ROUND HOUSE BACKSTAGE ROUND HOUSE THEATRE DONOR NEWSLETTER WINTER 2024-2025 ISSUE 26













DEAR FRIEND,

We write this letter during the Student Matinee of *What the Constitution Means to Me*, and while the circumstances surrounding this play have changed since we opened this show the day after the residential Inauguration, we are buoyed by the energy, passion, and strength of these future leaders attending the show today.

Speaking of future leaders, the Teen Performance Company will produce the 23rd annual Sarah Metzger Memorial Play, *Gallows Humor*, at the end of this month. These students are the theatremakers of the next generation, and they have created one of the most impressive (and timely) pieces of theatre that we have seen come from this program. What's particularly special about this play is that it is the first play we've commissioned by a teen playwright. Learn more about this year's Sarah Metzger Memorial Play on page 3. And don't miss the introduction to our full company on pages 4-6. Discover how Round House shaped the paths of two past members of the Teen Performance Company and see what they are up to now on page 7.

We're thrilled to offer a donor-exclusive interview with the director of *What the Constitution Means to Me*, Morgan Gould. You may have seen that our production features new, never-before-seen material, making the play more relevant to the realities that affect how the Constitution shapes our lives in 2025. We are particularly proud to note that while *What the Constitution Means to Me* was the most produced play in the United States in 2024, Round House is the only theatre in the world that has been allowed to update the script to make the play itself a living document. Read about how new material was added to an already iconic play on pages 8-9.

We can't forget about what a joy it was to produce the world premiere of *A Hanukkah Carol, or GELT TRIP! The Musical*, after first announcing it back in 2023. Be sure to take a look back at our Inside Look and Opening Night on pages 12-13.

In case you missed it, we are excited to produce the annual Broadway in Bethesda Gala on May 10. The 2025 Gala will feature Tony Award-winner Renée Elise Goldsberry. Sponsorships for this incredible evening are on sale now. Be sure to print or screenshot the save-the-date on page 14!

So much has happened already in our 2024-2025 Season, and we're only halfway through! We look forward to seeing you at *Gallows Humor*!

See you there,

RYAN RILETTE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

ED ZAKRESKI MANAGING DIRECTOR

Cover: Photo of Kimberly Gilbert (Heidi) in What the Constitution Means to Me by Kent Kondo. Photo of the cast of A Hanukkah Carol, or GELT TRIP! The Musical by Margot Schulman.

GALLOWS HUMOR WILL BE ROUND HOUSE'S FIRST COMMISSIONED PLAY BY A STUDENT PLAYWRIGHT. HOW DID IT COME ABOUT?

"It would be cool to have a show that was actually written by a teen for teens." After eating Christmas dinner with their family in 2023, Teen Performance Company (TPC) member Fin Davis sent Round House Director of Education Danisha Crosby an email suggesting that Round House consider commissioning a teen playwright for TPC, as an opportunity for the program to truly be "a full teen production."

Traditionally, Round House commissions a professional playwright to write a new play every year specifically for TPC; every other role in the company—director, designers, stage manager, actors, etc—is filled by teenagers, with mentorship from adult theatre professionals. For some time, however, Round House's Artistic and Education teams have discussed exactly what Fin was suggesting; the most recent strategic plan even included developing a Teen Playwright program, with the goal of cultivating teenaged writers who could eventually write plays for TPC to perform.

Fin's own interest in playwriting began with TPC. In addition to rehearsing and performing a play, TPC members spend the year observing Round House rehearsals, engaging with our staff and artists, and taking masterclasses in a wide array of theatre disciplines. During the 2022-2023 Season, playwright Dani Stoller (*Girlhood*) led a masterclass in playwriting for the company. Fin attributes this class to their own interest in playwriting: "I was introduced to a form of telling stories that wasn't just long-form writing and wasn't just performing something that was written by someone else. Playwriting is creating a world and making the instructions for how people can use my writing to put something on a stage that's meaningful. Though I always thought of myself as a writer, I never knew that playwriting would bring me so much joy. From December 2022 to now, playwriting has been my life and my way of spending my free time."

After receiving Fin's email, Danisha suggested that they share some of their work; Fin reflected on their own experience with the company and what stories teens might want to tell. "Lockdown in school" was one of the ideas they jotted down. Not long after, Fin found themself stuck in the school weightroom during an actual lockdown, and they decided that there really was a story to tell in that experience.

Fin wrote a first draft of the play (titled Gallows *Humor*) and shared it with Danisha, who read it along with Artistic Director Ryan Rilette and then-Associate Artistic Director Naysan Mojgani. Not only was it remarkably strong for a first draft, but it was exactly the kind of play that Round House prizes for TPC: a story that allows teenagers to be taken seriously and say something that matters to them. When the group met with Fin to discuss the possibility of commissioning the piece for the Teen Performance Company, it was immediately apparent that Fin truly was a playwright. "Fin seemed so shy and quiet when they first entered the room, and as soon as they started talking about their work, they just blossomed with confidence and clarity. It was so obvious that this was the right path for them," recalled Naysan.

Gallows Humor is a wonderful achievement for TPC and for Round House; not only does it achieve the full dream of what the Teen Performance Company can be, but it also represents Round House's educational mission of developing the next generation of theatre artists. (And as a bonus: it's an excellent play.)

Gallows Humor runs February 28 – March 2.

Giorgia Toti (Miranda), Fin Davis (Gemma), and Lillian Aguirre (Tiny) in *GIRLHOOD*. Photo by Danisha Crosby

THE 2024-2025 TEEN PERFORMANCE COMPANY



We're thrilled to announce this season's Teen Performance Company! This season's company is comprised of 22 high schoolers from all around the DC Metro region. We wanted to get to know them a bit better, so we asked them about their favorite theatrical experience.

CREATIVE TEAM



FIN DAVIS

Playwright 12th grader at Eleanor Roosevelt HS Second year with TPC

My favorite theatrical experience was acting in 2023's Sarah Metzger Memorial Play, *Girlhood*. It felt like the first time where I was truly acting, even though I have been performing for 12 years. *Girlhood* was the first time where I put in a lot of work and study to understand the characters that I was playing. In *Girlhood*, I felt truly professional and it was amazing.



LARK JEFFERS Director

10th grader at Montgomery Blair HS Second year with TPC

Theatre for me began as a fun days-off activity at the Round House Education Center. Then, when I was 6, I got the chance to audition for the mainstage production of *Cat on A Hot Tin Roof*. Then, when I was cast, it was my first real theatrical experience. Everyone was so welcoming towards me and wanted to see me succeed (even

INTERESTED IN JOINING TPC?

APPLICATIONS for director, designer, dramaturg, stage manager and run crew for the 2025-2026 Company are now open!

AUDITIONS will be held in September 2025

Visit **RoundHouseTheatre.org/TPC** to

if I was onstage only three times in the whole show). The support that the Round House team provided for me is what made me want to continue doing theatre and helped spark my love for theatre.



EVVALEEN ROBINSON

Dramaturg/AD 10th grader at Montgomery Blair HS Second year with TPC



STEVIE LEWIS Stage Manager

11th grader at the Nora School Second year with TPC

My favorite theatrical experience was ASMing last year's Sarah Metzger Memorial Play, *Spring Break*.



BRIGHIDA ABELLA REYNOLDS

Assistant Stage Manager 10th grader at Montgomery Blair HS First year with TPC

My favorite theatrical experience was acting in my first Shakespeare play, *Julius Caesar*, and getting to play a conspirator.



ANA EWACHIW

Scenic/Props Designer 11th grader at Montgomery Blair HS Third year with TPC

My favorite theatrical experience was in last year's Sarah Play, hearing audience members point out different details in my projections work.



ALEXANDER WEISS

Scenic/Props Designer 11th grader at Albert Einstein HS First year with TPC My favorite theatrical experience was seeing *Phantom of The Opera* on Broadway. It was my first time seeing a Broadway show and it inspired me to keep creating as a designer.



EVE CINTRON

Costume Designer 12th grader at Bethesda-Chevy Chase HS Second year with TPC

My favorite theatrical experience has been volunteering to do makeup and working on costume changes for Silver Creek's middle school production of *SpongeBob Jr.*



ABBY GRAEFF

Lighting Designer 12th grader at the Nora School Second year with TPC

My favorite theatrical experience was stage managing a group of seven-year-olds for a production of *The Snow Queen* at Creative Cauldron.



LOIS PROELLER

Sound Designer 12th grader at Bethesda-Chevy Chase HS Second year with TPC

My favorite theatrical experience was working with Round House Theatre over the off season and spending six straight hours cramped around a table with a bunch of theatre electricians cleaning lights and talking. I got lots of advice and heard lots of bad jokes.



ASTER KUKLOVA

Run Crew/Board Op 12th grader at Quince Orchard HS Second year with TPC

CAST



RHEA RANCHHOOJEE Olivia 9th grader at Barrie School

A READE

ADETOLA AKINTADE Gina

10th grader at Thomas S. Wootton HS First year with TPC



SCOUT AMAKALI Charlie

10th grader at Albert Einstein HS Second year with TPC

My favorite theatrical experience was here at Round House, when I saw *The Tempest*, I was so mesmerized by the actors and the set. I was so excited to see more productions here.



ALLISON EVANS

Emma 12th grader at Washington-Liberty HS Second year with TPC

My first memory was playing one of the pigs in *The Three Little Pigs* in Kindergarten, but the most fruitful memory I have of theatre was being the curtain puller for the musical *Legally Blonde* in 6th grade. I loved the experience, and I remember always looking back to curtain call and hoping one day I would be the one performing on the stage.



ACE KIPPOLA

Michael 10th grader at Thomas S. Wootton HS First year with TPC

My favorite theatrical experience has been performing as Theo in the musical *Pippin* at American University.



OMARI RUSSELL

First year with TPC

Theo 11th grader at Washington Waldorf School First year with TPC

My favorite theatrical experience was being set crew for Rockville Musical Theatre's production of *Young Frankenstein* by Mel Brooks.



KENAI SANDERS Alex

12th grader at John F. Kennedy HS First year with TPC

My favorite theatrical experience was doing the Fresh Prince scene about Will's dad.



JULIA TCHIKINE

Abby 10th grader at Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart First year with TPC



GIORGIA TOTI

Casey 12th grader at Montgomery Blair HS Second year with TPC

My favorite theatrical experience was seeing a performance of *The Hours* in Amsterdam.



PARKER VAN HUFF Sophie

10th grader at Albert Einstein HS First year with TPC

When I was a kid (9 years old) I did *Sweeney Todd* and all of the teens in the cast got nightmares, except me... A 9-YEAR-OLD.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

CHECKING IN ON ROUND HOUSE EDUCATION ALUMS

LAURA COLE RILEY, former Round House camper, teaching artist, and Sarah Metzger Memorial Play stage manager, spent over a decade with Round House Theatre. The Sarah Play was Laura's introduction to Round House with the 2005 production of *The Crucible*, directed by Rebecca Graber. The Education Department staff convinced her to return as a camper, and then when she graduated high school in 2007, she popped in to say hi and walked out with a job. She held nearly every role there is in Summer Destinations over the next ten summers. Laura also taught after-school, spring break, Days Off!, and push-in classes with kids from 3-years-old to 18. Laura is now in her ninth year teaching elementary music with Montgomery County Public Schools, and she spends as much time as possible with her incredible partner, friends, and family.

I joke sometimes that Round House raised me. Stage managing the Sarah Play taught me organizational skills I desperately needed at the time; as a camper, I learned self-soothing techniques I still use; teaching in Summer Destinations, I learned about being a professional and gained tons of experience that applies to my daily life in and out of work - not to mention life-long friendships. Round House even inspired me to choose the path I'm on now. I was in my final semester of a vocal performance degree, performing opera professionally in multiple states with clear steps forward, when I realized I was spending the whole year looking forward to my

summer teaching job with Round House. I graduated, got my teaching license, and got my first full time teaching job at a school I already knew because I'd taught literacy-through-theatre classes there with Round House! Now I'm nine years in and delighted to be currently hosting a Round House Theatre class in my classroom."

ANNA BROSOWSKY was a member of Round House's Teen Performance Company from 2017 to 2021 and is now in her third year at McGill University studying psychology and management. She joined TPC as an assistant stage manager for *Sloppy Firsts* and quickly fell in love with the program and community. She

then stage managed *Hear. Eye. Stand.* before directing *Freak* and *How the Moon Would Talk* in her junior year. Since her time with TPC, Anna has continued to be an active member of the theatre community. At McGill, she has stage managed productions of *Hair* and *Legally Blonde* and most recently directed a sold-out run of *Company*. Anna also made her professional stage management debut in 2023 with the world premiere play *Webster's Bitch* at Playhouse on Park in West Hartford, CT.

AURA

I firmly believe that Round House is the reason I'm still involved in making theatre today. When I joined as an ASM in my freshman year of high school, I knew I loved theatre, but I didn't know anything about what it took to make it happen or how I wanted to be involved. TPC changed all of that for me, as it has for so many other students who were lucky enough to participate in the one-of-a-kind program. The knowledge, community, and mentorship that I got in my four years at Round House continue to impact me and inform my choices, creative and otherwise. I am immeasurably grateful for Round House for being my creative home throughout high school and for welcoming me back with every visit."

Heidi Schreck premiered *What the Constitution Means to Me* in 2017, followed by the Off-Broadway premiere in 2018, the Broadway premiere in 2019, and a tour beginning in early 2020. The version currently available via streaming was recorded during the 2019 Broadway run.

UPDATING WHAT THE CONSTITUTION MEANS TO ME FOR 2025

LIVING DOCUMENT ... ":

A few things have happened since then.

People

A11

Round House's production of the play—opening eight miles from Capitol Hill the day after Inauguration—presented a significant opportunity to update the text and bring it forward to 2025. Director Morgan Gould—a longtime friend and collaborator of Heidi's (as well as the playwright and director of Round House's 2023 smash *Jennifer Who Is Leaving*)—sat down with Dramaturgical Advisor Naysan Mojgani to discuss the how and why of making those updates.

NAYSAN MOJGANI: We're producing this play in a very different moment than when it was written. How has that felt, to be working on it post-election?

MORGAN GOULD: I love this piece, and I feel like It's so

important to have it again now. When the election happened and it went... a certain way, I wasn't shocked, but I was devastated, and I sent an email to the cast and designers pointing out how it's even more important to do this play because it speaks to exactly why he was elected. And it's scary to talk about right now as he goes back into office. But it also feels urgent and true. There's a line in the play about the Ninth Amendment "leaving room for the future self," and the play does that too. But now we're in the future that the play predicted. And that feels scary but also-in a weird wayhopeful, because these aren't new things. He's a symptom, he's not the disease. The disease goes way, way back.

There's a line in the play about the Ninth Amendment 'leaving room for the future self,' and the play does that too. But now we're in the future that the play predicted.

NM: Even before the election—however it ultimately turned out—we knew the play would benefit from being brought forward in time. Can you tell us a bit about that thought process?

MG: There are a few tracks we were thinking about. One is Heidi. She played the role as herself: she is Heidi. And here we have an actor who's going to come out and say "Hi. I'm Heidi," but it's supposed to be real extemporaneous speech.

> So, what does it mean for an actress to make a real relationship with the audience, that feels authentic and real, but is actually not her personal stories. Not her words. So that was something we were thinking about-how to make that feel as close to Kim as possible, so that she wasn't trying to play "Heidi," because that feels weird. Heidi's added this delightful moment in the play where the actress gets to introduce herself. And then, this play talks so much about reproductive rights, so Dobbs was obviously a big thing to address. Part 1 used to end with a recording of Ruth Bader Ginsburg saying her famous "when there are nine," about having nine women in the court, and I thought "Well, we have Amy Coney Barrett now, so which nine women do you want?" So we felt like that needed an update. And that might be the place to hold space for

Dobbs: the question that Heidi poses there is that you'd have to trust the people interpreting the Constitution, which is, of course, our Supreme Court. That was our thinking when Heidi and I were talking about changes. Now that we have seen the court slide the way that it has, it just didn't feel right to celebrate the court in that moment; it felt right to *talk about the court* at that moment.

NM: What about the debate?

MG: Unfortunately, there are a lot more examples to back up a lot of the arguments Heidi and the previous debaters

developed: they talk a little bit about "maybe there'll be political violence." Well, we've now lived through January 6th, so we for sure know there is, so we got to talk about that. Two presidents who didn't get the popular vote, that's something we can talk about that Heidi wouldn't have been able to say. Gerrymandering, voter suppression... They were always true then too, but I feel like now, it's more in the Zeitgeist. And then, just the little touches that I think, Heidi as an actor would appreciate - it's supposed to be extemporaneous speech and she developed it that way. So, if that sentence doesn't fit exactly in Kim's mouth, okay yeah, let's change it to this. Each debater

It's a Pulitzer Prizenominated play. I don't want to mess that up. I just want to be a gentle chiropractor

NM: Finally, what was the actual process of putting those changes in? Obviously, there's a playwright who isn't in the room but whose name is on the play, so...

MG: I went through and was like, "hey, I'd love to change this, I'd love to change this," and she went through with me and was like, "well, actually, that's why this is like that. So,

you shouldn't change it." So that was super helpful, just to understand the parameters of what could change or shouldn't change. The biggest changes are the debate (just because that's supposed to be a current moment), the legionnaire speech, and a couple things when she sets up the show-Rachel Hauck is great and her set was great, but she didn't design this set. So, we just added a thing where she says "the original production was designed by my friend Rachel, but this one was designed by my friend Shoko." Let's lie as little as possible. So, holding really close to "what was Heidi's intention?" Not what is my political intention now, but what was Heidi's intention then? And

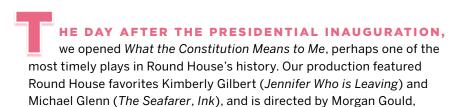
gets to make an analogy of what they think of the Ninth Amendment, and we tailored one to each debater based on what they like. Also, the legionnaire has a monologue about masculinity that for the original production, Mike Iveson and Danny Wolohan each had their own speech that Heidi developed with them. So, I developed one with Michael Glenn. It's this moment where you get to meet the actor who's playing the legionnaire, and it felt weird to meet "the actor who's playing the guy who used to play the Legionnaire." So, Heidi gave me permission to just remove a layer of that meta-ness and just meet Michael Glenn.

NM: I love his monologue.

MG: I actually love that monologue so much. We had a twoand-a-half-hour conversation on the fourth day of rehearsal, where I barely knew him. Michael was so generous. We talked about a wide variety of things, then I went home and pulled out the things I thought would be evocative of the question of "what is masculinity?" Some things his son is going through and things he went through as a teenager... It's really awesome that Michael shared all of that and really great and awesome of his son and his wife to approve of him doing it on stage. He said he had a profound conversation with his son, and it really changed the way that they have related to each other. Hopefully men who see the show, especially dads of sons, see that and see there is a way to actually reach back and say, "This is what being a man's like. And it doesn't have to be that way." how do we change it to only make it more that intention for today, if Heidi were writing it right now. It was never about "ooh, what's a cool new thing we could do?" Because the structure of this play is iron-fucking-clad. If I pull a thread and ruin that, I'll die, because it's a perfect play. It's a Pulitzer Prize-nominated play. I don't want to mess that up. I just want to be a gentle chiropractor: we haven't

had an adjustment in a few years, what's that look like? And of course, there's lots of statistics that Heidi highlights herself in the script, saying "please update this." So, there was a lot of Googling to make the statistics. Thank God for our dramaturg Lauren Halvorsen.

WHAT THE CONSTITUTION MEANS TO ME INSIDE LOOK AND OPENING NIGHT



At the Inside Look, Artistic Director Ryan Rilette discussed with Morgan Gould what this play means in 2025, when so much has changed since it was written in 2017. Morgan spoke about her history with the play, her friendship with Heidi Schreck, and the new material our production is adding, with the blessing of Heidi (see page 8-9 for an interview with Morgan about these changes). We heard from the actors about how they connect with the piece, and we heard from the sound and costume designers about how their designs serve the story.

We opened on January 21, just 32 hours after the presidential inauguration, and the evening was a resounding success. We were joined by local politicians, actors and designers from previous shows, press, and donors. We also heard from Michael Rowny, who through the Melissa Blake Rowny Fund for Artistic Development has helped Round House purchase artist housing this season.

ATING EXPLORATION

JAN 15 - FEB 16, 2025

Photos by Kent Kondo and Cameron Whitman photography

playwright and director of Jennifer Who is Leaving.



Morgan Gould (Director) and Michael Glenn (Mike)

Delaney Bray (Sound Designer) and Fadekemi Laniyonu (Debater)

The cast and creative team of *What the* Constitution Means to Me

What the Constitution Means to Me Inside Look



Morgan Gould (Director) and Emily Gleeson

Michael Rowny

Michael Glenn (Mike), Todd Scofield, Artistic Director Ryan Rilette, Maboud Ebrahimzadeh, and Sophia Early

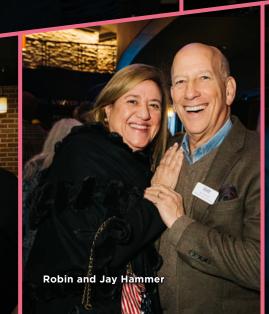
Laura Roulet-Hernandez & Rafael Hernandez Mayoral (Show Sponsors) and Ana & Carlos Roa

Judy & Michael Mael

Katherine Davis and David Hantman

SAWYER STAGE

Joe Hale, Leslie Grizzard, and Cathy Bernard

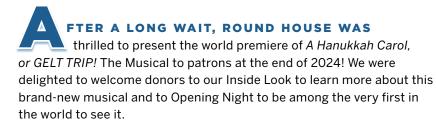


WOME



Councilmember Marilyn Balcombe and Holly Mancuso

A HANUKKAH CAROL, OR GELT TRIP! THE MUSICAL INSIDE LOOK AND OPENING NIGHT



At our Inside Look, we heard from the creators about the long journey this musical took, from a 10-minute play to the musical you were able to see last year. We heard about what inspired the show, the various changes that took place over the years, and some of the pieces that didn't stick around by the time the show was finalized. The actors spoke about the unique challenges that a world premiere faces in the rehearsal room, and finally we got the chance to hear some of the songs that would feature in the show!

Opening Night was a joy-filled evening, full of laughter, celebration, and excitement. The theatre was completely packed with donors, artists, press, friends, and family. The show had come a long way since it was first pitched to Round House during the pandemic, and Opening Night was a celebration of all that hard work.

Photos by Kent Kondo and Cameron Whitman photography



Artistic Director Ryan Rilette, Director Marlo Hunter, and Show Creator Harrison Bryan



Director Marlo Hunter and her children

Leo Zickler, Linda Ravdin, Judy Zickler, and Sherry & David Smith (Show Sponsors)



The cast of A Hanukkah Carol



Doug Robinson, Genevieve Dornemann, Bonnie & Alan Hammerschlag (Show Sponsors), and Dramaturg Gabrielle Hoyt





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The cast, crew, and design team of A Hanukkah Carol

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Katie Luke, Show Creator Harrison Bryan, Alyson Ryan Kogan, and Gail & David Fuchs

Meg Hauge, Amy Austin, and John Hauge



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