



20<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY PRODUCTION



*It's a  
Wonderful  
Life*

Live in Chicago!



# FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



Welcome to the 20th anniversary of our holiday tradition *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!* Frank Capra's story resonates with audiences as strongly today as its 1947 premiere. Likewise, our staged production draws passionate returning patrons and creates new fans annually. Over the years, we've delighted 60,000+ people and featured the work of 40+ Ensemble Members and Artistic Affiliates.

The story's themes are timeless and universal. We feel comforted by the annual reminders - **to value kindness, to support our communities, to uplift others, to caution against greed, and to protect those struggling with despair.** This story also reminds us of the fragility of life. Capra's brilliant sentiment – "Each man's life touches so many other lives. When he isn't around, he leaves an awful hole, doesn't he?" – hits our souls deeper this year.

As Americans, we've experienced much in this 21st century so far: 9/11 attacks; formation of Wikipedia, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, & Homeland Security; four presidents – including the first Black president; four vice-presidents – including the first female, Black & South Asian American vice-president; stock markets plunge, recession, & housing collapse; increased weather-related disasters; Pluto's planetary classification & reclassification; Higgs boson discovered; increased mass shootings; wars in Afghanistan & Iraq; reckoning with our country's formation and systemic inequities; COVID-19.

If you feel exhausted by this abridged list, it's understandable.

And yet, *here you are* – resilient and full of love to give. *Here you are* – survivor of both historic events and personal challenges. *Here you are* – reading this message and making plans for your future.

You are here.

Your gracious spirits and open hearts are equally important to this Chicago tradition. Your presence is a gift to the Blues family.

Remember, no one is a failure who has friends.

- Gwendolyn Whiteside



presents  
from the Frank Capra movie *It's a Wonderful Life*  
based on the Philip Van Doren Stern story *The Greatest Gift*

# It's a Wonderful Life Live in Chicago!

directed by **Gwendolyn Whiteside\***  
music directed by **Michael Mahler\***

- Scenic Design ..... **Grant Sabin\*, U.S.A.**
- Lighting Design ..... **Katy Peterson Viccellio**
- Costume Design ..... **Christopher J. Neville\***
- Original Score ..... **Austin Cook\***
- Jingle Composer ..... **Michael Mahler\***
- Sound Design ..... **Rick Sims\*, U.S.A.**
- Set Dressing & Properties Design ..... **Elyse Dolan\***
- Assistant Lighting Designer ..... **Rachel West\***
- Production Stage Manager ..... **Shandee Vaughan\*^**

\*Ensemble member or Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater  
^Member of Actors' Equity Association

**NOVEMBER 26, 2021 - DECEMBER 31, 2021**  
Opening Night: December 3, 2021

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 Greater Ravenswood 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

Mary Bailey .....	Audrey Billings*^
Joseph .....	Manny Buckley*^
Violet .....	Dara Cameron*^
Harry .....	Yuchi Chiu
Clarence/Mr. Potter .....	Joe Dempsey*^
George Bailey .....	Brandon Dahlquist^
Foley .....	Shawn J. Goudie*
Announcer/Pianist .....	Michael Mahler*^
Clarence/Mr. Potter .....	John Mohrlein*^

\* Ensemble member or Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater  
 ^ Member of Actors' Equity Association

The taking of photographs and the use of any type of recording during the performance is not allowed and is a violation of state and federal copyright laws.

## SETTING

1944. A radio broadcast from the WABT Studio on Lincoln Avenue in Chicago.

The performance runs 90 minutes with no intermission.

## PRODUCTION STAFF

Production Manager .....	Shandee Vaughan*
Assistant Stage Manager .....	J.G. Smith*
Publicist .....	Cathy Taylor PR
Technical Director .....	Michael Trudeau*
Master Electrician .....	Rachel West*
Projection Associate .....	G. "Max" Maxin

## COMMUNITY SERVICE

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. For *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!*, we honor one teacher per performance with a "Teacher Tribute." We proudly partner with NAMI Chicago, USO, and U.S. Dept. of Veteran Affairs. We offer complimentary tickets to CPS teachers, the American Foundation of Suicide Prevention (IL chapter), and American Indian Center.

## IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE SUPPORTERS

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## SPECIAL THANKS

We give our deepest thanks to the biggest Hoosier fans, Michael Brosilow, Paula Conrad, Marty Higginbotham, Michael Levinson, Queen of Hearts, X-Man, and the staff of Victory Gardens Theater.



*"All you can take with you is that which you've given away."*

To make a donation or legacy gift, contact Director of Development Sarajane Johnson - SarajaneJ@AmericanBluesTheater.com or call (773) 654-3103



## PROFILES



**AUDREY BILLINGS** she/her (*Mary Bailey*) is a proud Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater. She's thrilled to reprise her role as Mary Bailey (and others). (And in person – Hooray!) Previous credits include: Christmas Eve in the long-running production of *Avenue Q* at the Mercury Theater, Mary Magdalene in *Jesus Christ Superstar*, Antonia in *Man of la Mancha*, and Hodel in *Fiddler on the Roof*. She has worked at the Paramount Theatre, Marriott Theatre Lincolnshire, Drury Lane Oakbrook, Theatre at the Center, Lookingglass Theatre Company and is a proud member of Actor's Equity. Much Love to Nick, and Happy Holidays to you and yours.



**MANNY BUCKLEY** he/him (*Joseph*) is a proud Ensemble member of American Blues Theater. He is a Chicago-based director, actor, playwright and teaching artist. Blues credits include *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!*, *Six Corners*, *Looking Over the President's Shoulder* (Jeff Award Nomination-Best Solo Performance), and *Dutchman/TRANSit* (Black Theatre Alliance Award Nomination). Manny toured nationally as "Satchel Paige" in the original production of *The Satchel Paige Story*, and appeared in *The Father* (Helen Hayes Award Nomination) at Studio Theatre in Washington, D.C. He originated the role of "Carson" in *Hit*

*the Wall*, which sold out extensions in Steppenwolf's Garage Rep. Select Chicago credits include *The Brothers Size*, *1984*, and *Of Mice and Men* (Steppenwolf); *Dorian* (House Theater); and *Love's Labour's Lost* (Chicago Shakespeare Theatre). Mr. Buckley is the recipient of a Black Theatre Alliance, and Black Excellence Award. He most recently directed *Kingdom*, an audio drama, with Broken Nose Theatre.



**DARA CAMERON** she/her (*Violet*) is a proud Ensemble member of American Blues Theater and is grateful to be performing back onstage at her

artistic home. Favorite credits include *The Spitfire Grill* (Jeff nomination) and *Little Shop of Horrors* (American Blues Theater); *Old Jews Telling Jokes* (Royal George and Off-Broadway); *The Secret of My Success* (Paramount Theatre); *Elf*, *Hero* (Jeff nomination), *South Pacific*, *October Sky*, *Sister Act*, *City of Angels*, *Cinderella*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Fiddler on the Roof* (Marriott Theatre); *Addams Family* (Mercury Theater); *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* (Theatre at the Center), and *Sunset Boulevard*, *Seussical*, and *Buddy – The Buddy Holly Story* (Drury Lane Theatre). She is a graduate of Northwestern University and a member of Actors' Equity. She is married to actor Michael Mahler, and when they aren't singing in Bedford Falls together, they are busy chasing after their stinker of a toddler, Ezra!

## PROFILES



**YUCHI CHIU** he/him (*Harry*) is a Chicago-based actor, teacher, singer/songwriter, and musician. Born and raised in Los Angeles, he moved to Chicago to

study at Northwestern University and subsequently taught high school special education for five years. Yuchi then transitioned into acting by enrolling in classes at Acting Studio Chicago as well as completing the ACADEMY program at Black Box Studio. Now, Yuchi proudly serves as an instructor at Black Box. Outside of acting, he can be found bartending, exercising, reading/writing, and trying to get his dog to actually return balls while playing fetch. Credits include *Baked! The Musical* (Underscore Theatre); *How Do We Navigate Space* (Strawdog Theatre); *BJ's Mobile Gift Shop* (Sundance Film Festival 2021); *The Miscellany* (The Passage Theatre). Yuchi is represented by DDO Artists Agency and is excited to join the *It's a Wonderful Life* family!



**BRANDON DAHLQUIST** he/him (*George Bailey*) is happy to return to Bedford Falls for his 5th season. Broadway: *Bronx Bombers*.

Regional: *As You Like It* (Guthrie Theater); *The Glass Menagerie* (Milwaukee Repertory); *A Little Night Music*, *1776* (American Conservatory Theatre); *Shakespeare in Love*, *Rhinoceros*, *1776* (Asolo Repertory);

*12 Angry Men* (Maltz Jupiter Theater); *Dogfight*, *City of Angels* (San Francisco Playhouse); *Sunday...George*, *Murder on the Nile*, *Lombardi* (Peninsula Players). Chicago: *Secret of My Success* (Paramount Theatre), *Miracle the Musical* (Royal George Theater), *A Little Night Music*, *Arcadia*, *Oh Coward!* (Writers Theatre); *Cabaret*, *Meet Me in St. Louis*, *Sugar* (Drury Lane Oakbrook); *Assassins*, *Sunday...George*, *Best Musical!* (Porchlight Music Theater). On Camera: *Difficult People* (Hulu), *Chicago P.D.* (NBC), *The Chi* (Showtime). A popular photographer, Dahlquist is on social @ IG: @thats\_on\_brandon & @BrandonDahlquistPhotography. For Mutti & Mom.



**JOE DEMPSEY** he/him (Clarence/ *Mr. Potter*) is a proud Affiliate of American Blues Theater and has appeared for in *Scapin* and *Pledge of Allegiance*. His

last show was *The Steadfast Tin Soldier* at Lookingglass before the world ended. He has worked at Goodman, Steppenwolf, Northlight, Court, Chicago Shakespeare, Drury Lane Oak Brook, and Paramount among many other Chicago theatres as well as Milwaukee Rep, St Louis Rep, Centerstage (Baltimore), and City Theatre (Pittsburgh). TV work includes *Somebody Somewhere*, *Chicago Fire*, *ER*, and *Early Edition* and film work includes several indies you've never seen.

## PROFILES



**SHAWN J. GOUDIE** he/him (*Foley*) is proud Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater. He is excited to be returning for his thirteenth season of *It's a Wonderful Life:*

*Live in Chicago!*, because where else are you told it is ok to smash plates and slam doors. Shawn is also a founding member of The Dolphins of Damnation sketch comedy group and a Stormtrooper in the 501st Legion. He would like to thank his amazing wife, their endlessly curious children, and his loving parents.



**MICHAEL MAHLER** he/him (*Announcer/Pianist, Music Director, Jingle Composer*) is a proud Ensemble member of American Blues,

most recently seen as the Announcer/Pianist/Music Director in Blues' live streaming production of *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!* Past Blues productions: *Buddy – The Buddy Holly Story* (Jeff Award – Best Music Direction), *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Hank Williams: Lost Highway*, and *Side Man*. Other recent roles include The Baker in *Into the Woods* (Writers); Jim Hardy in *Holiday Inn*, and Jack Singer in *Honeymoon in Vegas* (Marriott Theatre). Michael co-wrote the songs for the Netflix movie *My Little Pony: A New Generation* and contributed additional lyrics to Cameron Mackintosh's most recent Broadway production of *Miss Saigon*. Other works as a composer/lyricist include *The Secret of My Success*,

*Miracle* (Jeff Award – Best New Work), *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, *October Sky*, *The Man Who Murdered Sherlock Holmes* (Jeff Award – Best New Work), and *Hero* (Jeff Award – Best New Work). Michael is married to fellow Ensemble Member Dara Cameron and proud father to their son Ezra.

### IN MEMORY



**JOHN MOHRLEIN** he/him (*Clarence/Mr. Potter*) was a proud Ensemble member of American Blues Theater for 25 years. 20 years as "Clarence/Mr. Potter,"

and he loved getting to revisit and reinvent these characters year after year. At American Blues, he appeared in *Half of Plenty*, *It's a Wonderful Life*, *A View from the Bridge*, *Strictly Dishonorable*, *American Dead*, *The Hairy Ape*, *A Lie of the Mind*, *Endgame*, *American Buffalo*, *The Skin of Our Teeth*, *One Day Only*, *The Threepenny Opera*, *A Stone Carver* (Jeff nomination for Best Actor, After Dark Award for Outstanding Performance); and directed *Catch-22*. Other credits: *The Glass House* at the Art Institute of Chicago; nine productions at Goodman Theatre; and *Cripple of Inishmaan*, *Heart of a Dog*, and *Murder of Cardinal Tosca* at Northlight Theatre. His extensive television and film work includes *Golden Boy*, *Good Night Sweet Wife*, *Dillinger*, *Killing Floor*, *Early Edition*, *Crime Story* (recurring role), *Untouchables*, *Devil's Dominoes*, *Stranger Than Fiction*, *No Place to be Somebody*, *Hellcab*, *Hero*, and *Cold Justice*.

## PROFILES

**GWENDOLYN WHITESIDE** she/her (*Artistic Director, Director, Mary Bailey - 12/29 & 12/31 @ 4:30pm*) is a proud Ensemble member of American Blues Theater and has served as Artistic Director since 2010. In her tenure, she created the nationally-recognized *Blue Ink Playwriting Award* and new work development program, implemented community service into the company's mission, and adapted the arts education program *The Lincoln Project* for Chicago Public Schools serving nearly 4,000 students annually during a traditional school year. She led American Blues through its reorganization in 2009, building the operational budget from zero to \$1 million. She secured the company's first-ever operating reserve and endowment. Whiteside served on numerous panels for the National Endowment for the Arts and sat on the Board of Directors for Network of Ensemble Theaters and League of Chicago Theatres. She's a graduate of Northwestern University (BS), The School of the Art Institute of Chicago (MFA), and a Kellogg Executive Scholar in Nonprofit management (Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University). As a producer, she's received 14 Joseph Jefferson nominations or

awards. As an actress, she's received 5 Joseph Jefferson Awards, Citations, and nominations; 2 After Dark Awards; and 1 Broadway World Chicago Award.

**GRANT SABIN** he/him (*Scenic Design*) is a proud Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater. He's excited to be back with the *It's a Wonderful Life* team for his 13th year. A native of rural Illinois, Grant blends his rural roots with urban art. He's a recipient of the 2015 Michael Maggio Emerging Designer Award. He is known throughout Chicago for his keen eye in capturing atmospheric detail and his ability to design "impressively executed sets" on a storefront-theater budget. His designs have been seen at Northlight, Victory Garden, Steppenwolf, Next, The Royal George, McCarter Theater NJ, Overture Center WI, Theatre Wit, Gallagher Bluedorn IA, American Blues, ATC, The House, The Hypocrites, Christina Isabelle Dance, The Seldoms Dance, and A Red Orchid. He was nominated for a Joseph Jefferson award for his designs of American Blues Theater's *Yankee Tavern*, A Red Orchid's production of *The Sea Horse*, and Dog & Pony's production of *Mr. Marmalade*. He was recently named one of the Top 50 Players in Chicago Theatre by *New*



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**(773) 654-3103**

## PROFILES

*City Magazine*. Grant is currently a full-time faculty member at Columbia College Chicago.

**KATY PETERSON VICCELLIO** she/her (*Lighting Design*) is delighted to return for her 16th year as Lighting Designer to *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago*. Katy has designed lighting and scenery throughout the United States for over 20 years. Favorite Chicago shows include *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!* with American Blues; *Playing With Fire* and *I Am My Own Wife* (Jeff nomination) with BoHo Theatre, and seven seasons of Lighting/Production Design for *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. She holds a B.A. from The University of Texas and M. Arch from The Ohio State University, and practices architecture in Columbus, Ohio, where she lives with her husband, son, two dogs, and a fish. Her first building as a project architect won an AIA Ohio Honor Award and was featured in *Metropolis* magazine.

**CHRISTOPHER J. NEVILLE** he/him (*Costume Design*) is a proud Ensemble member of American Blues Theater. He is elated to be back this holiday at Bedford Falls. Previous Blues costume designs include *Hank Williams: Lost Highway* (assistant), *The Rainmaker*, *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!*, *Looking Over the President's Shoulder*, *Dutchman/TRANSit*, and *The Columnist*. Christopher stitched and assistant

designed at Victory Gardens Theater, Lookingglass Theatre Company, Chicago Opera Theater, Theatre at the Center, and Signal Ensemble Theatre.

**RICK SIMS** he/him (*Sound Design*) is a proud Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater. He has composed and designed sound for numerous Chicago-area theaters, including Steppenwolf Theatre, Lookingglass Theatre Company, American Blues Theater, Congo Square Theatre, Writers Theatre, Lifeline Theatre, Griffin Theatre, Chicago Children's Theatre, The Hypocrites, House Theatre of Chicago, Court Theatre, American Theater Company, Victory Gardens Theater, Raven Theatre, Steep Theatre, Northlight Theatre, and About Face Theatre. His additional credits include The Getty, Boston Playwrights' Theatre, Arden Theatre Company, Playwrights Horizons, Actors Theatre of Louisville, and Portland Playhouse. Rick won Jeff Awards for Sound Design for *Moby Dick* and *Hepheastus* (Lookingglass Theatre Company), a Black Theatre Alliance Award for *Brothers in the Dust* (Congo Square Theatre), and has received several nominations for both awards. Rick also wrote the book, music, and lyrics for *Hillbilly Antigone* at Lookingglass Theatre Company, where he is an Artistic Associate.

## PROFILES

**ELYSE DOLAN** she/her (*Set Dressing & Properties Design*) is a proud Ensemble member of American Blues Theater where she is also the Associate Producer. Outside of her enthusiasm for decorating Christmas trees, she's primarily a Director. Here at Blues she has directed several short plays in past editions of *The Ripped Festival*; directed staged readings in the annual *Blue Ink Festival*; and has been Assistant Director on a handful shows including *Six Corners* and *Little Shop of Horrors*. Other recent directing credits include the Zoom reading of *Other Rockpools* at The New Coordinates, the Chicago premiere of *If/Then* at Brown Paper Box Co., and she was two weeks away from opening *Nine* at Blank Theatre Company at the time of the pandemic shut-down. Her directing work has been seen across Chicago at The New Coordinates, Broken Nose Theatre, Prop Thtr, Commission Theatre, Babes with Blades, 20% Theatre Company, and more. Elyse holds a B.A. from Denison University.

**SHANDEE VAUGHAN** she/her (*Stage Manager, Production Manager*) is a proud Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater. After spending the last year and half managing all things virtual, Shandee is ecstatic to be physically back in the room with her Blues family! Blues credits: *Roan @ the Gates*, *Five Presidents*, *The Spitfire Grill*, *The Absolute Brightness of Leonard Pelkey*, *On Clover Road*, *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago* (2016 & 2018-2020), *Flyin' West*, *Buddy - The Buddy Holly Story*, *The Columnist*, and *Little Shop of Horrors*. Other recent Chicago credits include: *Time Is On Our Side* (About

Face Theatre), *Deathscribe X* and *Night in Alachua County* (WildClaw Theatre), and *The Woman in Black* (WildClaw Theatre). Shandee is a proud member of Actors' Equity Association.

**MICHAEL TRUDEAU** he/him (*Technical Director*) is a proud Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater and is thrilled to be working with Blues again. Past Blues credits include Technical Director for *It's A Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!* (2015-2017), *Yankee Tavern*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, and *Side Man*, among others. Outside of American Blues, he works full time at Northwestern University as the Lighting and Sound Technician for the theater department, and is also the Master Electrician at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Enjoy the show and Happy Holidays!

**RACHEL WEST** she/her (*Assistant Lighting Designer*) is a proud Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater. She is thrilled to work on *It's a Wonderful Life* actually LIVE again and in a new role this year! She has been serving as the Master Electrician for American Blues since 2018. Rachel is the Lighting Supervisor for Porchlight Music Theatre where she recently designed *Nonsense* as part of their Revisits series of lost musicals. She works with The Black Ensemble Theater, Mercury Theater, MCA Chicago, Actors Gymnasium and volunteers with the Maine-Niles Association of Special Recreation teaching theater to individuals with special needs. She is a Chicago-area native and a graduate of Boston University School of Theatre.



**If you or someone you know is considering suicide, please contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255)**



## 20 YEARS OF *IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE*

More than 60,000 patrons have enjoyed our holiday classic since 2002. As we celebrate 20 years of *It's a Wonderful Life*—and celebrate our return to live, in-person theatre—we remember our past and look toward the future.

The American Blues Theater Ensemble has staged "It's a Wonderful Life" as a radio play at various Chicago venues and events since 2002, including: 1909 Byron, Theater on the Lake, Logan Square (2002 - 2008); Victory Gardens Biograph Theater (2009 - 2012); Greenhouse Theater Center (2013 - 2016); Stage 773 (2017 - 2019); virtually via Zoom (2020); and now — we're returning to the Victory Gardens Biograph Theater for 2021!

Pictured below are some of the artists who have brought this story to life over the past 20 years, including Audrey Billings, Ashley Bishop, Manny Buckley, Dara Cameron, Casey Campbell, Ian Paul Custer, Brandon Dahlquist, Jenni Fontana, Shawn Goudie, James Joseph, Kevin Kelly, Zach Kenney, Ed Kross, James Leaming, Michael Mahler, John Mohrlein, Camille Robinson, Stef Tovar, and Gwendolyn Whiteside.



## ABOUT FRANK CAPRA AND "IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE"



Frank Capra and Jimmy Stewart on the set of "It's a Wonderful Life"

Frank Capra (May 18, 1897 – September 3, 1991) was an Italian-born American film director, producer and writer who became the creative force behind some of the major award-winning films of the 1930s and 1940s. Among his leading films were "It Happened One Night" (1934), "Mr. Deeds Goes to Town" (1936), "You Can't Take It with You" (1938), and "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington" (1939). During World War II, Capra served in the U.S. Army Signal Corps and produced propaganda films.

After World War II, Capra's production company bought the film rights to Philip Van Doren Stern's self-published short story, "The Greatest Gift" (1943), which became the basis for "It's a Wonderful Life" (1946). Although the film initially received mixed reviews and was unsuccessful at the box office, it became a Christmas classic after it was put into the public domain, which allowed it to be broadcast without licensing or royalty fees.

Today "It's a Wonderful Life" is considered one of the greatest films of all time. It was nominated for five Academy Awards, including Best Picture, and has been recognized by the American Film Institute as one of the 100 best American films ever made. Frank Capra, Jimmy Stewart, and Donna Reed have all cited "It's a Wonderful Life" as their favorite movie.

### THE BEDFORD BOX

From our home to yours, The Bedford Box has been specially prepared for you! Delivered to your home via mail or picked up at the box office, this box has all the charm of your favorite production, including a vintage copper *Wonderful Life* ornament, "The Greatest Gift" short story and companion audiobook read by Broadway's Adrienne Walker, "Martini's Specials" beverage recipe book, and much more.

Visit [AmericanBluesTheater.com](http://AmericanBluesTheater.com) to order the Bedford Box for the holidays!



## ABOUT AMERICAN BLUES THEATER

Winner of American Theatre Wing's prestigious 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 these guiding values both on and off its stages—**collaboration, courage, inclusive, equity, service, and integrity**

We are Chicago's **second-oldest AEA Ensemble theater**. As of 2021, our theater and artists received 221 Joseph Jefferson Awards and nominations that celebrate excellence in Chicago theater and 40 Black Theatre Alliance Awards. Our artists are honored with Pulitzer Prize nominations, Academy Awards, Golden Globe Awards, Emmy Awards, and numerous other accolades. Our artists work throughout the nation - including Broadway and regional theaters - and loyally return to our stage.

American Blues Theater is committed to developing the classic plays and musicals of tomorrow. More than half of our mainstage productions are world and Chicago premieres. Our new play development consists of a variety of programs – including world and Chicago premieres, the nationally-recognized *Blue Ink Playwriting Award*, commissions, *The Room* staged readings, *The Garage* concerts, and annual *Ripped Festival* of new short-plays.

**We believe it is an honor and duty to serve our community.** We raise awareness of other non-profit organizations' commendable causes through creative collaborations. We hold food drives, distribute promotional materials, offer free post-show discussions, provide complimentary tickets, honor military personnel, hold exclusive performances for underserved communities, and raise awareness for children's surgeries. We donate proceeds from "Pediatric Previews" to St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital.

American Blues Theater is your Chicago home for bold, exceptional, and relevant performances. **Your ticket purchases and donations help us make Chicago the first city in all our hearts.**



*Merry Match*

A group of anonymous **MERRY DONORS** (not Mr. Potters) will match dollar-for-dollar all contributions made to American Blues Theater through Dec. 31, 2021.

Donate safely online at **AmericanBluesTheater.com** or mail your check to:

American Blues Theater  
4809 N Ravenswood Ave, Suite 221  
Chicago, IL 60640

American Blues Theater is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. Your contribution is tax deductible to the extent of the law.

# ENSEMBLE UPDATES

**Manny Buckley**—currently performing in *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!* See program bio.

**Dara Cameron**—currently performing in *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!* See program bio.

**Elyse Dolan**—Set Dressing/Properties Designer for *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!* See program bio.

**Jared Gooding**—lighting designer at 5+ shows through spring across the United States. Current Chicago work can be seen in *A Recipe for Disaster* in the loop.

**Philip Earl Johnson**—performing his one-man show *MoonIE the Magnif'Cent* in CT, WI, OH and FL for the last 6 months as well as planning further personal narrative comedy shows.

**Lindsay Jones**—currently composing/ designing *Slave Play* at the August Wilson Theatre on Broadway, as well as *Need Your Love* at Cincinnati Playhouse In The Park and *Radio Golf* at Gulfshore Playhouse. Current audio drama work includes *King Lear* for Next Chapter Podcasts and *The Imagine Neighborhood* for the Committee For Children.

**Steve Key**—recently seen in *The Good Fight* and *FBI: Most Wanted* and presently he can be seen on stage at Steppenwolf in *Bug*.

**Ed Kross**—recently appeared on *Chicago Med* and *Fargo*, and can currently be seen onstage in *Sister Act* at The Mercury Theater.

**Warren Levon**—recently worked with Elgin Community College sound designing their fall show *Baltimore* by Kristen Greenridge.

**Michael Mahler**—currently performing in and Music Director for *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!* See program bio.

**John Mohrlein**—currently performing in *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!* See program bio.

**Christopher J. Neville**—Costume Designer for *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!* See program bio.

**Suzanne Petri**—currently working on Cabaret benefits honoring Bob Moreen, performing in the Chicago Cabaret Holiday Gala and Audio Describing *The Snow Queen* at the House Theatre.

**Chuck Smith**— goes into rehearsals in December for August Wilson's *Gen of the Ocean* at the Goodman Theatre.

**Wandachristine**—currently writing and adding her voice to Audiobooks while caring for her 91 year-old Mother.

**Gwendolyn Whiteside**—Director of *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!* See program bio.

See page 16 for full Ensemble listing.



## AMERICAN BLUES THEATER ENSEMBLE

Dawn Bach	Lindsay Jones	Chuck Smith
Matthew Brumlow	Steve Key	Wandachristine
Manny Buckley	Ed Kross	Wendy Whiteside
Dara Cameron	Warren Levon	
Casey Campbell	Michael Mahler	<i>Emeritus</i>
Darren Canady	Heather Meyers	Rick Cleveland
Austin Cook	John Mohrlein	Dennis Cockrum
Ian Paul Custer	Christopher Neville	Lauri Dahl
Elyse Dolan	Cara Parrish	Kevin Kelly
Jared Gooding	Suzanne Petri	James Leaming
Marty Higginbotham	Camille Robinson	William Payne
Philip Earl Johnson	Editha Rosario-Moore	Carmen Roman

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Manny Buckley	Rama Ranganathan	Burt X. Rosenberg,
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Kimberlee Herold	Michael Weatherspoon	Chip Pringle, <i>In</i>
Keith Karlson	Wendy Whiteside	<i>Memoriam</i>
Michael Levinson		

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

## ARTISTIC AFFILIATES

Simone Allen	Zach Kenney	Zachary Stevenson
Eric Backus	Cisco Lopez	James Still
Audrey Billings	Manny Ortiz	Christina Telesca
Ada Cheng	James Ortlieb	Michael Trudeau
Liz Chidester	Alexander Ridgers	Denzel Tsopnang
Joe Dempsey	Eileen Rozycki	Shandee Vaughan
Paul Deziel	Grant Sabin	Adrienne Walker
Joe Foust	Richard Shavzin	Lily Walls
Tom Geraty	Rick Sims	Rachel West
Shawn Goudie	J.G. Smith	

## STAFF

### LEADERSHIP

*Artistic Director*  
Gwendolyn Whiteside

*Accounting Services*  
Yvonne Afable  
Priya Mishra

*Resident Intimacy Designer*  
Charlie Baker

### ARTISTIC

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*Illinois NFP Audit & Tax, LLP*  
Abdullah Khan  
Alfredo Rodriguez, Jr

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Francisco Lopez

### ADMINISTRATION

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Sarajane Johnson

### PRODUCTION

*Production Manager*  
Shandee Vaughan

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*Photography*  
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*Video/Media*  
The Stage Channel

*Graphic Design*  
Natalie Bontumasi  
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## LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

American Blues Theater is located in Chicago, the traditional homelands of the Council of the Three Fires: the Odawa, Ojibwe, and Potawatomi Nations. City of Chicago was founded by the son of an enslaved African woman who was regarded as the first non-Indigenous settler. His name was Jean Baptiste Point du Sable.

Many other nations including the Myaamia, Wea, Ho-Chunk, Menominee, Thakiwaki, Meskwaki, Kiikaapoi, and Mascouten peoples also call this region home. This land has long been a center for Indigenous people to gather, trade, and maintain kinship ties. Today, Chicago is home to one of the largest urban American Indian communities in the United States, and the country's oldest urban-based Native membership community center, the American Indian Center Chicago (AIC).

American Blues Theater makes this acknowledgment as part of our commitment to dismantling the ongoing legacies of settler colonialism.

*To learn more about land acknowledgments visit [nativegov.org](http://nativegov.org).*

*To learn more about & engage with the American Indian Center Chicago, visit [aicchicago.org](http://aicchicago.org).*

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