

ROUND HOUSE BACKSTAGE

ROUND HOUSE THEATRE
DONOR NEWSLETTER
FALL 2024
ISSUE 25

SOJOURNERS



A HANUKKAH CAROL



EDUCATION



ROUND
THEATRE
HOUSE

GREETINGS FROM OUR LEADERSHIP



DEAR FRIEND,

It's hard to believe that we're already well into the 2024–2025 Season at Round House when in many ways it feels like we're just getting started. It's always a delight to take you backstage with us to share how far we've come and to look forward to what's next.

It's not a Round House summer without an amazing array of summer camps! This summer we welcomed nearly 800 students spanning grades K-12 over 10 weeks of camp across three Round House facilities. From our youngest friends acting out animal antics and discovering uncharted territories, to middle grade students exploring filmmaking, improv, musicals, and mysteries, to teens showcasing their own stories by learning how to create original plays, the creative energy was something to behold! Get a sneak peek into the magic of summer camp on pages 8-11.

Summer camp is just one of our incredible Education programs that helps foster creativity and encourages young people to tell their unique stories. The only thing better than experiencing their excitement and imagination here at Round House is to see these young artists grow up and find new, interesting ways to share their stories with the world. On pages 12, meet two talented Round House Education alumni who are shaping the future in their own ways.

Soon after summer camp wrapped, we kicked off the 2024–2025 Season with *Sojourners* by Mfoniso Udofia, the first play in her expansive nine-play Ufot cycle. Many of you may remember our readings of *Adia and Clora Snatch Joy*, the last piece in the cycle, from the inaugural National Capital New Play Festival in 2022. We couldn't wait for audiences to experience her brilliance on the mainstage, and we were thrilled to welcome Mfoniso to Round House (less than 24 hours after being at the Emmy Awards, where she was nominated for her writing on *Lessons in Chemistry!*) to celebrate Opening Night of *Sojourners*. Don't miss a recap of the celebration on page 15.

Next up is the world premiere of *A Hanukkah Carol, or GELT TRIP! The Musical*. Created by Harrison Bryan (along with Rob Berliner and Aaron Kenny), best known to Round House audiences as Christopher Boone in our 2019 production of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, this hotly anticipated new musical expands traditional holiday fare with a fun new take on a classic tale. Learn about how this hilarious show came to be in a conversation with Harrison on pages 4-5.

The 2024–2025 Season is off to a great start, all thanks to you. With your support, we can help foster the artists of the future while producing the best new works by some of the most talented new voices of our day.

See you at the theatre!

RYAN RILETTE
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

ED ZAKRESKI
MANAGING DIRECTOR

SPOTLIGHT ON BUSINESS COUNCIL MEMBER

PASTERNAK & FIDIS, P.C. HAS BEEN A DEDICATED SUPPORTER OF Round House Theatre for almost 15 years, first partnering with Round House as the corporate show sponsor of *Around the World in 80 Days* during the 2009-2010 Season. Over the years, they have continued to sponsor hit Round House shows, including the world premiere of *Charming Billy*, Suzan-Lori Parks's *Father Comes Home from the Wars (Parts 1, 2 & 3)*, *The Book of Will*, and many more. In fact, Divorce and Family Law partner Linda Ravdin served on the Round House Board of Trustees from 2010 to 2023, finishing her tenure as the Vice President. Linda now chairs our Emeritus Trustees Council, remaining an integral part of Round House.

Like Round House, Pasternak & Fidis, P.C. is a fixture of Bethesda. Specializing in Estate Planning and Administration and Divorce and Family Law, Pasternak & Fidis thoughtfully manages the needs of families of all kinds, including blended families, same-sex couples, domestic partners, and more.

Since its founding in the 1980s, Pasternak & Fidis has built its reputation on unparalleled service to clients in the Washington, D.C. area. They are committed to remaining the type of firm that offers effective representation in their areas of expertise while maintaining the outstanding service that clients expect in addressing their most personal legal needs.

Pasternak & Fidis' partners are consistently recognized for their excellence, sitting on 'top attorney' lists with *Bethesda Magazine*, *Washingtonian*, *Chambers & Associates*, *Best Lawyers*, *Super Lawyers*, and more. Partners have written books published by the ABA, Lexis Nexis, and Thomson-West; their articles can be found in numerous publications, including *The ABA Journal*, *Family Advocate*, *Bloomberg BNA*, and Pasternak & Fidis' own newsletter, *P&F Reporter*.

Linda says, "There is just no substitute for live theatre. We are so lucky to have Round House as a neighbor and to be able to walk up the street and enjoy great theatre. I loved my time on the Board of Trustees and now as Chair of the Emeritus Trustees Council. It's given me the opportunity to learn from the inside about what it takes to create theatre for everyone, the nuts and bolts of putting together, year after year, a dynamic season, and the perpetual challenge of keeping the theatre financially healthy."

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**FROM 10 MINUTES
TO 90 MINUTES,
HOW *A HANUKKAH CAROL*
CAME TO BE**

**A conversation with co-writer and
creator, Harrison Bryan**



Artistic team member Naysan Mojgani sat down for a conversation with Harrison Bryan, co-writer and creator of *A Hanukkah Carol, or GELT TRIP! The Musical*, covering his journey with Round House and the path that led to this world premiere musical.

NAYSAN MOJGANI: Your first time working at Round House was as the lead actor in our 2019 production of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (co-directed by Artistic Director Ryan Rilette and Jared Mezzocchi); can you talk us through that experience?

HARRISON BRYAN: I had already done *Curious Incident* at another theater about a year earlier, but I met Ryan and Jared and just fell in love with their ideas for the show. So I was stepping in with all of this internal processing from a previous production, but then completely inspired and reset by the Round House vision and embrace of tech starting on day one. It was really a new and invigorating idea, and I absolutely loved it.

When you enter a new theatre company for the first time, it can take a little bit to feel comfortable, especially as an out-of-town hire. But from the first email, everyone embraced a deeper reason to be a part of this show and this beautiful holistic approach to the work where everyone felt like they had a place at the table. And then feeling the audience's connection with the theatre, I just will never ever forget the time that I spent here. So when we had the opportunity to explore working together again, it felt like the perfect match.

NM: And meanwhile, you're also working on your own writing. How did that begin for you?

HB: For a long time, I would say that acting is one part of me, and writing is another part of me, and as I've grown and collaborated (with myself!), I've engaged a new line of thinking, which is less compartmentalized and more full and self-utilized, in that the acting feeds the writing and the writing feeds the acting. They are always in conjunction.

I was very fortunate to have some incredible teachers in high school who encouraged playwriting at a really young age, and I was also in an after-school theatre therapy troupe which would use improvisation and playwriting to talk about the challenges of being a teenager. Then at BU (Boston University), where I went for undergrad,

“ I WAS ASKED TO WRITE A TEN-MINUTE PLAY FOR A HOLIDAY-THEMED FESTIVAL OF SHORT WORKS. THEY DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING HANUKKAH-RELATED. SO I WAS VERY EXCITED TO DIVE INTO THAT.”

I was encouraged to write more. I wrote 16 short plays during my freshman year, and I performed all of them, and I really feel blessed to have had enough people say “Keep going,” that I felt supported and encouraged enough to continue the writing path even while I was pursuing the acting path.

NM: For *A Hanukkah Carol* in particular, how did it take seed?

HB: I was asked to write a ten-minute play for a holiday-themed festival of short works. They didn't have anything Hanukkah-related. So I was very excited to dive into that. It dawned on me that I had never seen an adaptation of *A Christmas Carol* for Hanukkah. I spent all night writing this short play where a stoner Jew from Long Island gets visited by three spirits because she smoked too much Kosher Kush. It was my favorite thing I had ever written. It was a ten-minute play that lasted twenty minutes because of laughs. Everyone asked “is there more?” And I said, “I hope so.” And I stopped thinking about it until I met composer Aaron Kenny. He introduced me to Rob Berliner, his songwriting partner, and at the time they were looking for a playwright to collaborate with to write their first feature-length musical. They asked “what do you have that could be expanded into a musical,” and I sent them 24 short plays that I had written. It was an insane email. I thought I'd never hear from them again. But Rob took one look at *A Hanukkah Carol* and said, “I think this is a musical.” And then we all locked ourselves in a rehearsal studio in midtown [Manhattan] and thought about all the ways that what I had written could be expanded and changed. We have moved away from Kosher Kush entirely. It is now so wonderfully family-friendly. And every step along the way has gotten us closer and closer to what I loved about it when it was just a ten-minute play: the balance between absurdity and authenticity, and the laughter and joy that it brought my family. And now, thinking about expanding it into a full-length musical, with 350 people on opening night—I cannot wait to see their faces.

NM: When Rob pulled *A Hanukkah Carol* from the stack and said it could be a musical, did that immediately feel correct?

HB: To be honest, I think it was immediate, yes. First of all, the idea of adding to the canon of holiday entertainment just felt too important, cool, and exciting to pass up. It also already felt magical and sensational—it has a lot of the elements baked in that make a good musical. I think that's why *A Christmas Carol* has been adapted so many times in so many ways. So it felt like a no-brainer.

NM: On that first point, when we first read it, we thought it was very funny. But it also spoke to us on a mission level: our artistic team comes from three entirely different religious traditions with very different relationships with religion, and the idea of opening up the range of what's offered during the holidays was tremendously appealing to us. So I'd co-sign all of that, as well as thank you for trusting us with the piece.

HB: When I was six years old, I asked my mom why there weren't any Hanukkah decorations hung up by the city. We would drive to school, and there were so many incredible Christmas decorations hanging above the Avenue U train station, and I was like, “How come the Festival of Lights has no lights here?” And my mom immediately started crying and realized that it was a question she'd never asked as a Brooklyn Jewish mother, and we sat down and wrote a little





editorial to the *New York Post* about it, and it was published. And now she has it framed as a magnet on our refrigerator. So that six-year-old, writing to the *New York Post* about a street corner in Brooklyn, is now a thirtysomething theatre artist, carving out a space during the holiday season to provide not competing lights, but *additional* lights, so that the holiday season has the opportunity to be brighter than ever. And that's what this show aims to do.

I had a very unique experience with *Curious Incident*, being in a play in this theater where I never left the stage, and I can't shake the connectivity of my experience in that space. So, when I think about performance venues that celebrate connection, that have an inherent energy of support, love for the craft, a balance between the intimate and the epic, Round House feels like the perfect Hanukkah stocking to place our show's goodies inside of. And the amount of time, effort, and care that have already been put into this show feels profound. It's gonna be freaking awesome.

— “ —

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SUMMER CAMP 2024!

ROUND HOUSE THEATRE EDUCATION HAD A GREAT SUMMER, OFFERING TEN WEEKS OF SUMMER CAMPS TO OVER 775 REGISTRANTS RANGING FROM AGE 4 TO 18 ACROSS THREE ROUND HOUSE SPACES.



Our popular **DESTINATIONS** program (**GRADES K-3**) met for week-long sessions at the Round House Education Center in Silver Spring. Students used their imaginations to travel to destinations as varied as Wakanda, magic school, and the Amazon rainforest through acting, movement, design and playmaking.

This summer we launched a new partnership with Montgomery County Public Schools and hosted students from New Hampshire Estates Elementary School. Students participated in Destinations and received academic support from their school teachers in reading and language arts, all in the same camp day.





Students in **GRADES 4-6** participated in **PLAYMAKERS, FILMMAKERS, AND IMPROV** camps held in both Bethesda and Silver Spring. Playmakers campers wrote, designed, and rehearsed a live production to share with family and friends. Filmmakers offered students the chance to create, write, design, and shoot a film. You can see a little of their work from *Filmmakers: Art Around the World* here: <https://youtu.be/rNODLsFmSno>





Students in **GRADES 6-12** participated in camps with specialty topics including **MUSICAL THEATRE, PLAY CREATION, FILMMAKING, IMPROVISATION, AND STAND-UP**. Our teen camps focus on developing the individual voices and artistry of teen theatre makers by bringing teens together with professional artists who are also outstanding teachers.

In addition, our summer programs brought interns and teen educators into our buildings to support our teaching artists and learn about the art of teaching theatre. In the summer of 2024, we were joined by 14 teen educators and 11 college interns. We also hosted a Summer Rise Student through a partnership with Montgomery County Public Schools.





ENOUGH! PLAYS TO END GUN VIOLENCE

Round House Theatre continued its partnership with Enough! Plays to End Gun Violence. Last fall, Teen Performance Company (TPC) members performed *No Prospering Weapons* by Justin Cameron Washington at national kick-off event at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. TPC member Noah Green was then invited by Enough! to perform *Ghost Gun* by Olivia Ridley at an Olney Theatre Center for the Arts special event as well as for the D.C. Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement event, "Building Resilience: A Trauma-Informed Approach to Healing".



WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

CHECKING IN ON ROUND HOUSE EDUCATION ALUMS



ARTEMIS MONTAGUE is the creator of the musical *She Sings Me Home* (workshopped as part of the 2nd Annual National Capital New Play Festival), and has a lovely history with Round House. A former camper in middle and high school, they became an assistant teacher, box office associate, and house manager with Round House as an adult. They currently live in New York City pursuing music and musical theatre. Recently, they won a 2024 MAP Fund grant for *She Sings Me Home*, which they will use towards a public developmental reading of that show. In addition, they have written two other musicals: *Rhapsody in Sunflower Yellow* as well as *How Baby and the Ancestors Attempted a Revolution*. The latter was completed when they were a 2024 Fellow at the MacDowell Artist Colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire this summer.

They will always appreciate Round House Theatre for developing their love of musical theatre and for supporting them through different stages of their life and career.

LAURA LOY served as Education Apprentice for the 2016-2017 season and served as a teaching artist for many years afterwards. Since her time at Round House she has received a master's degree in theatre education from Emerson College and has been teaching in Fairfax County Public Schools for the last 6 years. In those years she has twice been award Outstanding Teacher of the Year in the Herndon Pyramid for her time at Herndon Middle School and is now the acting theatre teacher and director at James Madison High School In Vienna. In addition to her public school teaching, she has also served as Director of Education at Arts On The Horizon in Alexandria, Virginia since 2019.

"Round House Theatre was an important part of my educational theatre journey and exposed me to other theatre teaching artists with the same passion for giving this art to others. The organization set a foundation for the type of educator I strive to be, and I am so grateful for the community that it provided me". —*Laura Loy*



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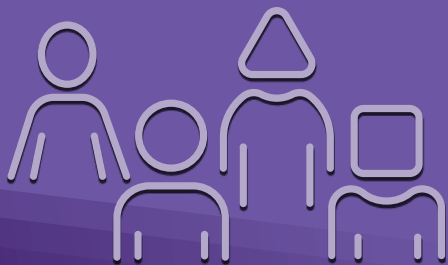
OVER THE LAST
22 YEARS

★★★★ THE ★★★★★
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our annual festival featuring free
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AND A FULL-SCALE PRODUCTION OF A
NEW PLAY OR MUSICAL



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donation requirement for board
membership in order to build a
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REPRESENTATIVE OF OUR COMMUNITY.



BROADENING ACCESSIBILITY,
including implementing
RELAXED PERFORMANCES,
OPEN CAPTIONING, AUDIO DESCRIPTION,
AND ASSISTIVE LISTENING DEVICES



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programs, in addition to our
general operating expenses. If
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Theatre for Everyone initiatives
alone, you can donate at
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SOJOURNERS INSIDE LOOK AND OPENING NIGHT

WE OPENED OUR 2024-2025 SEASON with Mfoniso Udofia's *Sojourners*, the first play chronologically in her incredible Ufot Cycle. The Ufot Cycle is one-of-a-kind in contemporary American theatre, and we are lucky enough to be commissioning a future play in the cycle, *Lifted*.

At the Inside Look, Artistic Director Ryan Rilette introduced us to the director, cast, and costume designer who discussed how they created the world of the play. Actors discussed the unique challenge they faced in doing the first play of a cycle, knowing what happens to these characters in future plays, and honoring where the characters were in the story at present. The costume designer, Ivania Stack, explored how we tell stories through costumes, and the Director, Valerie Curtis-Newton, tied all the disparate pieces of the artistic process together. And, we were delighted as Billie was joined by her daughter, Bee, on stage!

We were lucky enough to have the playwright, Mfoniso Udofia, join us for Opening Night, along with local politicians, local actors and designers, press, and donors. It was wonderful to welcome our audiences back to Round House for another great season!

Photos by Kent Kondo and Cameron Whitman Photography



Billie Krishawn (Abasiama) and Opa Adeyemo (Ukpong)



Costume Designer Ivania Stack explores the inspiration behind Abasiama's costume



Sojourners Inside Look



Special Guest Bee (Billie Krishawn's daughter)



Valerie Curtis-Newton (Director) and Ryan Rilette (Artistic Director)



Bob Hebda and Yao Dogbe



Bill Tompkins, Ed Zakreski (Managing Director), and Carl Nash



Alan Hammerschlag, Bonnie Hammerschlag, and Susannah Wellford



Dawn-Elin Fraser (Dialect Coach), Mfoniso Udofia (Playwright), Valerie Curtis-Newton (Director), and Ayanna Bakari



Renea S. Brown (Moxie)



Nan Beckley (Show Sponsor) and Cindy Calahan



The cast and creative team of *Sojourners*



Robin and Jay Hammer (Show Sponsors) and their guests



Susannah Wellford, Aaron Kisner, Amy Selco, and David Hantman

2024-2025 SEASON

HILARIOUS HOLIDAY MUSICAL

— WORLD PREMIERE —

A HANUKKAH CAROL OR GELT TRIP! THE MUSICAL

MUSIC BY **AARON KENNY**
LYRICS BY **ROB BERLINER**
BOOK BY **HARRISON BRYAN &
ROB BERLINER**
ORIGINAL CONCEPT BY **HARRISON BRYAN**
DIRECTED AND CHOREOGRAPHED BY
MARLO HUNTER

NOV 20 - DEC 22, 2024

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WHAT THE CONSTITUTION MEANS TO ME

BY **HEIDI SCHRECK**
DIRECTED BY **MORGAN GOULD**
FEATURING **KIMBERLY GILBERT**
AND **MICHAEL GLENN**

JAN 15 - FEB 16, 2025

CAPTIVATING AND SUSPENSEFUL WORLD PREMIERE

BAD BOOKS

BY **SHARYN ROTHSTEIN**
DIRECTED BY **RYAN RILETTE**
FEATURING **KATE EASTWOOD NORRIS**
AND **HOLLY TWYFORD**

APRIL 2 - APRIL 27, 2025

CELEBRATION OF FRIENDSHIP AND FANDOM

KING JAMES

BY **RAJIV JOSEPH**
DIRECTED BY **ROB RUGGIERO**

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Round House Theatre

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