah Shakespeare Festival, Court, Northlight, Chicago Shakespeare, Steppenwolf, Marriott Lincolnshire, Ravinia, Peninsula Players, and Pioneer Theatre Company. Kymberly has an MFA degree in Acting from The Theatre School at DePaul University, an MA in Arts Administration from Southern Utah University, and a BFA degree from Brigham

Young University in Music Dance Theatre. A Jeff Award-winner, she was named the *Chicago Tribune's* 2003 "Chicagoan of the Year" for Theater. AEA, SAG- AFTRA. kymberlymellen.com



TYLER MEREDITH (*Abigail*) is thrilled to be making her American Blues Theater debut. Other Chicago credits include: *The Tempest, A*

Midsummer Night's Dream (Chicago Shakespeare Theater); *Spinning* (Irish Theatre of Chicago); *Goldfish* (Route 66 Theatre Company); *Mai Dang Lao* (Sideshow Theatre Company); *Romeo and Juliet* (Teatro Vista); *Celebration* (A Red Orchid Theatre); *Letters Home* (Griffin Theatre Company); *It's a Wonderful Life: The Radio Play* (American Theatre Company); *Twelfth Night, Top Girls, As You Like It* (The Arc Theatre); *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (Muse of Fire Theatre Company); *King John, As You Like It, Romeo and Juliet* (Backroom Shakespeare Project); and has worked regionally with Montana Shakespeare in the Parks. She is a graduate of Interlochen Arts Academy, The School at Steppenwolf, and holds a BFA from the University of Illinois-Chicago. Tyler is an Artistic Associate of Route 66 Theatre Company.



CHRISTOPHER SHEARD (*Andrei/Philip*) is thrilled to be working alongside this great team. Chicago credits include productions with Chicago

Shakespeare Theatre, Windy City Playhouse, *Arcadia* at Writers Theatre, and *Spill* at TimeLine Theatre. He is a company member with Definition Theatre. Regionally, he's appeared in four seasons at American Players Theatre, two at the Great River Shakespeare Festival, and a reading with Ensemble Studio Theatre. Most

recently, Chris appeared in a film produced by Fox on a Hill Productions. He received his BA from Florida State University, his MFA from The University of Illinois PATP, and is represented by Grossman and Jack Talent.



DAVID AUBURN

(Playwright) is an American playwright. He attended the University of Chicago, where he was a member of Off-Off

Campus, and received a 1991 B.A. degree in English literature. Following a one-year fellowship with Amblin Entertainment, he moved to New York City in 1992. Auburn spent two years in the Juilliard School's playwriting program, studying under the noted dramatists Marsha Norman and Christopher Durang. Auburn's first full-length play, *Skyscraper*, ran Off Broadway in 1997. His short play, *What Do You Believe About the Future?*, appeared in Harper's Magazine and has since been adapted for the screen. Auburn is best known for his 2000 play *Proof*, which won the 2001 Tony Award for Best Play, as well as the 2001 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. He has adapted it into a film, which was released in 2005. His play *The Columnist* had its world premiere in a production by the Manhattan Theatre Club on Broadway, running from April 3, 2012 through June 3, 2012 and starring John Lithgow with direction by Daniel Sullivan. Auburn has also been awarded the Helen Merrill Playwriting Award and a Guggenheim Fellowship. Following *Proof*, he wrote the screenplay for the movie *The Lake House*, released by Warner Bros. in 2006. In 2007, he made his directorial debut with *The Girl in the Park*, for which he also wrote the screenplay.

KEIRA FROMM (Director) is a Jeff Award-nominated director, a casting director, and a teacher based out of Chicago. Recent directing credits include: *How the World Began* (Rivendell Theatre Ensemble), *A Kid Like Jake* (About Face Theatre), Luce (Next Theatre), *Charles Ives Take Me Home* (Strawdog), *The How and the Why* (TimeLine Theatre), *Broadsword* (Gift Theatre), and *Fallow* (Steep Theatre). Keira is an Artistic Associate with About Face Theatre. She received her MFA from DePaul University, her BFA from Boston University, and is a proud member of SDC. Keira is a frequent guest director at DePaul as well as Roosevelt University. Next up, she is directing the Chicago premiere of *Bright Half Life* with About Face Theatre in the spring, and *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Gynecologic Oncology Unit at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Hospital of New York City* with Route 66 Theatre Company in the summer.

JOE SCHERMOLY (Scenic Design) is excited to make his American Blues Theater debut. As a Griffin ensemble member his credits include *Pocatello*, *Winterset*, *Titanic*, *Spelling Bee*, *Flare Path*, *Punk Rock*, *Port*, *Constant Wife*, and more. Other credits include: *Constellations* (Steppenwolf); *Hand to God*, *Samsara* (Victory Gardens); *The Watson Intelligence*, *Mr. Burns*, *Seven Homeless Mammoths*, *Completeness* (Theatre Wit); *Travesties*, *Henry IV* (Remy Bumpo); *American Idiot* (The Hypocrites); *Stupid Fucking Bird*, *Idomeneus*, *The Ugly One* (Sideshow); *The Seafarer*, *Lay Me Down Softly* (Seanachai). Joe studied set design at Northwestern University and has received two After Dark Awards and three Jeff Award Nominations. www.joeschermoly.com

JARED GOODING (Lighting Design) is excited to be working with American Blues for the first time. A graduate of The Theatre School at DePaul University with a BFA in

Lighting Design and native of Houston Texas, design credits include the Associate Design of *Lookingglass Alice* (Lookingglass), serving as the Lighting Assistant for *The Wiz: Live* on NBC, designs for Timeline Theater, The Hypocrites, About Face Theatre, MPAACT, Windy City Playhouse, Pegasus Theatre, Next Theatre, Congo Square, Citadel Theatre, and Fleetwood Jourdain Theatre. He spends his free time as a DJ in area bars.

CHRISTOPHER J. NEVILLE (*Costume Design*) is a proud Ensemble member of American Blues Theater. Previous Blues costume designs include *Hank Williams: Lost Highway* (asst), *The Rainmaker*, *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!*, *Looking Over The President's Shoulder*, and *Dutchman/TRANSit*. Christopher stitched and assistant designed at Victory Gardens Theater, Lookingglass Theatre Company, Chicago Opera Theater, Theatre at the Center, and Signal Ensemble. Along with balancing design work, Christopher teaches yoga across the Chicagoland area. He trained at Peninsula Players Theatre as a production intern and received his BFA in Theatre Design & Technology from Oakland University in Rochester, MI. www.cjnevelledesigns.com

CHRISTOPHER KRIZ (*Sound Design*) is a composer and sound designer based in Chicago. Recent Chicago credits include *The Magic Play*, *Carlyle* (Goodman); *Constellations* (Steppenwolf Theatre Company); *Hand To God*, *The House That Will Not Stand* (Victory Gardens Theater); *The Life Of Galileo* (Remy Bumppo Theatre Company); *Gem of The Ocean* (Court Theatre); *The Grapes Of Wrath* (Gift Theatre); *Sunset Baby* (TimeLine Theatre Company); and *Mothers and Sons* (Northlight Theatre). Recently, Lifeline Theatre produced his new musical, *Soon I Will Be Invincible*. Regional credits include *Roz and Ray* (Seattle Repertory Theatre) and *Sticky Traps*

(Kansas City Repertory Theatre). Mr. Kriz has been honored with two Jeff Awards and 11 nominations. He is a member of United Scenic Artists 829. christopherkriz.com.

ALEC LONG (*Properties Design*) is happy to return to American Blues Theater on this production, his second show with them. His other credits include, *Big Love* (Triton College), *Christmas at Christine's* (Silk Road Rising), *Roz and Ray* (Victory Gardens), *Later that Same Evening* (Northwestern University), *Chagrin Falls* (Agency Theatre), *A Room* (A Red Orchid), *The Bardy Bunch* (Mercury), *Comedy of Errors* (Commission Theatre), *UltraAmerican* and *Mosque Alert* (Silk Road Rising), *Dutchman and Transit* (American Blues Theater), *Thee Trinity* (Polemic Theatre), *The Grapes of Wrath* (Gift Theatre), *Susannah* (Northwestern University), *A Little Longer and Farther Away* (New Colony), *Dreams of the Penny Gods* (Halcyon), and *The Things We Keep* (Arc Theatre).

EVA BRENEMAN (*Dialect Coach*) is a voice and dialect coach who works in the Chicago region. Most recent Chicago credits include *Pygmalion* (Remy Bumppo); *King Charles III* (Chicago Shakespeare); *A Disappearing Number* (Timeline); *One Man Two Guvnors* (Court Theatre); *Discord* (Northlight); *Arcadia* (Writers Theatre); *The Compass* (Steppenwolf); *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* (Chicago Children's Theater); *The Little Foxes* (Goodman Theatre); *Posh* (Steep Theatre); and *Blood Wedding* (Lookingglass Theatre Company). Regional credits include *Death of a Salesman*; *The African Company Presents Richard III*; *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *The Island* (American Repertory Theatre); *Love's Labour's Lost* (Actor's Theatre of Louisville); *Around The World In 80 Days* (Centerstage/Kansas City Repertory); and *Mamma Mia!* (National Tour/Las Vegas). Television credits include *Betrayal* and *The Chicago Code*. Eva is an associate artist at TimeLine Theatre Company.

SARAH ILLIATOVITCH-GOLDMAN

(Dramaturg) is a playwright and dramaturge from Toronto who now lives and works in Chicago. Selected playwriting credits include: *This Is Not a Cure for Cancer* and *Crime Scene Chicago: Let Hope Rise* (Collaboraction Theatre Company), *Hospital* (Sketchbook Festival, Edmonton Fringe Festival), *We Three* (Cue6 Theatre), *Pieces* (RBC Tarragon Emerging Playwright Award finalist), and *The War Photographer* (Eugene O'Neill National Playwright's Conference semi-finalist, American Blues Theater Blue Ink semi-finalist). Selected dramaturgy credits include: *A Splintered Soul* (ARLA Productions), *To Be Alone With You* (My Broadway World Nominee 2015 for best production and best actor), *Desperate Dolls* (Strawdog Theatre Company), and *The Centre of Everything Civilized* (Toronto Fringe Festival). Sarah is an adjunct professor of playwriting at the University of Illinois in Chicago and is a Script Supervisor for world premiere plays at The Steppenwolf Theatre Company. Love you Brian.

DANA M. NESTRICK (Stage Manager)

Credits include: *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Hank Williams: Lost Highway, I Do! I Do!*, and *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs* (American Blues Theater); *after all the terrible things I do* and *Kid Like Jake* (About Face Theater); *The curious case of the Watson Intelligence*, *Santaland Diaries* (2009-2011 & 2015), *Mr. Burns*, and *THIS* (Theatre Wit); *Port Authority*, *The Overcoat*, and *A Minister's Wife* (Writer's Theatre); *Teddy Ferrara*, *World of Extreme Happiness*, *Romance*, and *Binky Rudich or the Revenge of the Space Pandas* (Goodman Theatre); *Mamma'z Boyz* and *Our Lady of the Underpass* (Teatro Vista); *The Big Meal*, *Welcome to Arroyos*, and *Speech & Debate* (American Theater Company); *Slueth* (Buffalo Theatre Ensemble); *The Mystery of Irma Vep* (The Provincetown Repertory); *Topdog/Underdog*, *A Christmas Carol* (2002-2005), *Metamorphoses*, *The Mystery of Irma*

Vep, *Tennessee William's Eight by Tenn*, *Trip to Bountiful*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Constant Star*, and the world premiere of *Tea at Five* starring Kate Mulgrew (Hartford Stage); *Steel Magnolias* and *A Flea in Her Ear* (Arizona Repertory Theatre); *Side by Side by Sondheim* (Music Theatre Arizona). Dana is also a costume craft artisan, currently working at Steppenwolf Theatre.

SARAH E. ROSS (Production Manager) is a proud Ensemble member of American Blues Theater and serves as Production Manager since last season's *Little Shop of Horrors*. She is a freelance scenic, costumes, and properties designer based in Chicago and has worked with Paramount Theatre, The Second City, The Joffrey Ballet, Shattered Globe, 16th Street Theater, Writer's Theatre, Theater Wit, and Chicago Shakespeare Theater. Regionally, she has designed scenery for Peninsula Players Theater, TheaterSquared, Helen Hocker Theater, and Summer Studio Theater Company. She received Jeff Awards for costume design for *Tobacco Road* (American Blues Theater), scenic design for *The Rainmaker* (American Blues Theater), and several nominations for scenic and puppet designs. Sarah is a proud member of Local USA 829 and the Society of Properties Artisans Managers.

SPENCER RYAN DIEDRICK (Assistant Director) is working with Keira and American Blues for the first time, and couldn't be prouder. Other assisting credits include productions at TimeLine, Strawdog, Raven, and Lifeline. His work has also been seen at the side project, Greenhouse, Collaboraction, Otherworld, the Neo-Futurists, and the Back Room Shakespeare Project. He serves as a proud company member of (re)discover theatre, and is the Co-Artistic Director of Blue Goose Theatre Ensemble.

ROB ONORATO (*Assistant to Costume Design*) is a writer and theatre worker. He grew up in New England, and currently calls Chicago home. He has worked as a freelance assistant stage manager with companies such as American Blues Theater, About Face, and Pavement Group; he also works with Writer's Theater. Outside Chicago, he has worked with Nantucket Theater Workshop, Goodspeed Musicals, and the New York International Fringe Festival.

SHANDEE VAUGHAN (*Assistant Stage Manager*) is thrilled to join American Blues Theater once again after a successful holiday run of *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!* Shandee is a freelance stage manager from Mesa, Arizona. She recently stage managed Wildclaw Theatre's *Deathscribe* at Steppenwolf, as well as the Adrienne Archt Center in Miami. Last summer, she was the ASM for American Blues' Jeff nominated production of *Little Shop of Horrors*. In tandem, Shandee also assistant directed and stage managed *Fight Quest* (Otherworld Theatre) which remains one of most unique shows she has helped bring to life. Other selected credits include: *Jacob Marley's Christmas Carol* (Festival 56), *Klinton Christmas Carol* (Commedia Beauregard), and *TEXAS!* (Texas Panhandle Heritage Foundation). Shandee graduated with her BA in Theatre from West Texas A&M University and enjoys playing the ukulele in her free time. shandeevaughan.com

MICHAEL TRUDEAU (*Master Electrician*) is a proud Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater. He's thrilled to be working with American Blues this season. Blues credits include: *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Side Man*, *Yankee Tavern*, and *Looking Over the President's Shoulder*. Other Chicago credits include master electrician for UIC, Shattered Globe, Emerald City Theater, and Theater at the Center. He has also worked

as a follow spot operator for *Mary Poppins* and *Miss Saigon* with Paramount Theatre in Aurora, IL and *A Christmas Carol* at Goodman Theater. During the summer months, he is the Master Electrician at Peninsula Players Theater in Fish Creek, WI. <http://mrtrudeau23.wix.com/mtrudeaudeesigns>

GWENDOLYN WHITESIDE (*Producing Artistic Director*) is a proud Ensemble member of American Blues Theater and has served as Producing Artistic Director since 2010. Under her leadership, American Blues has nearly doubled the size of its Ensemble, added 28 Artistic Affiliates, and diversified its base of artists. She created the nationally-recognized annual *Blue Ink Playwriting Award*, *Blueprint Development* for new work, implemented community service into the company's mission, and adapted the arts education program *The Lincoln Project* for Chicago Public Schools which serves over 2,000 students annually. She led American Blues through its 2009 rebirth and built the operational budget from zero to \$825,000 in six (6) years. Whiteside served numerous panels for the National Endowment for the Arts and sat on the national Board of Directors for Network of Ensemble Theaters. She's a graduate of Northwestern University (cum laude), The School of the Art Institute of Chicago (MFA), and a Kellogg Executive Scholar in Nonprofit management (Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University). She was nominated for "Chicagoan of the Year" in Chicago Magazine and named in Newcity's annual Players list numerous times. In six years, six American Blues' productions won or were nominated for best production by the Joseph Jefferson Award committee. She's received 11 Joseph Jefferson Awards, Citations, and nominations as an actress and Producing Artistic Director. Her favorite performances include Jeff Award for Solo Performance (*Grounded*), Jeff Award nomination for Solo Performance (*the K of D*), *Mary's Wedding* (Top 5 performances in Indianapolis), *Collected Stories* (Best Actress

Broadway World Chicago Award), and 6 years as “Mary Bailey” (*It’s a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!*). She’s the recipient of two (2) After Dark Awards and numerous Broadway World Chicago Awards and nominations.

JACLYN HOLSEY (*General Manager*) is a proud Ensemble member and General Manager of American Blues Theater. She’s an Equity stage manager and worked with Chicago theaters such as TimeLine, Victory Gardens Theater, Teatro Vista, Rivendell Theatre Company, Collaboraction, and here at American Blues Theater since 2001. American Blues Theater credits: *Looking Over the President’s Shoulder, Hank Williams: Lost Highway, Grounded, Collected Stories, Illegal Use of Hands, Tobacco Road, Half of Plenty, St. Scarlet*, and five years of *It’s*

a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago! She’s worked with American Blues since 2005 as a stage manager, then an Artistic Affiliate, Ensemble member, Business Manager, and now General Manager. Before coming to American Blues, she worked as the Regional Operations and Programs Coordinator for First Nonprofit Insurance. Jaclyn also served as the Executive Assistant at Victory Gardens Theater under the leadership of Marcie McVay from 2003-2008. She graduated from Otterbein College with a BA in Theater and received her Certificate in Nonprofit Management through the University of Illinois at Chicago. She is currently working towards a Masters of Nonprofit Administration from North Park University. She sends her love to her husband, son, and daughter for the love and joy they bring her every day.

ABOUT AMERICAN BLUES THEATER

Winner of American Theater Wing’s prestigious 2016 National Theatre Company Award, American Blues Theater is a premier arts organization with an intimate environment that patrons, artists, and all Chicagoans call home. American Blues Theater explores the American identity through the plays it produces and communities it serves. American Blues Theater follows three guiding values both on and off its stages – to be accessible, responsible, and true.

Our diverse and multi-generational artists have established the second oldest professional Equity Ensemble theater in Chicago. Our 37-member Ensemble has over 532 combined years of collaboration on stage. As of 2016, our theater and artists received 186 Joseph Jefferson Awards and nominations that celebrate excellence in Chicago theater and over 31 Black Theater Alliance Awards. Our artists are honored with Pulitzer Prize nominations, Academy Awards, Golden Globe Awards, Emmy Awards, and numerous other accolades.

American Blues Theater is committed to developing the classic plays and musicals of tomorrow. Our new work development consists of a variety of programs – including world and regional premieres, the *Blue Ink Playwriting Award*, *Blueprint* commissions, and *Ripped: the Living Newspaper Festival* of new short-plays. More than half of our mainstage productions are world and Chicago premieres.

DEFINITION OF “ENSEMBLE”

An Ensemble theater is a group of individuals dedicated to collaborative creation and committed to consistently working together over years to develop a distinctive body of work and practices. Ensemble members, both artists and administrators, are empowered to help shape their theater’s artistic direction and organizational structure.

HISTORY

BUILT BY THE AMERICAN BLUES FAMILY

American Blues Theater was founded in July 1985 by a director, playwright, designer, and actor. The company dedicated itself to new and classic American plays. Richard Christiansen of the Chicago Tribune cited American Blues in his editorial "Chicago Theater Forges New Standards of Glory." In August of 1993, the company leased a warehouse on Byron and Lincoln. In 38 days, James Leaming led a community-based 90+ volunteer crew to transform the space into an intimate 134-seat theater. From 1994-1997, the Ensemble was lauded with numerous Joseph Jefferson Awards and After Dark Awards.

LEADERSHIP FROM OUTSIDE THE ENSEMBLE

From 1997-2009, the company was led by Artistic Directors from outside of the Ensemble. Under the leadership of Brian Russell and Damon Kiely ('97-'07), the theater's name changed to American Theater Company (ATC), the mission statement was revised, and the business expanded greatly. In 2008, under new management, the Ensemble theater practice was dismantled. After 18 months of talks with the new management, all four Founders and every Ensemble member prior to 2008 chose to leave the ATC organization in March 2009 citing "major administrative and artistic differences".

BLUE SKIES AHEAD

The Ensemble reformed under its original name American Blues Theater. Founding Board members reconstituted the Board, giving tremendous support and guidance. Ensemble member Gwendolyn Whiteside became the Producing Artistic Director. Whiteside ushered in the annual *Blue Ink Playwriting Award*, *Blueprint Development*, implemented community service into the company's mission, and adapted the arts education program *The Lincoln Project* for Chicago Public Schools that serves over 2,000 students annually.

"Feels like home." – Terry Teachout, *The Wall Street Journal*

"One of our favorites in Chicago!" – Dean Richards, *WGN*

"Ensemble founded one of Chicago's most venerable off-loop theaters." – Chris Jones, *Chicago Tribune*

ENSEMBLE - FOUNDED IN 1985

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If you are interested in joining the Board of Directors at American Blues Theater, please call (773) 654-3103.

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American Blues Theater
Administrative office
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