

# ASOLO rep

ASOLO REPERTORY THEATRE

**FEB 18 -  
MAR 22,  
2026**



## The Unfriend



**THE UNFRIEND**  
Written by **STEVEN MOFFAT**  
Directed by **PETER ROTHSTEIN**

# ASOLO rep

ASOLO REPERTORY THEATRE

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HEART  
&  
ROCK  
'N'ROLL



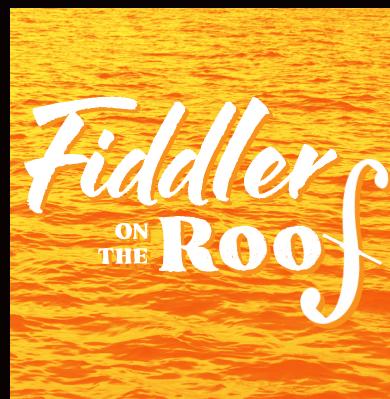
**DON'T MISS  
A MOMENT**  
of the Final shows  
of the season!

**4 SHOW FLEX PASS  
ON SALE NOW**



**The Unfriend**

**FEB 18 - MAR 22**



**APR 11 - MAY 24**



**MAY 6 - MAY 31**



**JUN 6 - JUN 27**

**asolorep**  
ASOLO REPERTORY THEATRE

Peter Rothstein Producing Artistic Director    Ross Egan Managing Director  
Proudly Present



## **The Unfriend**

### **THE UNFRIEND**

Written by **STEVEN MOFFAT**

Directed by **PETER ROTHSTEIN**

Scenic Design  
**KATE SUTTON  
JOHNSON**

Costume Design  
**FABIAN FIDEL  
AGUILAR**

Lighting Design  
**PHILIP ROSENBERG**

Sound Design  
**KATHARINE HOROWITZ**

Projection Design  
**GREG EMETAZ**

Hair, Makeup,  
and Wig Design  
**MICHELLE HART**

Voice and Dialect Coach  
**PATRICIA DELOREY**

Casting  
**MURNANE CASTING  
CHAD ERIC MURNANE,  
CSA & AMBER SNEAD,  
CSA**

Stage Manager  
**KAITLIN KITZMILLER\***

Assistant Stage Manager  
**JENNIFER GREGORY\***

CO-PRODUCERS  
**GERALD and SONDRa BILLER • BARBARA JACOB and KAREN LICHTIG**

CORPORATE SPONSORS



\* Members of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

Appliances for *The Unfriend* set provided by Rice's Appliance & Bedding Center

Directors are members of Stage Directors and Choreographers Society; Designers are members of the United Scenic Artists Local USA-829;  
Backstage and Scene Shop Crew are members of IATSE Local 412.

*The Unfriend* was developed and produced by Playful Productions. The play was first performed at Chichester Festival Theatre on 21st May 2022, at the Criterion Theatre, London on 15th January 2023 and at Wyndham's Theatre, London on 16th December 2023.

# asolorep BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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## AFFILIATIONS

Asolo Repertory Theatre is a member of the Theatre Communications Group (TCG), the League of Resident Theatres (LORT), the National Alliance for Musical Theatre (NAMT), Florida Professional Theatre Association (FPTA), the Arts and Cultural Alliance of Sarasota County and the Manatee County Cultural Alliance.

## UNION CREDITS

Asolo Rep operates under an agreement between the League of Resident Theatres (LORT) and Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States, the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society, and the United Scenic Artists Local USA-829, IATSE Local 412 of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees and Moving Pictures Machine Operators of the United States and Canada.



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## CAST IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER

MARK BENNINGHOFEN\* ..... Neighbor  
HOOINMIN LUKE CHOI ..... The Deckhand/Delivery Man  
ZACH HARRIS f ..... Alex  
CARLA NOACK\* ..... Debbie  
ASHLEY RAYMOND ..... Rosie  
ARUSI SANTI\* ..... PC Junkin  
BRIAN WALLACE\* ..... Peter  
SALLY WINGERT\* ..... Elsa Jean Krakowski

\* - Members of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

f - FSU/Asolo Conservatory Students

§ - Appears by permission of Actors' Equity Association, the union of professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

## UNDERSTUDIES

UNDERSTUDIES NEVER SUBSTITUTE FOR LISTED PLAYERS UNLESS  
A SPECIFIC ANNOUNCEMENT FOR THE APPEARANCE IS MADE AT THE TIME OF THE PERFORMANCE.

For Elsa Jean Krakowski: SYLVIA DAY\*, For Debbie: VICKIE DAIGNAULT\*

For Peter: TASSO FELDMAN\*, For The Deckhand/Delivery Man: RICARDO GARCIA

For PC Junkin: BILLY LYONS §, For Rosie: YAALA MULLER

For Neighbor: FRANK ODEN, BILLY LYONS §, For Alex: EREN PAGAN-OVERMYER

ANY VIDEO AND/OR AUDIO RECORDING OF THIS PRODUCTION IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED.



# THE CAST



**MARK BENNINGHOFEN** (Neighbor) is delighted to return to Asolo Repertory Theatre where he's appeared in *Inherit The Wind*, *Dial M for Murder*, and *Dancing at Lughnasa*. *Rope* at The Hartford Stage Company. *Juno and the Paycock*, *Born Yesterday*, *Appomattox*, *Time Stands Still*, *Great Expectations*, and *St. Joan* at The Guthrie Theater. *Sweeney Todd*, *A Little Night Music*, and *Six Degrees of Separation* at Theater Latté Da. Tyrone and Ralph at The History Theater. TV and film credits include: *Movie Stars*, *Frasier*, *Drew Carey*, *Chicago Hope*, *The Public Domain*, *Wilson*, and *Older Than America*. markb@shout-radio.com



**HOONMIN LUKE CHOI** (The Deckhand/Delivery Man) is a New York City based actor who was born in Seoul, Korea. He is honored to be participating in the Asolo Repertory theater production. Luke performed with FSU/Asolo conservatory productions as Jeffery in *The Curious Savage*, Atung in *The Chinese Lady*, Judge and Shepherd in *The Winter's Tale* and Rhode in *The Three Sisters*. Also was in various seasons of tour production at his theater company M.A.T.



**ZACH HARRIS** (Alex) is a third year Graduate student at the FSU/Asolo conservatory for Actor Training. He previously worked as an Understudy in *Inherit the Wind* with Asolo Repertory Theatre in 2024. Being a student, Zach got the privilege to participate in the Asolo Rep's educational tour this past Fall. He cherishes the experience of outreach and is thrilled to make the shift to the Mertz Stage.



**CARLA NOACK** (Debbie) is delighted to join Asolo Repertory Theatre for *The Unfriend*. Other credits include: *Song of Extinction* (Theater Latté Da/Guthrie Theater), *Miss Julie*, *Antigone* (Ten Thousand Things), *Bernhardt/Hamlet*, *Hir*, *Grounded*, *Tiny Beautiful Things* (Unicorn Theatre), *The Roommate*, *A Doll's House*, *The Realistic Joneses* (KC Actors Theatre), *As You Like It*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Twelfth Night*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Richard III* (Great River Shakespeare Festival), *Lot's Wife*, *The Borderland* (KC Repertory Theatre). Carla teaches acting at the UMKC Conservatory. She loves potlucks, popcorn, and Ping-Pong. She is grateful for her family and for four decades of collaboration and friendship with Peter Rothstein.



**ASHLEY RAYMOND** (Rosie) is a third-year graduate student at the FSU/Asolo Conservatory and will be graduating in the spring! She is originally from Connecticut where she completed her B.A. in Theater and Psychology. She was last seen on the Asolo Repertory Theatre stage as an understudy in *Inherit The Wind* and recently had the privilege of being in the Asolo Rep on Tour's productions of *Alice in Wonderland* and *Shakespeare 45*.



**ARUSI SANTI** (PC Junkin) was born and raised in Mexico, and currently spends most of his time in the mountains of North Carolina. Selected regional credits include: *Real Women Have Curves* (A.R.T.), *A Christmas Carol* (Guthrie Theater), *Somewhere Over the Border* (Syracuse Stage, Geva Theatre,

People's Light, City Theatre), *Nosotros la Gente*, *Ironbound* (B Street Theatre), *Blood Knot* (Flat Rock Playhouse), *Witch*, *The Last Wide Open* (NC Stage), *Once*, *Chaps* (Lamb's Players), *The Liar* (Creede Rep), *Clandestino* (Mixed Blood). UK: *Much Ado About Nothing* (Edinburgh Fringe). Mexico: *La Alondra* (Teatro UNAM). Training: University of Minnesota/Guthrie Theater BFA Actor Training Program.



**BRIAN WALLACE** (Peter) is a veteran of several LORT stages from NYC to Los Angeles, including repeat appearances at the Public Theater, Capital Rep, Trinity Rep, Arkansas Rep, Dallas Theater Center, and the Alabama Shakespeare Festival. In addition to originating roles in several Pulitzer-nominated world premieres, Brian has narrated audio books about international banking, written and co-produced a US/UK television pilot, and played the small but pivotal role of Nova Charise in the groundbreaking road film *Relish*, which won Best Feature at the Madrid and Burbank International Film Festivals. Since moving to L.A., he has found a home performing Shakespeare at the storied Will Geer Theatricum Botanicum in Topanga, where he is a regular Nick Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Graduate of the National Theater Institute and the Moscow Art Theater School. Info: [imdb.me/BrianWallace](https://imdb.me/BrianWallace)



**SALLY WINGERT** (Elsa Jean Krakowski) is an actor with over 40 years of experience home-based in the Twin Cities. She has worked extensively at home and across the country. Most recently she played the title character in *An Act Of God* at Six Points Theater, Virginia Noyes in *It's Only A Play* at Park Square, and Amanda in Rob Melrose's production of *The Glass Menagerie* at The Alley. She has worked at The Shakespeare Theater in Chicago, Arena Stage, Yale Rep, ART, The McCarter, London's West End, Broadway, and many others. In the Twin Cities Sally has worked at Mixed Blood, Ten Thousand Things, Artistry, Theatre Latte Da, The Moving Company, The Playwright's Center and so many more including over 90 productions at The Guthrie. She is thrilled to be returning to Asolo Repertory Theatre where she has been seen in *Inherit The Wind* and *Sweeney Todd*.



**SYLVIA DAY** (Understudy Elsa Jean Krakowski) is thrilled to be back at Asolo Repertory Theatre where her credits include: *Cabaret*, *Fountain*, *Grand Horizons*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Sweat*, and *A Doll's House*, *Part 2*. Her off-Broadway credits include *50 Shades of DAY!* which she starred in, wrote, and directed. While living in Europe for over 20 years, Sylvia enjoyed success as an

international actor and comedian, performing in five languages. She is a mainstage cast member of Florida Studio Theatre Improv and a rising star in the stand-up comedy world. IG @mssylviaday



**VICKIE DAIGNAULT** (Understudy Debbie) selected regional theatre credits include: *The Immigrant* (Sarasota Jewish Theatre), *Ugly Lies the Bone* (Florida Studio Theatre), *The Sound Inside*, *Women Laughing Alone with Salad* (Urbanite Theatre), *Silent Sky*, *Between Riverside and Crazy* (American Stage), *Hats!, the Musical* (The Royal George), *The Dixie Swim Club* (Alhambra Theatre), *Big River*, *Kindertransport*, and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Apple Tree Theatre). In addition to her acting work on the stage, she has performed in indie films and commercials, has directed plays, operetta and readings, produced a short film and is producing the new podcast, *Dear Friends*.



**TASSO FELDMAN** (Understudy Peter) Regional credits include: *The Lehman Trilogy* (Denver Center), *Waiting for Godot* (Rogue Theater Company), *Intimate Apparel* (McCarter Theater), *The Seagull*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Heart of Robin Hood*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *On the*

*Razzle* (Oregon Shakespeare Festival), *Amadeus*, *Charley's Aunt*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Cocoanuts*, *The Three Musketeers* (Utah Shakespeare Festival), *Goldfish* (South Coast Rep), *Equivocation* (Geffen Playhouse), *The Goat, or Who is Sylvia?* (Lyric Stage Co, Boston). TV/Film: Six seasons on *The Resident*, *Black Box*, *CSI:NY*, *The Artist*, *Pirandello on Broadway*. Training: BFA, Boston University.



**RICARDO GARCIA** (Understudy The Deckhand/Delivery Man) is an award-winning actor and filmmaker with over 20 prizes in eight countries, including the JCSI Emmy for *What If* and the short *I Loved To See You*. Educated in Brazil, China, and Canada, he has performance credits in all these countries and in five languages. He received the Ficmonterrey Full Scholarship at Vancouver Film School and leads a filmmaking program for deaf students in Brazil. Now part of the FSU/Asolo Conservatory MFA.

# THE CAST



**BILLY LYONS** (Understudy PC Junkin) is a first-year MFA student at the FSU/Asolo Conservatory. As a bi-coastal actor, they have proudly worked with: Shakespeare & Co., SFBATCO, Livermore Shakespeare (SPARC), Pacific Repertory Theatre, and the San Francisco Shakespeare Festival. Some of their favorite recent credits include Puck (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*), Clown (*The 39 Steps*), Nell Gwyn (*Charlie and Nell*), and Touchstone (*As You Like It*). [www.charlielavaroni.com](http://www.charlielavaroni.com)



**FRANK ODÉN** (Understudy Neighbor) is a multi-discipline theater artist with a career spanning more than five decades. Recent acting appearances include the Utah Shakespeare Festival, Arvada Center Black Box Rep, and Shakespeare in the Wild. He has written the book, music and lyrics for six long-running musical comedies and created multiple "concert theater" productions which he tours to perform as a solo guest artist with symphony orchestras nationwide. [www.frankoden.com](http://www.frankoden.com).



**YAALA MULLER** (Understudy Rosie) is a soon-to-be New York-based actress in her final year at the FSU/Asolo Conservatory. Originally from Israel, she spent recent years working as a political organizer and voting rights advocate and is ecstatic to return to theatre. At Asolo Repertory Theatre, she appeared as an understudy in *Inherit the Wind* and was part of her class's uproarious ensemble in the Asolo Rep On Tour's productions of *Alice in Wonderland* and *Shakespeare45*.



**EREN PAGAN-OVERMYER** (Understudy Alex) is a first-year student at the FSU/Asolo Conservatory. Previous credits include The Book of Silence, Julius Caesar, The Tempest, Private Lives, Clue, and On The Town (WMU), The Two Noble Kinsmen (Commonwealth Shakes), and Man and Moon and Taproot (Queer Theatre Kalamazoo). BFA: Western Michigan University. So much love to everyone who helped me get to where I am today! [@eren\\_gabriel](http://eren_gabriel) | [erenpaganovermyer.com](http://erenpaganovermyer.com).

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UP NEXT



**Fiddler on the Roof**

**FIDDLER ON THE ROOF**

Based on SHOLEM ALEICHEM stories, by special permission of ARNOLD PERL  
Book by JOSEPH STEIN Music by JERRY BOCK Lyrics by SHELDON HARNICK  
Produced on the New York Stage by HAROLD PRINCE  
Original New York Stage Production Directed & Choreographed by JEROME ROBBINS  
Directed by PETER ROTHSTEIN  
Choreography by DANNY PELZIG Music Direction by MATTHEW MECKES

**APR 11 - MAY 24**

# THE CREATIVES

**FABIAN FIDEL AGUILAR** (Costume Design) **Fabian** attended the Yale School of Drama for his M.F.A. and Boston University (B.F.A.) to pursue theatrical costume design. Credits include DIG (Playwright Horizons), Three Sisters, Twelfth Night (Two River Theater), *Makred Maia Dot Gato Dropped. May Makes a Million, Winnie the Night, Slov Mlima's Ta* **NEED NEW BIO** *Juliet (Wes Road (PCP) iachi, Mother cals), Recent Alien Abductions (Play Co.), ¡BIENVENIDOS BIAUCOS! or Welcome White People! (Team Sunshine, Philadelphia), A View from the Bridge, Seven Spots on the Sun. Set and costume for The War Boys (NYC), Sotto Voce (Portland Stage), A Midsummer Night's Dream, and The Moors (Yale Repertory Theater world premier).*

**PATRICIA DELOREY** (Voice and Dialect Coach) Asolo Rep favorites include: *Knoxville* (world premiere), *Silent Sky, Cabaret, The Cake, Sweeney Todd, Gloria, Ragtime, Rhinoceros, Roe, The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity, The Great Society, Josephine* (world premiere), *All The Way, West Side Story, Sotto Voce, Other Desert Cities, The Grapes of Wrath, Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike, Clybourne Park, The Innocents* (world premiere), *Bonnie & Clyde* (world premiere), *Doubt, Equus*. Other credits include: *Judith* (world premiere Urbanite Theatre), *Pitmen Painters* (American Stage Theatre), *The Smuggler* (Urbanite Theatre), Studio Six's production of *Plasticine* (The Baryshnikov Arts Center), *Saturday Night Fever* (Royal Caribbean International Cruises), *Stone Cold Dead Serious* (world premiere American Repertory Theatre), and *Nocturne* (world premiere American Repertory Theatre).

**ROSS EGAN** (Managing Director) began his arts administration career in Chicago where he was a co-founder of Jeff award-winning Refuge Theatre Project. Ross has served as Managing Director at Barter Theatre, the nation's longest-running professional theatre, and as Director of Marketing & Operations at Illinois Shakespeare Festival. Ross holds a BFA in acting from Michigan State University and an MBA from Illinois State University. He lives with his family in Lakewood Ranch and proudly serves as a den leader for Scouting America.

**GREG EMETAZ** (Projection Design) THEATRE: *Come from Away, Ken Ludwig's Lady Molly of Scotland Yard, All is Calm, Man of La Mancha, The Three Musketeers, Murder on the Orient Express* (Asolo Rep); *Joseph, All Shook Up, Footloose, Singin' in the Rain* (The

Muny); *Mamma Mia!, Newsies* (TUTS); *The Vagrant Trilogy* (The Public Theater). OPERA: *Champion, Fire Shut Up in My Bones* (The Metropolitan Opera); *La Fanciulla Del West* (NCPA Beijing); *M. Butterfly, Tristan, The Righteous* (Santa Fe Opera); CONCERT: *Liz Phair Exile in Guyville Tour*. FILM: feature film *Camp Wedding*; short films: *Bowes Academy, Spell Claire, Get the F K Outta Paris!, Death by Omelette*. Behind-the-scenes documentaries: Julie Taymor's *The Tempest & Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark*. MINORapocalypse.com.

**JENNIFER GREGORY** (Assistant Stage Manager) is thrilled to be back at Asolo Repertory Theatre, where she previously worked on *Jesus Christ Superstar*. Other selected credits include: *A Christmas Carol, Ashland Avenue, Betrayal, Midnight in the Garden of Good & Evil, The Penelopiad, The Cherry Orchard, and War Paint* (Goodman Theatre); *The Year of Magical Thinking, Bloomsday, Frankenstein* (Remy Bumppo Theatre Company); the touring production of *X-Marks the Spot* (Chicago Children's Theatre); *Ain't Misbehavin', The Messenger* (Pioneer Theatre Company); *Jersey Boys, Kinky Boots, A Gentleman's Guide to Love & Murder* (Saugatuck Center for the Arts); and *Wait Until Dark* and *Memphis* (Arkansas Repertory Theatre).

**KATHARINE HOROWITZ** (Sound Design) is a sound designer, composer, and teaching artist in Minneapolis, MN, and is pleased to be making her debut at Asolo Repertory Theatre and reuniting with Peter Rothstein! She has designed critically-acclaimed and award-winning shows for Capital Rep Theatre, The Guthrie Theater, Children's Theatre Company, Theater Latté Da, Wellfleet Harbor Actors Theatre, Creede Repertory Theatre, Great River Shakespeare Festival, Second City Theatricals, and many others. Katharine is a 2017 McKnight Theatre Artist Fellow at the Playwrights' Center in Minneapolis. [www.katsound.com](http://www.katsound.com)

**KATE SUTTON JOHNSON** (Scenic Design) In 2019, Kate made her Asolo debut, designing the set for *Sweeney Todd*. She returned in 2024 to envision the set for *Inherit the Wind*, and now she's back designing sets for both *The Unfriend* and *Fiddler on the Roof*. Over this period of collaboration with the Asolo team, Kate has grown to feel like this is one of her primary artistic homes, and she'd like to offer a deep bow of thanks to the theater's talented administrative staff, production leadership, artisans, fabricators, and stagehands for making the work so meaningful. Kate is based in the Twin Cities and has designed dozens of theater projects locally and nationally, including contemporary dramas, classical theater, large-scale musicals, devised work, and everything in between. Additionally,



# THE CREATIVES



Kate works extensively in the museum world, designing exhibit experiences that focus on natural history, anthropology, science, childhood development, ethnography, archaeology, and conservation.

**KAITLIN KITZMILLER** (Stage Manager) is thrilled to be returning to Asolo Repertory Theatre. Previous regional credits include: Goodman Theatre, Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, Paramount Theatre, Drury Lane Theatre, Milwaukee Repertory Theatre, Resident Ensemble Players, Theatre Silco and Peninsula Players. Kaitlin is a proud member of Actor's Equity Association.

**STEVEN MOFFAT** (Playwright) was the co-creator, writer and executive producer of *Sherlock* (Hartswood/BBC) and *Dracula* (Hartswood/BBC/Netflix). From 2009-2017 Steven was the lead writer and executive producer of BBC One's flagship show, *Doctor Who*. Steven's credits in

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## NEED NEW BIO

The Unfriend, recently transferred to the West End after premiering at Chichester Festival Theatre. Steven's numerous awards include BAFTAs for *Press Gang* and *Doctor Who*, two BAFTAs and two EMMYS for *Sherlock*, and the BAFTA Special Award in 2012. In 2015 he was granted an OBE for services to drama.

**PHILIP ROSENBERG** (Lighting Design) Broadway and West End: *Boop!, Mrs. Doubtfire, Pretty Woman, The Elephant Man, A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder* and *It's Only a Play*. Regional: Kennedy Center, La Jolla Playhouse, Ford's Theatre, The Guthrie Theater, The Old Globe, TheatreWorks, Hartford Stage, Alliance, Huntington Theatre Company, Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, Shakespeare Theatre Company, Dallas Theatre Center, Denver Center Theatre, The Alley Theatre, Arena Stage, The McCarter Theatre, Manhattan School of Music, Portland Stage Company, TACT, Barrington Stage Company, Williamstown Theatre Festival, Dorset Theatre Festival, Bay Street Theatre, Goodspeed Opera, Two River Theatre Company, George Street Playhouse, and Westport Country Playhouse.

**PETER ROTHSTEIN** (Producing Artistic Director; Director) directed *Come from Away*, *Ken Ludwig's Lady Molly of Scotland Yard* (World Premiere), *Twelve Angry Men: A New Musical*, *Inherit the Wind*, *Man of La Mancha*, *Sweeney Todd*, and *Ragtime* at Asolo Rep. He works extensively as a director of theatre, musicals, opera, and new work development. For 25 years, Rothstein served as the founding Artistic Director of Theater Latté Da, a Minneapolis-based company dedicated to new and adventurous music-theater. Other collaborations include: the Guthrie Theater, Children's Theatre Company, Ten Thousand Things, and Seattle's 5th Avenue, as well as the Minnesota Opera, Boston Lyric Opera, Florida Grand Opera, and Chicago Opera Theater. Rothstein is the creator of *All is Calm: The Christmas Truce of 1914*, which had its off-Broadway debut in 2018, receiving the Drama Desk Award for Unique Theatrical Experience. Rothstein served on the board of directors for the National Alliance for Musical Theatre, Alive and Kickin', and the Twin Cities' Ivey Awards. He holds degrees in Music and Theater from St. John's University and an MFA in Directing from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

**MURNANE CASTING** (Casting) casts for Broadway, tours, and regional theatre. Current and recent projects include: *TINA, Dear Evan Hansen, Mrs. Doubtfire, The Sound of Music, Grinch, and Kinky Boots*. Developmental work include: *Anne of Green Gables, The Boy Who Loved Batman, and Fremont Ave*. Murnane Casting regularly collaborates with major theatres nationwide, including Arena Stage, Asolo Repertory Theatre, Bay Street, Denver Center, Goodspeed, and The Hollywood Bowl. Learn more at [www.MurnaneCasting.com](http://www.MurnaneCasting.com).

## FIDDLER AD WIZARD OF OZ AD SEASON ANNOUNCEMENT DEVO AD

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# THE QUIET HOPE OF *PRIMARY TRUST*

## *An interview with Director Chari Arespacochaga*

BY JAMES MONAGHAN

## 1. How did you first encounter this story and what were some of your initial reactions?

I first encountered *Primary Trust* in its New York Premiere. I remember most how quiet and introspective the show felt and the wallop of emotion that emanated from it. I will never forget the image of the table in Wally's apartment, then the shadow of the time he walked in on his wife already crying. The play found but being integrated into a traumatic incident, the 'touchstones of hope' that effectively holds up the play.

# NEW STEVEN MOFFATT INTERVIEW



## Chari Arespacochaga

**2. Eboni Booth is both specific and general about when this play is set: "Before Smartphones." How does this contribute to the specificity of the characters and the general world of the play?**

I think it was so smart of her to set this in that sense of isolation is more information at our fingertips — being what you need requires. And yet that palpable sense is now more relatable given the hips with smartphones — aware of so many ways we connect. On a human level, I reckon with are:

A painting of a neon-lit bar at night. The bar is called "PHILLIES" and has a sign that says "Only 5¢". There are four people at the bar: a man in a suit, a man in a fedora, a woman in a red dress, and a man in a white shirt. The bar is on a street with other buildings in the background.

## *Nighthawks* by Edward Hopper

- How to be with yourself — no browsing, no doomscrolling, no games or social media apps to distract you from having to just sit with yourself.
- How to get information — Kenneth has to find out about a job opening through another person, and by chance.

3. Could you say a little about how the design of the show came together and how it complements the play?

In our very early meetings, Joey Mendoza and I were sharing images with each other. Kenneth's loneliness, is of Cranberry, New York, images that captured quiet and states of mind. A sense of survival was also important in our exchanges, we both later learned from Edward Hopper.

wanted the flow from his thoughts being shared with the audience into his real time experiences to reflect how the mind processes memory almost cinematically. This has all trickled into the conversations about music. We wanted to use the space nontraditionally and we are also playing with the idea of music as a representative of the town and being in the atmosphere throughout, while also cueing us into the inner workings of Kenneth's mind and memories.

4. *Primary Trust* won the Pulitzer Prize in 2024. The jurors for the prize consider how the work is ‘distinguished,’ delivers a ‘strong message,’ as well as overall ‘originality’ and ‘impact.’ In what ways do you feel *Primary Trust* exemplifies these qualities?

*Primary Trust's* genius resides in celebrating unity through truthful interactions and relationships among real people trying to survive and cope

ures moments we can  
ing us that there is only  
se moments. As such,  
prise — in the quietest  
over you. In the end we  
anity and given a sliver

h's words to explain this. Now, as he processes the letter, Kenneth remembers the words he'd heard from a new friend.

# NEW STEVEN MOFFATT INTERVIEW

# MIND YOUR MANNERS

BY JAMES MONAGHAN

## We have a unique tendency to parse styles of comedy into subsections,

perhaps because it is so tricky to figure out why something makes us laugh. We generally don't, for example, describe tragedies with the mechanisms by which they attempt to make us cry (maybe 'family drama' is a notable exception?). But you'll recognize the Rom Com as a funny story of two people falling in love, or the Farce as a door-slapping, sight gag extravaganza, or the Workplace Comedy as the story of people who don't necessarily like each other being forced to cooperate, just to name a few.

The Comedy of Manners focuses on the hilarious ways humans tie themselves into knots to conform to perceived social dictums. Economic, political, social, and cultural mores are all targets for skewering in this style, and the plays generally focus on the elite who have the time and means to debate the most appropriate way to behave in a given situation. As ever, for much of the rest of the world, it's less about your elbows being on the table than making sure there is food on it. For English audiences, this genre is primarily born out of the Restoration.<sup>1</sup> When Oliver Cromwell's Puritanical restrictions on life and art gave way to King Charles II's much more liberal views, the resulting plays naturally reflected the spirit of the time in which they were created. Without turning this into too much of a history lesson, it will serve our understanding of the kinds of manners taken up in this genre by knowing a little more about Charles and his reign:

01

He is known as the "Merry Monarch" for restoring many quintessentially English customs (Christmas, football, and 'pub-culture' among them) and had 13 illegitimate children outside of his marriage to Catherine of Braganza.

At least one of those children was fathered with popular actress Nell Gwyn; Charles went on to create a Dukedom for this child that still exists to this day.

03

This moment in history (roughly 1660-1700) also corresponds to the rise of the British empire and a rapid expansion in wealth for English Aristocracy and the new middle class through enterprises like the Dutch East India and Hudson Bay companies.

It is no wonder then that many of the first so-called comedies of manners dealt with infidelity and lust, scandal—political or otherwise—and the fate of fortunes.

It is easy to look back in history and identify the trends and, perhaps in hindsight, the somewhat silly ideas about what is socially appropriate. The term "comedy of manners" doesn't come into popular use in English until at least 1822 (according to Webster's), over 100 years after the initial comedies to exemplify the style were written. It is much trickier to identify and lampoon

02

the ridiculous parameters our notions of social correctness are currently based on. Luckily, with *The Unfriend*, we are in the hands of comedic master, Steven Moffat, whose keen observations of contemporary society are a delight, if not a little close to home.

An obvious requirement when translating this style to the present is the eschewing of aristocracy and nobility as the central figures. While we certainly still have incredibly wealthy people in modern times, a play about which mega yacht to buy or delays in getting on the private jet might run the risk of alienating much of the audience. Moreover, the social rules that apply are a bit more class-agnostic than they once were. In any case, Steven finds plenty of rigid manners to question in his squarely middle-class family. And then there is technology—cell phones, social media, online gaming—essentially a whole new realm where 'correct behavior' is much trickier to pin down...

if it even exists. Mr. Moffat makes much out of the shocking dialogue that takes place in these forums where shooting at each other or un-friending each other is routine. And of course there is our well-intentioned but often quite complicated culture of correctness. How do we take up the space we need, while also honoring the space others are asking to take up, holding space for those who can't, and making space for new ideas? All this is built upon the evergreen reality that family is hard, our bodies do smelly things, and murder is generally frowned upon.

The central question in all these comedies of manners, new and old, is: are these characters meeting the social standard? The unexpected joy of a contemporary comedy of manners is that we not only get to laugh at the characters as they aspire to do the right thing and fail repeatedly, but also to debate what that right thing even is.

<sup>1</sup> The French have Moliere a few hundred years earlier.

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Mother-daughter team Barbara and Karen have enjoyed sponsoring FSU/Asolo Conservatory graduate students for over 10 seasons. Far beyond their financial support, they have attended alumni weddings, hosted Seders, taught a baklava-making class, and brought the bagels and cream cheese to final understudy rehearsal. They are mainstays at

the open classes and attend every Conservatory opening and closing performance, as Barbara says, so they can see how the show "marinates." This season, their giving includes co-producing *The Unfriend*, chosen because of Karen's particular admiration of playwright Steven Moffat and his work on British TV shows such as *Dr. Who* and *Sherlock*. Barbara and Karen's enthusiastic engagement with Asolo Repertory Theatre and the Conservatory makes it truly a "family affair!"

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