

ROUND HOUSE BACKSTAGE

ROUND HOUSE THEATRE
DONOR NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2024
ISSUE 24

TOPDOG/UNDERDOG



A JUMPING-OFF POINT



BROADWAY IN BETHESDA GALA



ROUND
THEATRE
HOUSE

GREETINGS FROM OUR LEADERSHIP



DEAR FRIEND,

We hope you are enjoying a relaxing summer as we reflect on the past season and reset for next season.

This spring was full of celebrations at Round House, from our third annual National Capital New Play Festival to a record-breaking *Broadway in Bethesda* Gala featuring Tony Award-winner Brian Stokes Mitchell, and a stunning conclusion to the 2023–2024 Season with a production of Suzan-Lori Parks's play *Topdog/Underdog* that *The Washington Post* said “hits with the force of a bullet.” We’re so thankful to all of you who were able to join us—your energy, excitement, and unwavering support is vital to the success of each and every season.

There’s even more to look forward to in our 2024–2025 Season—learn more about the shows featured next season and the thought process that goes into selecting a season on pages 4-5.

Reading about a theatre season is one thing, while seeing it brought to life by dozens of talented artists is entirely another. Don’t miss an interview with Round House Casting Director and Associate Producer Sarah Cooney on pages 8-9 for a look into how we connect with the incredible individuals who create magic on stage every day.

This spring, we welcomed a group of Round House supporters for another sneak peek into the workings of the National Capital New Play Festival. Together, we went backstage and walked onto the set of *A Jumping-Off Point* to discover how a brand-new play goes from page to stage and get an actor’s point-of-view.

In our last issue, we shared a look into what goes into the creation of our Teen Performance Company’s production of the Sarah Metzger Memorial Play. On page 6, enjoy an exclusive preview into the 2024–2025 Teen Performance Company’s world premiere play—the first ever by a teen playwright, TPC alum Fin Davis.

As you can see, there is always plenty to celebrate at Round House, and it wouldn’t be possible without you. On behalf of everyone at Round House, we wish you a restful summer and can’t wait to see you at the theatre this fall!

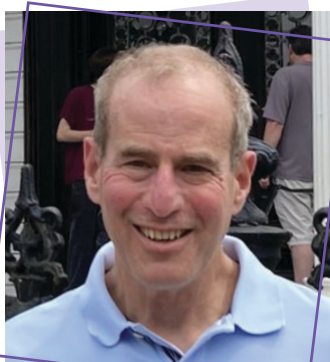
RYAN RILETTE
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

ED ZAKRESKI
MANAGING DIRECTOR

NEW

TRUSTEES

• • •
This spring, we welcomed three new members to the Round House Board of Trustees. These leaders share why Round House is important to them.
• • •



MICHAEL MAEL

“I have been involved in the arts and in Montgomery County for more than 20 years. Joining the Round House board allows me to work with an organization I have long admired and bring those two interests together.”



DAVID HANTMAN

“I am thrilled to join the Round House Board and continue to support this amazing local theatre. Round House’s programming educates youth about the arts, and Round House leadership is bringing thought-provoking and inclusive productions to the stage. Having a world-class theatre in the heart of Bethesda is incredibly exciting and I am proud to be a part of it.”



JOHN KING

“Round House Theatre is a true gem for the arts in Montgomery County and for the DMV area. After seeing numerous outstanding shows there over the years, I’m thrilled to be a part of the Board, and I look forward to making a contribution. You can count on Round House for meaningful, beautiful, and thoughtful theatre of the highest quality, and we need to maintain and care for this valuable gift in our community.”

INTIMATE, HEARTFELT, AND FUNNY - OUR 2024- 2025 SEASON

BY NAYSAN MOJGANI

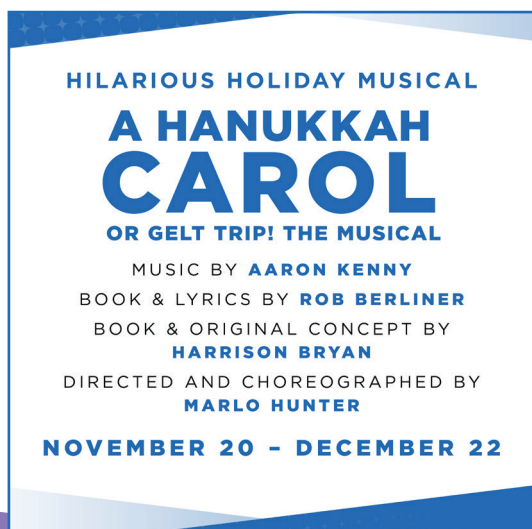


Sponsored by Nan Beckley and Jay & Robin Hammer

Round House Theatre's 2024-2025 Season features five intimate, heartfelt stories that will have you laughing, crying, and talking with your friends long into the night. These plays, and a brand new musical, continue Round House's commitment to amplify voices that have historically been under-represented or misrepresented by the theatre field, and give a human face to some of the biggest issues in contemporary life.

We begin with a beautiful, touching story about immigration, one of the hot-button topics of this election year. **Mfoniso Udofoia's *Sojourners*** is the origin story of her Ufot Cycle, which follows a Nigerian immigrant family across generations as they navigate their lives and identities in America. *Sojourners* focuses on a love triangle of three young immigrants who must decide whether to return home after they finish their education,

or stay and make a life in an America that is much harder than home. We have commissioned Mfoniso to write a later play in this family saga and are thrilled to introduce DC-area audiences to her profoundly moving work.

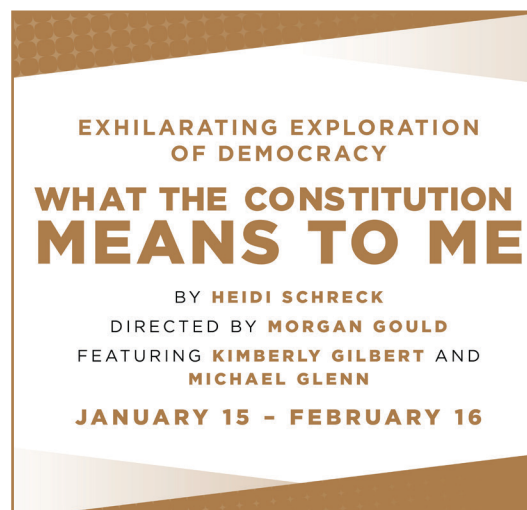


Over the holidays, we introduce **a brand new, family-friendly holiday musical to the world with *A Hanukkah Carol, or Gelt Trip! The Musical***. The musical writing team of Harrison Bryan, Rob Berliner and Aaron Kenny—"Two Jews and their Goyfriend," as they like to call themselves—recognized that despite there being a large Jewish audience in the theater, there are very few Jewish holiday shows. They set out to remedy that with a new story that has all the heart of Charles Dickens combined with all the humor of Mel Brooks. Our audiences will love this irreverent, hilarious new musical that won the Audience Favorite Award at

Lead Sponsors David and Sherry Smith & The RPM Fund

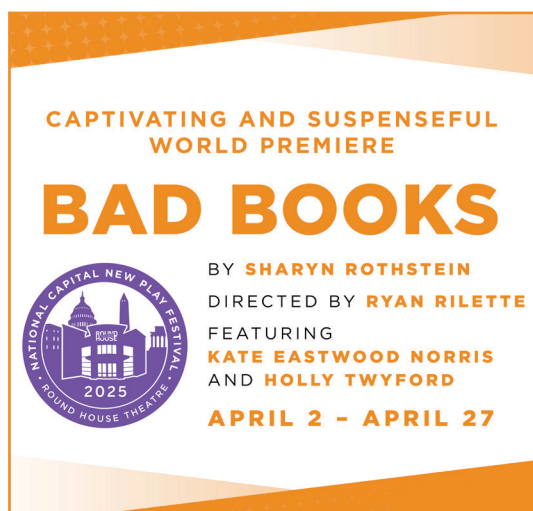
this year's Broadway Shark Tank. *A Hanukkah Carol* is produced by special arrangement with Daryl Roth and Jim Kierstead.

The second half of the season kicks off with **Heidi Schreck's smash hit, *What the Constitution Means to Me***. Recognized with an Obie Award for Best New American Play for its Off-Broadway run, the Broadway transfer was nominated for a Tony, won a New York Drama Critics' Circle Award, and was recognized as a Pulitzer Prize Finalist. While the Broadway tour played the Kennedy Center in 2019, Round House will produce the first local, professional production of this stunning play that deftly mixes the personal and political. Focused on women's rights and dignity, the play is also a literal debate on how the Constitution serves (or fails to serve) our modern society.



Sponsored by Laura Roulet and Rafael Hernandez Mayoral

In the fourth annual National Capital New Play Festival, we will produce the **world premiere of Sharyn Rothstein's *Bad Books***, previously presented as a reading in the 2023 Festival. That reading's dream team of Artistic Director Ryan Rilette and local acting legends Kate Eastwood Norris and Holly Twyford will reunite for the world premiere production, which will feature an in-the-round configuration of our Bethesda theater. A quintessential Round House play, *Bad Books* cuts to the heart of so many of our modern debates and divisions, challenging us with deep humor and empathy to see past our political divisions and first impressions, and not to assume that we understand the motivation of those who don't share the same beliefs. A writer and producer for the hit television shows *Suits* and *Orphan Black: Echoes*, Sharyn's unique blend of comedy and incisive social commentary is perfect for DC-area audiences.



Sponsored by Mitch and Heidi Dupler; Bonnie and Alan Hammerschlag; and Rick Kasten

Finally, we end our season in June with **Pulitzer Prize Finalist Rajiv Joseph's 2023 Off-Broadway hit, *King James***, in partnership with TheaterWorks Hartford. This intimate dramedy examines male friendship and sports fandom, reminding us what sports teams and athletes mean—both for a community and for individuals. This moving, funny, and deeply affecting new play chronicles the unexpected friendship of two men who bond when “King” LeBron James joins their home team of Cleveland, sparking much-needed hope in them and the city. Whether basketball fans or not, audiences will see themselves in this touching and funny story of friendship and platonic intimacy.

Intimate, heartfelt, and funny, the five shows that make up our 2024–2025 Season celebrate and guide us through that rewarding and challenging work of being in community, reminding us that great theater expands our understanding and empathy for others.



WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

CHECKING IN ON ROUND HOUSE EDUCATION ALUMS



EMILY LETTAU is our newest full-time employee, joining us as the new Education Program Manager in June. Emily first joined Round House as a teaching intern in our 2018 Summer Camps and returned for 3 more summers, going on to become a Program Assistant and eventually Program Lead for Summer Camp. She has also continued to teach during the school year as part of our weekend on-site classes and our after-school programming.

While teaching with Round House part time, she finished her undergraduate degree in Elementary Education and her master's degree in Arts Integration. She also served as the Learning Programs Manager at Baltimore Center Stage before accepting the position of Round House Theatre's Education Program Manager.

"Round House is where my time working in the arts began, and it feels like a wonderful full circle moment to be returning as a full-time employee. I don't have a formal theatre background—sure, I performed in some shows growing up and went to some theatre-focused camps, but for the longest time I never imagined I would have a career in the arts. My degree is in Elementary Education, so the majority of what I teach these days I learned from my fellow Round House Theatre

Teaching Artists. That first summer I learned right along with the campers, and now to be back and making it all happen? My heart is so full." —*Emily Lettau*

FIN DAVIS, a rising senior at Eleanor Roosevelt High School, is next year's playwright for the Sarah Metzger Memorial Play, entitled *Gallows Humor*. They are the first teenage playwright to have a play produced for the Teen Performance Company at Round House. Fin started out at Round House as an actor in the 2022–2023 Teen Performance Company, playing the role of Liz and Gemma in Dani Stoller's *Girlhood*. Although they were an actor in the company, Fin discovered their interest in playwriting from one of the many masterclasses the company attended at Round House. Over the past few months, they've been involved at Mosaic Theater, where they won first place in the 2024 High School Playwriting Contest for their play, *You're Still My Sister*. Fin is incredibly excited to be the playwright for next year's TPC play and is delighted to be working with Round House once again.

"When I first found Round House, I had never expected to find a theater with so much love for its community. I had never been involved with theatre in the way I had been involved with



theatre at Round House. This place continuously gives opportunities to children and teens to learn what it means to be a part of a theatre community, whether it's through the lens of acting, directing, designing, producing, stage managing, playwriting, and more. Round House has taught me that theatre is so much more than just acting on a stage. During the TPC production of *Girlhood*, we had numerous masterclasses in areas of expertise from light design to dramaturgy and it was through these masterclasses that I discovered how people master the art of writing plays. The playwriting masterclass, which was led by Dani Stoller, allowed me to try something I never thought would be on my radar and it turned out to be one of my greatest passions. I don't think I'd have learned how much I love playwriting if it wasn't for Round House and I'm deeply thankful for it." —*Fin Davis*

WHERE ARE OUR SENIORS HEADED?

We checked in with some of our graduating seniors in this year's Teen Performance Company to see where they're headed next year

GEORGIA PARRY was an Assistant Stage Manager in this year's Sarah Metzger Memorial production of *Spring Break*. In the fall she will be headed off to Pace University, majoring in Stage Management.



ISABELLE JONES played Sam and Frankie in this year's Sarah Metzger Memorial production of *Spring Break* and was also a part of the 2022-2023 company, *Girlhood*. In the fall she will be going to Barnard College and majoring in Theatre/Environmental Science.



NOAH GREEN played Corey in this year's production of *Spring Break*. He was also an actor in last year's company, *Girlhood*, in which he played Deacon and Sully. Noah will be going to DePaul University in Chicago this fall to study acting.



INTERESTED IN JOINING OUR TEEN PERFORMANCE COMPANY?

Applications for directors, dramaturgs/assistant directors, stage managers, run crew, costume, lighting, sound, and set/prop designers are open at RoundHouseTheatre.org/TPC.

Auditions for actors will be held in September, visit RoundHouseTheatre.org/TPC to submit!

A portrait of Sarah Cooney, a woman with long brown hair and blue eyes, wearing a yellow top. She is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera.

CASTING AT ROUND HOUSE: A CONVERSATION WITH CASTING DIRECTOR SARAH COONEY

With several Round House actors being honored recently, we wanted to talk with an undersung part of those successes: Round House's Casting Director & Associate Producer, Sarah Cooney.

NAYSAN MOJGANI: Can you start by talking us through the basic casting process?

SARAH COONEY: First, we talk to the director about what their vision of the show is and how they see each character and how they fit into that world. Sometimes we as Round House's artistic team may have a different vision. And so casting is a combination of taking what the director wants, and what we think they should consider that they have not yet considered. I build those lists—what the director knows they're looking for and what we think might be additional good fits—and merge them into one list of actors we want to audition and I send them audition material.

NM: Which is?

SC: I always send the

actors the full script so they can read it and become familiar with the show. Then, I cut sides which are just chunks of scenes. Then the director and I might tweak those a little bit, trying to find the best parts to learn about the actor and what they are going to bring to the character.

NM: What do you look for in picking those pieces?

SC: Characters have an arc over the course of the show—they don't begin the way they end. So, I like to give actors two sides—maybe one that shows how that character experiences the world at the beginning and then after they've gone through whatever transition they go through in the show or perhaps their moment of transition. It is difficult to condense a massive arc of a character throughout an entire two hour long play into tiny little scenes. But we do our best.

NM: And then the actors come in and read that material?

SC: This is something that has changed a lot in recent years. Pre-COVID, everything was in-person. Now, it's pretty common to start with self-tapes. A self-tape is when an actor takes the audition material, works on it at home, and then films themselves (sometimes with the help of a friend reading the other roles) and submits that to us. We receive a lot of these "pre-screen auditions." Sometimes hundreds for a role.

NM: Do you watch all of them?

SC: I do watch all of them and then I pick the best of the options to send the director. Then, we'll have either in-person or Zoom callbacks. If it's really important to the director to see chemistry between two actors, sometimes we set them up so that two people can come in and read together. For example, in *Topdog/Underdog*, Ro [Boddie, as Lincoln] was cast fairly early, so he was involved in the callback process. The other actors that were auditioning for Booth read with Ro, because seeing how they interacted together was important.

NM: And then, what is the actual decision process?

SC: Ultimately, the final decision is the director's. But we'll sit down as a team—the director, myself, Ryan (our artistic director), and for a new play, sometimes the playwright—and everyone expresses their opinions. I do my best to advocate for the actors that I think will do the best job in the role. And then we decide.

NM: To focus in on Round House, we try to be very conscientious about who we are hiring to tell these stories, recognizing the history of exclusion and marginalization. So, how do those institutional values intersect with your work?

SC: Round House does a lot of shows about very specific cultural experiences and perspectives. And casting those productions, it is clear what we need to find in order to be truthful to the story as it was written. So, it was exciting to do a show like *Next to Normal* where the ethnicity is not prescribed and traditionally has been performed with a white cast. We knew we would love to have a mixed race family to see how that same material works with a more diverse cast. So we had people of every ethnicity audition for the mom and dad, and once we cast Tracy Lynn Olivera and Kevin McAllister, we then knew what the makeup of the children needed to be. So we cast in two chunks: first the parents, then the children. And the family that we ended up with was really exciting.

“

**WE'LL SIT DOWN
AS A TEAM—
THE DIRECTOR,
MYSELF, RYAN
(OUR ARTISTIC
DIRECTOR), AND
FOR A NEW PLAY,
SOMETIMES THE
PLAYWRIGHT—
AND EVERYONE
EXPRESSES THEIR
OPINIONS.**

”

ROUND HOUSE THEATRE
**BROADWAY
IN BETHESDA**

GALA

AN EVENING WITH
TONY AWARD-WINNER

**BRIAN STOKES
MITCHELL**

MAY 11, 2024



This May, we hosted our annual *Broadway in Bethesda* Gala, featuring a performance by Broadway legend Brian Stokes Mitchell.

The evening consisted of a Sponsor Dinner, where attendees had the opportunity to meet Round House VIPs, hear Representative Jamie Raskin speak on the power of the arts, and savor a sumptuous dinner. Meanwhile, ticketholders attended a pre-show reception at the theatre, getting the opportunity to mingle before being joined by dinner attendees and heading into the theatre for the main event.

Attendees participated in a lively auction, followed by a performance from Sophia Early and Emma Wallach, some words from Teen Performance Company alums, a paddle raise, and finally Brian Stokes Mitchell's tremendous performance, and its multiple encores!

Finally, attendees were treated to a dessert buffet and our Star Sponsors had the opportunity to meet with Stokes. The event was a rousing success, many praising it as our best Gala yet!

Photos by Cameron Whitman Photography



Members of the Canady Foundation for the Arts



The Teen Performance Company and Sophia Early



Andrea and Michael Steele



Brian Stokes Mitchell, Leo and Judy Zickler



Chris and Anna Inglis and Susan and Tim Gibson



Gala Dinner



Members of the 2023-2024 Teen Performance Company



Jay and Robin Hammer and Yve and Paul Dinte



Mitch Dupler, Cathy Bernard, and Heidi Dupler



Linda Ravdin, Brian Stokes Mitchell, and Don Shapero



Representative Jamie Raskin addresses the dinner crowd



Neil and Ann Kerwin and Ryan Rilette (Artistic Director)



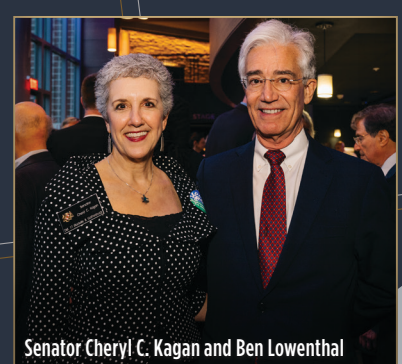
Mark and Merrill Shugoll, Brian Stokes Mitchell, Sheryl Rosenthal, and Marty Bell



Michael and Alex Staines



Meka and Richard Parker



Senator Cheryl C. Kagan and Ben Lowenthal

A JUMPING-OFF POINT INSIDE LOOK AND OPENING NIGHT

WE WERE THRILLED TO PRESENT THE world premiere of *A Jumping-Off Point* as part of our third annual National Capital New Play Festival!

At the Inside Look, our Associate Artistic Director Naysan Mojgani introduced us to the director and actors, as well as hosted a video interview with the playwright, Inda Craig-Galván. Attendees learned about the script-writing process, and how rehearsals might be different when working on a play that is still in development, being rewritten while in rehearsals.

Opening Night was spectacular, and audiences had the privilege of being among the first to see this world premiere play. Audiences loved being able to meet and mingle with members of the creative team and the playwright.

Photos by Kent Kondo and Cameron Whitman Photography



Inda Craig-Galván (Playwright) answers questions via video call



Jade King Carroll (Director) discusses the costume design for Miriam



Jade King Carroll (Director) discusses the set



Naysan Mojgani (Associate Artistic Director) introduces the cast and director

Nikkole Salter (Leslie), Danny Gavigan (Andrew), and Cristina Pitter (Miriam)



Show Sponsors Jay Sushelsky, Noreen Marcus, and Ryan Rilette (Artistic Director)



Danisha Crosby (Director of Education), Bob Hebda, and Deborah Rogers



Jay and Robin Hammer with Rachel and John King



Bill Lammers, Debbie Minter Jackson, Show Sponsor Nan Beckley, and Scott and Paula Moore



Michael Faison and Jordan Richardson



Lorraine and Doug Bibby, and Maboud Ebrahimzadeh



Carl Nash and Bunny Dwin



Agyeiwaa Asante (NCNPF Developmental Reading Playwright) and Sarah Cooney (Casting Director & Associate Producer)



Councilmember Andrew Friedson and Ed Zakreski (Managing Director)



Bob Hebda and Penny Pollard



Playwright Inda Craig-Galván with students from Howard University

TOPDOG/UNDERDOG INSIDE LOOK, OPENING NIGHT, AND BLACK OUT NIGHT

THE FINAL SHOW OF OUR SEASON WAS THE INCREDIBLE, PULITZER PRIZE-WINNING PLAY *Topdog/Underdog*. Written by Suzan-Lori Parks, this production was a hit with audiences and critics alike. *The Washington Post* wrote that our *Topdog/Underdog* “hit with the force of a bullet” and “harvest[ed] every note of humor and pathos from Parks’ immortal script. *Topdog/Underdog* was our second show this season to be extended due to audience demand!

Those who attended the Inside Look in May were fortunate enough to hear from actors Ro Boddie (Lincoln) and Yao Dogbe (Booth) about how they prepare in the rehearsal room for such an intense two-person play.

We welcomed a sold-out Opening Night crowd, filled with Round House patrons, local theatre critics, and local artists including actors, designers, and directors.”

Photos by Cameron Whitman Photography



Show Sponsors Mitch and Heidi Dupler



Mark Shugoll and Jamil Jude (Director)



Grace Gyamfi



Merrill Shugoll, Bonnie and Alan Hammerschlag, and Mark Shugoll



Ro Boddie (Lincoln), Joseph Campos-Furber, and Yao Dogbe (Booth)



The cast and crew of *Topdog/Underdog*



Allie Williams, Carla Young, and Narisha Sookdeo



Yao Dogbe (Booth), Tess Dogbe, and Ro Boddie (Lincoln)



Season Sponsors Don Shapero and Linda Ravdin with Show Sponsors Kay Richman and Dan Kaplan

INTRODUCTION TO **MICHAEL BARRET JONES**

It's hard to believe that it's been three months since I arrived at Round House Theatre, but I'm loving every minute of it.

For those of you I haven't met yet, hello! Since my first few weeks at the theatre included the *Broadway in Bethesda* Gala, the opening night of *Topdog/Underdog*, and a meeting of the Emeritus Trustees Council, I've had a crash course in starting to get to know many of Round House's greatest supporters and am now on a listening tour to meet as many of you over the summer as I can. These early conversations have all included the answers to some basic "get to know you" questions such as:

WHERE WERE YOU BEFORE ROUND HOUSE THEATRE? The Community Foundation for Northern Virginia

DID YOU GROW UP IN MARYLAND? No, I grew up in Delaware, spent 30 years in Metro NYC and Brooklyn, and moved to Reston, Virginia 18 months ago.

ISN'T THE COMMUTE FROM RESTON TERRIBLE? Only getting ON the Beltway; mostly not bad.

WHAT'S YOUR BACKGROUND? Theatre.

And the conversation takes off from there. I was onstage before my third birthday, taught Improv (for credit!) to fellow students in high school, directed my way through college, ran a high school Shakespeare program in New Jersey, directed the pilot of *Once on this Island, Jr.*, and for the last 20 years have been focused mostly on cabaret and fundraising. Professionally, my first job out of college was at the Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey, and much of the last 20 years have been focused on fundraising for social justice, HIV, and LGBTQIA+ causes, and community foundations.

More interestingly, the conversations have focused on the power of theatre, of social change through the arts, and of the ways that Round House has touched people's lives. We've talked philosophy, psychology, education, and maybe just a little about current events—mostly as they relate to the work on our stage. Mostly.

It's no secret that my primary job is to raise money to support that work, and that frees us to explore shared passions for the art form and helps me get to know my coffee or lunch companions better. The better we know each other, the better we can work together, and that means a better job creating Theatre for Everyone at Round House.

If we haven't met yet, or we have and you'd like to sit down for coffee, I'd be delighted to do so: my door is open, and so are most of my mornings before 10—I'm an early bird, so let's have a cup of coffee sometime and talk theatre!

If you have any thoughts, questions, or concerns, you can always reach me at 240.670.8795. I'm looking forward to it!



ANNOUNCING OUR 2024-2025 SEASON

POWERFUL AND HEARTFELT DRAMA **SOJOURNERS**

BY **MFONISO UDOFIA**
DIRECTED BY **VALERIE CURTIS NEWTON**
SEPTEMBER 11 - OCTOBER 6

HILARIOUS HOLIDAY MUSICAL

A HANUKKAH CAROL

OR GELT TRIP! THE MUSICAL

MUSIC BY **AARON KENNY**
BOOK & LYRICS BY **ROB BERLINER**
BOOK & ORIGINAL CONCEPT BY **HARRISON BRYAN**
DIRECTED AND CHOREOGRAPHED BY **MARLO HUNTER**
NOVEMBER 20 - DECEMBER 22

EXHILARATING EXPLORATION
OF DEMOCRACY

WHAT THE CONSTITUTION MEANS TO ME

BY **HEIDI SCHRECK**
DIRECTED BY **MORGAN GOULD**
FEATURING **KIMBERLY GILBERT AND MICHAEL GLENN**
JANUARY 15 - FEBRUARY 16

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

CELEBRATION OF FRIENDSHIP
AND FANDOM

KING JAMES

BY **RAJIV JOSEPH**
DIRECTED BY **ROB RUGGIERO**
MAY 28 - JUNE 22

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