

# ROUND HOUSE BACKSTAGE

ROUND HOUSE THEATRE  
DONOR NEWSLETTER  
SPRING 2025  
ISSUE 27

## *BAD BOOKS*



## *BONNIE HAMMERSCHLAG NATIONAL CAPITAL NEW PLAY FESTIVAL*



## *BROADWAY IN BETHESDA GALA*



ROUND  
THEATRE  
HOUSE

## GREETINGS FROM OUR LEADERSHIP



### DEAR FRIEND,

There has been so much to celebrate at Round House over the past few months, and we have been honored to share these special moments with all of you.

The centerpiece of spring at Round House is the Bonnie Hammerschlag National Capital New Play Festival. Our incredibly timely mainstage world premiere of *Bad Books* by Sharyn Rothstein became the best-selling mainstage premiere of the festival to date! On Opening Night, we kicked off another exciting festival and were particularly pleased to honor the festival's new sponsor, former Trustee and longtime Round House supporter Bonnie Hammerschlag. We are deeply grateful to Bonnie and her husband Alan for their continued support, and we look forward to many more successful festivals to come.

On May 10, Round House supporters came together to enjoy the annual *Broadway in Bethesda* Gala, featuring a powerhouse performance by Tony Award-winner Renée Elise Goldsberry. The evening also featured many familiar faces, with a magical start from Dendy (who will return to the Round House stage in next year's Bonnie Hammerschlag National Capital New Play Festival in *Nothing Up My Sleeve*), moving appearances from our Teen Performance Company, and a lively auction emceed by actor Kimberly Gilbert.

We are already looking forward to a monumental 2025-2026 Season. From the moving two-part Tony-winning epic *The Inheritance* to the regional premiere of *Sally & Tom*, the newest play from Suzan-Lori Parks that offers a comedic and unflinching take on the stories we tell about American history, we're thrilled to welcome audiences back next season. Take a deeper dive into how the 2025-2026 Season came to be on pages 4-5.

In this issue, you'll also meet our newest Business Council member, Mayorga Coffee, whose delicious coffee is now available at the Fourth Wall Bar and Café. On pages 8-9 you can learn about the ways that Round House collaborates with our peer institutions across the country.

Whether you sponsor a production, add a donation to your ticket purchase, plan a bequest, or secure matching contributions from your employer, your support makes it possible for Round House to continue to support our employees, to plan for the future, and to dream ever bigger.

Thank you for celebrating with us, and we'll see you at the theatre!

**RYAN RILETTE**  
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

**ED ZAKRESKI**  
MANAGING DIRECTOR

Cover: Photo of Kate Eastwood Norris (*The Librarian*) and Holly Twyford (*The Mother*) in *Bad Books* by Margot Schulman. Photo of the Bonnie Hammerschlag National Capital New Play Festival reading of *Indian Princess* by Susan Gibson. Photo of the *Broadway in Bethesda* Gala by Cameron Whitman Photography.

## Mayorga Coffee: Coffee With Purpose and Impact

**A**T MAYORGA COFFEE, we're fueled by the idea that great coffee can create real change. For over 25 years, our founder, Martin Mayorga, has been on a mission to transform the coffee industry by supporting small farmers, protecting their land, and building sustainable supply chains.

Martin's journey began when he witnessed firsthand the inequality and exploitation faced by small-scale coffee producers. Determined to make a difference, he built Mayorga Coffee around a simple but powerful idea: consumers can enjoy exceptional coffee while uplifting farming communities and protecting the planet.

At Mayorga, we are committed to direct trade and organic farming. We partner directly with small producers across Latin America, ensuring they receive fair prices for their harvests. This approach not only supports farmers financially but also helps preserve their land for future generations. The result is high-quality, Specialty Grade, 100% organic coffee that's grown without synthetic pesticides, additives, or dyes—delivering pure, natural flavor in every cup.

But we don't stop at organic. Our team works closely with partner farms to implement regenerative farming practices, such as shade-grown coffee that preserves biodiversity and prevents soil erosion. We also regularly test our coffee and soil health, ensuring we're delivering the highest-quality, most sustainable coffee possible.

Unlike many conventional coffee brands, we've rejected a profit-first model in favor of one that prioritizes fairness, transparency, and community. When you drink Mayorga Coffee, you're not just enjoying a delicious cup—you're joining a movement. Every bag of Mayorga represents a legacy of accountability, pride in heritage, and a commitment to doing business the right way.

We're thrilled to partner with Round House Theatre this year, sharing our coffee with its vibrant community of supporters. Together, we can celebrate the arts while enjoying coffee that's making a difference in the lives of farmers, their families, and the planet. Here's to great coffee and meaningful connections. ¡Salud!

**MAYORGA**  
— coffee —

MAYORGACOFFEE.COM



OUR 2025-2026 SEASON

THESE FOUR PLAYS  
ARE A *Celebration*  
OF THE POWER OF  
STORYTELLING AND  
THEATRICALITY.

**I**N OUR 2025-2026 SEASON, Round House will introduce DMV audiences to four new plays, with the regional premieres of the most honored play in a generation and the newest hit by a living legend, the American premiere of a celebrated British holiday comedy, and the world premiere of a magic show from the creators of *The Tempest*. By turns epic, thought-provoking, and awe-inspiring, these four plays are a celebration of the power of storytelling and theatricality.

We begin our season in August with the DMV premiere of a two-part epic, *The Inheritance*. Winner of The Tony, Olivier, Drama Desk, Evening Standard, London Critics Circle, and Drama League Awards for "Best Play," this modern masterpiece by Matthew López focuses on the legacy of the AIDS crisis through three generations of gay men who grapple with the tragedy of the past, what it means for their future, and what we owe to those who come before us. Inspired by E.M. Forster's *Howards End* and

directed by DC's own Tom Story, *The Inheritance* is an epic examination of survival, healing, class divide, and what it means to call a place home.

Over the holidays, we will introduce audiences to Sam Holcroft's hysterical and thought-provoking *Rules for Living*. A holiday comedy that was a hit at the National Theatre in London, this US premiere resets the play to America. As an extended family gathers for Christmas dinner, each of their individual coping strategies—the rules by which they all survive—are projected for the audience to see, leading to hysterical confrontations that build to pure mayhem by the play's conclusion.

In February, we kick off our fifth annual Bonnie Hammerschlag National Capital New Play Festival with the world premiere of *Nothing Up My Sleeve*. Previously presented as a workshop in our 2024 Festival as *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, this one-man, autobiographical coming-of-age story and magic show is the newest piece by the team who brought you our magical production of *The Tempest*, Aaron Posner and Dendy. Featuring magic by Dendy (Ariel in *The Tempest*), *Nothing Up My Sleeve* features a score of mind-blowing tricks, and is sure to be one of the hottest tickets in the DMV next season.

Finally, we end our season in May and June with the DMV premiere of the newest work from legend Suzan Lori-Parks (the playwright behind last season's Helen Hayes-nominated *Topdog/Underdog*), *Sally & Tom*. A backstage dramedy about an off-off-off-Broadway theater company putting on a play about Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson, this ferocious and funny off-Broadway hit directed by long-time Round House favorite Timothy Douglas celebrates the art of theater while taking a hard look at American history.

The epic, thought-provoking, awe-inspiring comedies, dramedies, and magic shows in our 2025-2026 Season explore how our stories define us and how our history influences our present. With shows that are sure to make you laugh, cry, and gasp in wonder, this is a season not to be missed!

POETIC AMERICAN EPIC  
**THE INHERITANCE**  
PARTS ONE AND TWO

BY **MATTHEW LÓPEZ**  
INSPIRED BY THE NOVEL *HOWARDS END*  
BY **E.M. FORSTER**  
DIRECTED BY **TOM STORY**  
**AUGUST 27 - OCTOBER 19, 2025**

HILARIOUS HOLIDAY FARCE

**RULES FOR LIVING**

BY **SAM HOLCROFT**  
DIRECTED BY **RYAN RILETTE**  
**DECEMBER 3, 2025 - JANUARY 4, 2026**



MAGICAL WORLD PREMIERE

**NOTHING UP  
MY SLEEVE**

**SIMPLE DECEPTIONS FOR  
CURIOUS HUMANS**

BY **AARON POSNER & DENDY**  
MAGIC BY **DENDY**  
DIRECTED BY **AARON POSNER**  
**FEBRUARY 11 - MARCH 15, 2026**

FEROCIOUS AND FUNNY DRAMEDY

**SALLY & TOM**

BY **SUZAN-LORI PARKS**  
DIRECTED BY **TIMOTHY DOUGLAS**  
**MAY 20 - JUNE 21, 2026**

# WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

CHECKING IN ON ROUND HOUSE EDUCATION ALUMS



**TEEN PERFORMANCE COMPANY (TPC)** alum and former Round House Theatre Teen Educator **DEREK LAMB** is excited to be starting his PhD this summer. Derek joined Round House as an actor in the Teen Performance Company's productions of *Chatroom* (2014-2015) and *Good Kids* (2015-2016). Through the masterclasses of TPC and as a production associate on *Beach Week* (2016-2017), Derek became interested in technical theatre, which he pursued during his undergrad at Pitt Stages and beyond with Baltimore Theater Project.

While Derek's love of theatre continues, his primary focus since leaving Round House has been biomedical research. He received his undergraduate degree in chemistry and molecular biology and is completing a master's degree in biostatistics. Derek is proud to have published both academic research on diseases including COVID-19 and sickle cell anemia, alongside public health journalism on vaccine hesitancy and sexual health. He will be beginning his PhD in biostatistics at the University of Pennsylvania this June.

“Round House has shaped who I am in more ways than I can list. Being a member of the Teen Performance Company was such a supportive experience. Knowing that we were trusted to create, to take risks, and to overcome whatever obstacles we faced together, that was empowering in a way that I'd never felt before. Round House's core focus on the ensemble—on a group of people working towards a shared goal—that's something I've found to be just as critical to working in science as in theatre.”

## WHERE ARE OUR SENIORS HEADED?



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

**FIN DAVIS** was the playwright of this year's Sarah Metzger Memorial Play, *Gallows Humor*. They were also an actor in the 2022-2023 production of *Girlhood* and in the 2023 National



Capital New Play Festival developmental reading of *Limp Wrist on the Lever*. In the fall, they will be studying at NYU Tisch and majoring in Theatre.

**GEORGIA TOTI** played Casey in this year's Sarah Metzger Memorial Play, marking her third year as a member of TPC. Next year she will be attending the University of Vermont in their Honors College, majoring in Political Science with a potential minor in French.



**LOIS PROELLER** was the Sound Designer in this year's Sarah Metzger Memorial Play. This was Lois' first time joining TPC. In the fall, they're heading to American University where they will be double majoring in Audio Technology and Theatre Design. This spring, they will also be the Sound Designer for *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* at Wildwood Theatre.



**KNOW A STUDENT  
WHO MIGHT BE  
INTERESTED IN  
TPC?**

**APPLICATIONS** for director, designer, dramaturg, stage managers, and run crew for the 2025-2026 Company are now open at [RoundHouseTheatre.org/TPC](https://RoundHouseTheatre.org/TPC)

**AUDITIONS** for actors will be held in September; visit [RoundHouseTheatre.org/TPC](https://RoundHouseTheatre.org/TPC) to sign up to our email list to be notified about auditions.



# CO-PRODUCTIONS AND ROLLING WORLD PREMIERES: PRODUCING IN COLLABORATION

BY **NAYSAN MOJGANI**, Artistic and Dramaturgical Advisor

**A**UDIENCES OCCASIONALLY ASK us “what happens next with this production,” hoping to be able to tell their friends in other cities to see it. Usually, Round House’s productions start and end with us. However, there have been some exceptions—most notably, our American premiere of Moira Buffini’s *Handbagged* transferred to New York’s 59E59 in 2019; and the new plays we premiere go on to be produced by other theaters around the country and the world—but usually, we respond to that question with something about the ephemeral nature of theatre and encourage the asker to come see the play again with their friends.

Our current season, however, includes both a National New Play Network Rolling World Premiere and a co-production, so we thought it was a good time to talk a little about the ways that Round House collaborates with our peer institutions across the country.

Sharyn Rothstein’s *Bad Books*, like Charly Evon Simpson’s *it’s not a trip it’s a journey* in 2022 and our 2017 production of Lauren Gunderson’s *Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*, is a

National New Play Network Rolling World Premiere (RWP). In a RWP, several theaters around the country commit to producing separate productions of a new play, all within a span of 18 months. While the productions are separate, the theaters work with the National New Play Network (an alliance of professional theaters dedicated to developing and producing new plays nationwide) to coordinate publicity, share insights, and support the playwright in continuing to fine-tune their script while seeing how it plays across multiple markets and audiences. For *Bad Books*, our colleagues at Florida Studio Theatre, Curious Theatre Company, and Williamston Theatre are sharing this fantastic new play with their audiences this season and next, and we are confident that these are the first of many productions for the play (an extra benefit of a RWP is the boost in word-of-mouth that comes with several simultaneous productions).

Round House audiences are most familiar with co-productions through our history of collaborations with Olney Theatre Center (*Ink*, *Fela!*, *Angels in America*, and *In the Heights*),



in which we partnered with our neighbors to produce a single production of those shows at one or the other of our theaters. This season, *King James* by Rajiv Joseph demonstrates another common approach to co-producing, as did last season's smash hit *Next to Normal*, which was co-produced with Barrington Stage Company. *King James* is co-produced with TheaterWorks Hartford, as well as Barrington Stage Company again. What this means is that the three theaters share the common expenses of getting a play off the ground—building a set, hiring artists, paying actors for rehearsal—and then take turns presenting the finished production. *King James* was tremendously well received in Hartford earlier this winter, and then the set and costumes were put in a truck and shipped down to Bethesda. We did some brush-up rehearsals, adjusted some of the technical components to fit our space, and then hit the ground running with a full production. By sharing expenses, theaters are able to lower the cost of producing a play, while accumulating good press along the way, and maintaining an artistic conversation between markets: when Round

House co-produces with theaters outside the DMV, we're able to send some of our top-notch actors, designers, stage managers, and other artists to those other theaters, spreading the good word about one of America's best theatre cities!

Post-COVID, audiences have gotten used to seeing more co-producing, Rolling World Premieres, touring shows, "Presented by," and commercial productions. It's no great secret that the economics of theatre have become more challenging in recent years: these more collaborative models are just a few of the ways theaters, including Round House, continue bringing top-notch performances to our stages while continuing to speak to the here and now of our community.

The ensemble of *Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*. Photo by Grace Toulotte; Dawn Ursula in *Angels in America*. Photo by Danisha Crosby; The ensemble of *In The Heights*. Photo by Stan Barouh; Cristina Pitter (Frankie), Dezi Bing (Willie), Afua Busia (Rain), and Erin Margaret Pettigrew (June) in *it's not a trip it's a journey*. Photo by Margot Schulman Photography; Duain Richmond (Fela Kuti) with the ensemble in Olney Theatre Center and Round House Theatre's co-production of *Fela!* Photo by Teresa Castracane; Cody Nickell (Larry Lamb) and Andrew Rein (Rupert Murdoch) in Round House Theatre and Olney Theatre Center's co-production of *Ink*. Photo by Margot Schulman Photography; Kate Eastwood Norris (The Librarian) and Holly Twyford (The Mother) in *Bad Books*. Photo by Margot Schulman; Gregory Perri (Matt) and Blake Morris (Shawn) in *King James* at Round House Theatre. Photo by Margot Schulman Photography.

# ROUND HOUSE THEATRE BROADWAY IN BETHESDA GALA

AN EVENING WITH  
TONY AWARD WINNER  
RENÉE ELISE  
GOLDSBERRY  
MAY 10, 2025



Earlier this month, we hosted our annual *Broadway in Bethesda* Gala, featuring a performance by Broadway star Renée Elise Goldsberry.

The evening began with a Sponsor Dinner, where attendees had the opportunity to meet Round House VIPs and savor specialty cocktails and a delectable dinner. Meanwhile, ticketholders attended a pre-show cocktail reception in the theatre lobby, before being joined by dinner attendees for the main event in the theatre.

Attendees participated in an exciting auction, and were treated to performances by Dendy, heard from Teen Performance Company members Fin Davis and Lark Jeffers, and participated in a paddle raise.

After the main event, guests were treated to a dessert buffet in our lobby, and our Executive Producer sponsors, Producer sponsors, and Teen Performance Company had the opportunity to meet with Renée on our stage. The event was our most successful Gala in our history, helping us raise over \$525,000 in support of Round House's artistic and educational programs.

Photos by Cameron Whitman Photography and DJ Corey Photography



Renée Elise Goldsberry



Gala Co-Chairs Jay and Robin Hammer with their guests



Heidi & Mitch Dupler



Michele Jawando, Councilmember Will Jawando,  
and Renée Elise Goldsberry



Managing Director Ed Zakreski, Katrina Clark, and Maboud  
Ebrahimzadeh



Gala Dinner



Don McMinn, Harv Lester, Jean Carlson, and Michael Beriss



Kimberly Gilbert, Fin Davis, and Lark Jeffers



Linda Ravdin, Don Shapero, and Renée  
Elise Goldsberry



Michael J. Wilson, Senator Cheryl Kagan, Judy  
and Michael Mael



Demi Friedson and Councilmember Andrew  
Friedson, Nan Kaufman, and Delegate  
Aaron Kaufman



Mary Kathryn Nagle and Jonodev Choudhuri



Ilana Heintz and Jeffrey Heintz



Michael Staines, John Horman, Jonathan Keegan, and Alex Staines



Rachel King, Gala Co-Chairs Jay and Robin  
Hammer, and John King



Wendy Feldman Block and Dendy

## GALLOWS HUMOR INSIDE LOOK AND OPENING NIGHT

**OUR 2024-2025 TEEN PERFORMANCE COMPANY** took the stage in March, presenting the 23rd Annual Sarah Metzger Memorial Play, *Gallows Humor*. *Gallows Humor* was our very first play commissioned and written by a teenager, and as a result, offered a unfiltered and first-hand view on what it is like to be in a school lockdown.

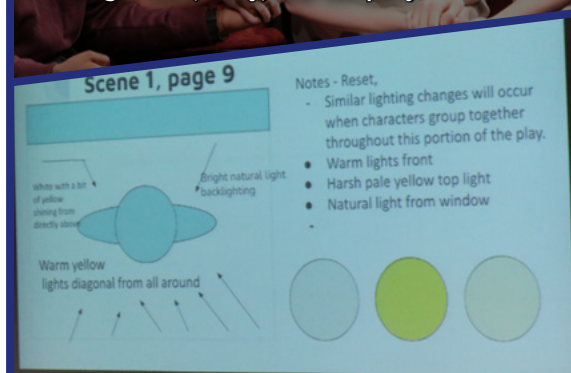
At the Inside Look, members of the design team shared their experiences working with their mentors and how they created the world of the play. We also heard from playwright Fin Davis about how they borrowed pieces from their real-life experiences with lockdowns and inserted them in the play. Finally, Director of Education Danisha Crosby emphasized how much the students learned and grew over the season.

Opening Night was a rousing success, we were delighted to welcome the biggest Opening Night audience we've ever had for a Teen Performance Company opening. Lynn Metzger, Sarah Metzger's mother, spoke about the importance of the program, and Fin Davis spoke about what the program has meant for every member of the company.

*Photos by Kent Kondo and Cameron Whitman photography*



Georgia Toti (Casey) and company

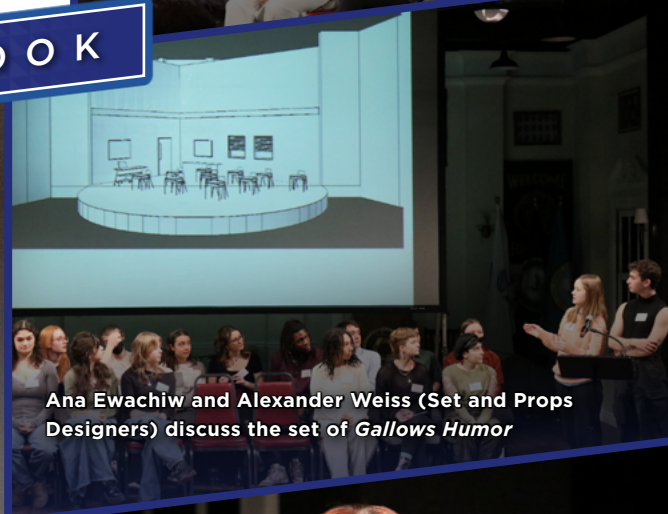


Abigail Graef (Lighting Designer) explains her lighting design

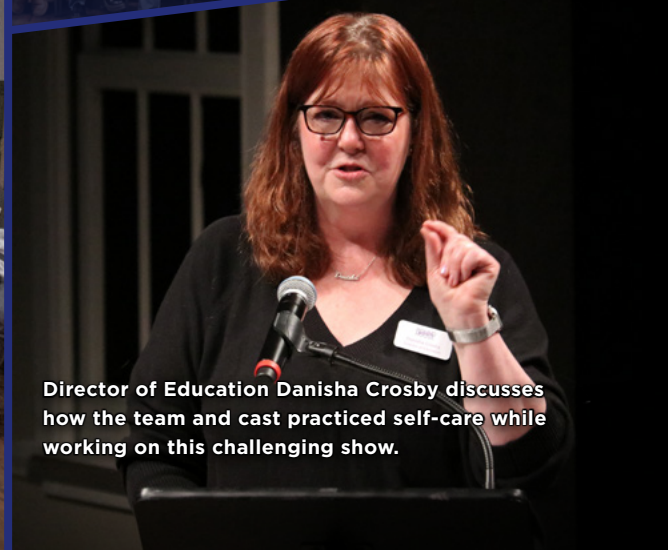
## INSIDE LOOK



The 2024-2025 Teen Performance Company



Ana Ewachiw and Alexander Weiss (Set and Props Designers) discuss the set of *Gallows Humor*



Director of Education Danisha Crosby discusses how the team and cast practiced self-care while working on this challenging show.



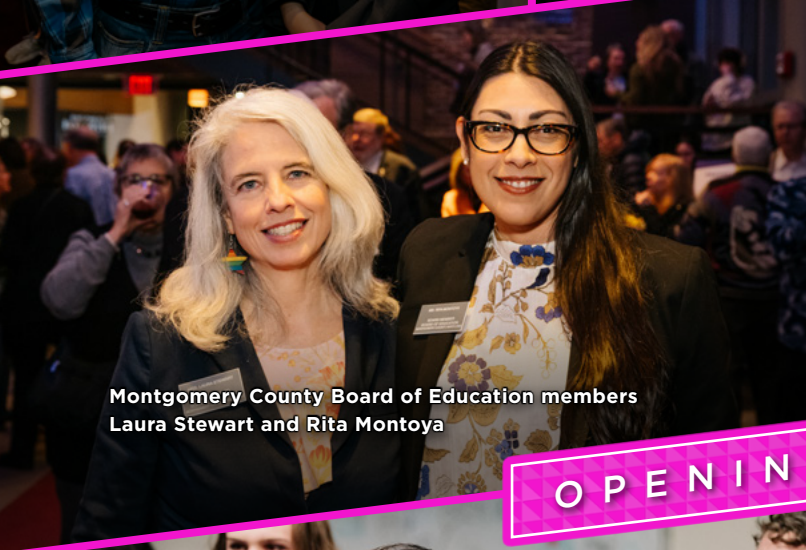
Alex Isicson and Lily Metzger



Artistic Director Ryan Rilette and Lynn Metzger



Dani Stoller (Playwriting Mentor) and Fin Davis (Playwright)



Montgomery County Board of Education members  
Laura Stewart and Rita Montoya

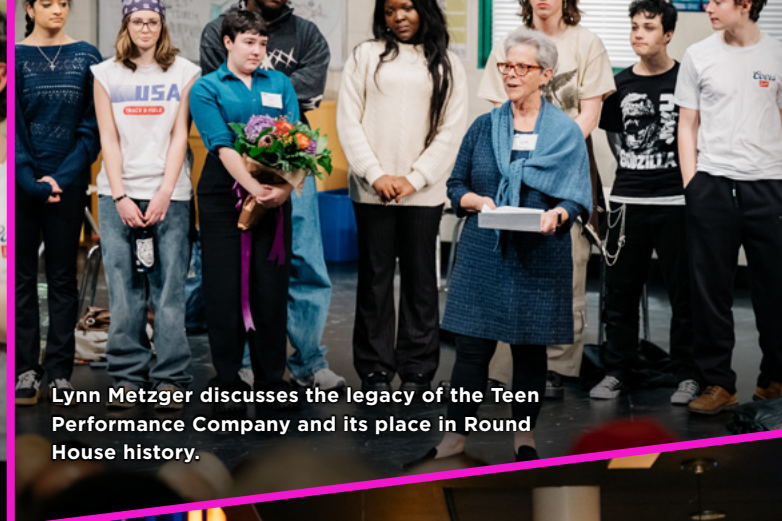


Kenai Sanders (Alex) and family

## OPENING NIGHT



Artistic Director Ryan Rilette praises the tremendous work  
of the TPC company



Lynn Metzger discusses the legacy of the Teen  
Performance Company and its place in Round  
House history.



Maya Keeley, Amy Selco, and Bob Hebda



Michael Beriss, Jean Carlson, and Maureen & Michael McMurphy

## BAD BOOKS INSIDE LOOK AND OPENING NIGHT

**WE WERE THRILLED TO PRESENT** the world premiere of *Bad Books* by Sharyn Rothstein as part of our fourth annual Bonnie Hammerschlag National Capital New Play Festival. *Bad Books* marked the third world premiere that came out of our developmental reading series—those who attended the readings in 2023 may remember hearing an earlier draft of the play!

During the Inside Look, donors were able to see a recorded, exclusive interview between the production's director, Artistic Director Ryan Rilette, and playwright Sharyn Rothstein. We also heard directly from Ryan about the difficulties in creating a show that is not only in the round, but also constantly rotating—something that has never been done in the DC area!

At Opening Night, we were delighted to welcome donors, friends, family, artists, and press to what would soon become the best-selling mainstage premiere of the festival to date.

*Photos by Kent Kondo and Cameron Whitman photography*



Costume Designer Ivania Stack and Managing Director Ed Zakreski



Artistic Director Ryan Rilette and Holly Twyford (The Mother)

## INSIDE LOOK



The team sings happy birthday to Bonnie Hammerschlag—the sponsor of the Bonnie Hammerschlag National Capital New Play Festival



Costume Designer Ivania Stack explains how she creates distinct characters with costume designs



Artistic Director Ryan Rilette explains the peculiarities of the set



Alan & Bonnie Hammerschlag and  
Managing Director Ed Zakreski



Artistic Director Ryan Rilette, Holly Twyford  
(The Mother), Rick Kasten, and Kate  
Eastwood Norris (The Librarian)



Cathy Bernard, Kimberly Gilbert, and  
Robin Hammer



Dr. Carla Sandy and Joy Lewis



Naysan Mojgani (Artistic &  
Dramaturgical Advisor) and  
Maboud Ebrahimzadeh



Neil & Ann Kerwin and Steve &  
Linda Skalet

## OPENING NIGHT



Gabriel Alejandro, Todd Scofield, Joe Graf,  
and Nicole Halmos



Sharyn Rothstein (Playwright) and  
Artistic Director Ryan Rilette



Heidi and Mitch Dupler



The Cast and Creative Team of *Bad Books*

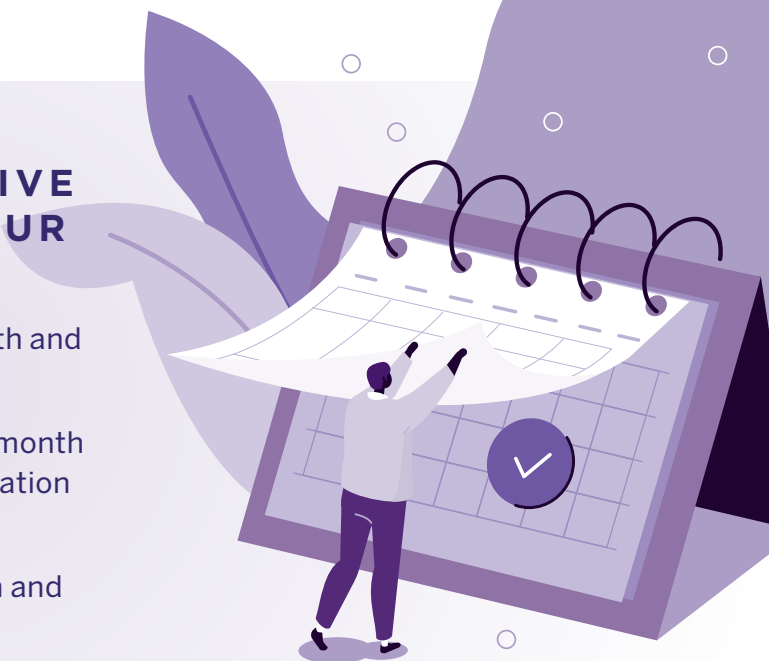
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