asolorep

ASOLO REPERTORY THEATRE

IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE

A LIVE RADIO PLAY



DEC 2 - JAN 3

SEASON PRESENTERS

Season Presenters are visionary partners whose generosity fuel an entire season of artistic excellence. Their commitment helps bring every production to life, ensuring that exceptional theatre continues to thrive in our community.

SEASON MUSIC SPONSORS: KEN AND JOANN JOHNS

SECOND STAGE PRESENTERS

Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation

The Exchange Since 1962

Jewish Federation of Sarasota-Manatee

- Ron Banyay
- Terry O. Brackett
- Andrew and Judith‡ Economos
- Donna and Jeffrey Lenobel
- Burgess Levin and Mary Saily
- Dr. Hal E. Ott and Sharon Casaburo
- Nancy Woodruff and Mark Lancaster

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Community Partners play a vital role in supporting Asolo Rep's artistic, educational, and community engagement initiatives through valuable in-kind goods, services, media support, and strategic partnerships.

Culinary

Curated Catering + Events · Gecko's Grill & Pub · Hanami Japanese Dining & Lounge · Royal Flamingo Catering · enRich Bistro · Simply Gourmet by Metz

Events

beneva Share Your Emotions® · U.S. Tent Rental

Legal

Century of Excellence 1925-2025

Hospitality

Hyatt Place Sarasota/Bradenton Airport · Residence Inn by Marriott · Staybridge Suites by IHG

Production/Technical

Cortez Pump and Sprinkler, LLC — We Offer In-House Pump Repair

Media

WEDU PBS · Observer — You. Your Neighbors. Your Neighborhood. · LocalIQ | Herald-Tribune · SRQ Media · Sarasota Magazine · WUSF 89.7 npr

asolorep
ASOLO REPERTORY THEATRE

Peter Rothstein Producing Artistic Director **Ross Egan** Managing Director

Proudly Present



IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE: A LIVE RADIO PLAY

Adapted by **JOE LANDRY**

Based on the story 'The Greatest Gift' by Philip Van Doren Stern.
'The Greatest Gift' is used by permission of The Greatest Gift Corporation.

Directed by **SCOTT KEYS**

Scenic Design
MICHAEL ANDREW RODGERS

Costume Design
DAVID M. COVACH

Lighting Design
ETHAN VAIL

Sound Design
MATTHEW T. PARKER

Hair, Makeup, and Wig Design
MICHELLE HART

New York Casting
MURNANE CASTING CHAD ERIC MURNANE, CSA & AMBER SNEAD, CSA

Composer/Music Supervisor
PETER VITALE

Voice/Dialect Coach
PATRICIA DELOREY

Stage Manager
MATTHEW ROHAN*

Assistant Stage Manager
HANNA HAGERTY*

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS

CO-PRODUCERS

RUTH MICKELSEN and BILL MANNING | GREG and BELLE STIKELEATHER
MARILYN B. WEST‡, IN MEMORY OF HER BELOVED ARNIE

‡ in memoriam

IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE: A LIVE RADIO PLAY (FULL LENGTH VERSION) is presented by arrangement with Concord Theatricals on behalf of Dramatists Play Service. www.concordtheatricals.com

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.

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

CAST

IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER

MATT KOENIG*	George Bailey
ANN MORRISON*	Violet & Others
MICHAEL A. SHEPPERD*	Potter & Others
JOZ VAMMER*	Mary Hatch
PETER VITALE	Foley Artist/Stage Manager
DONOVAN WHITNEY*	Clarence & Others

UNDERSTUDIES

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

For George Bailey and Foley Artist/Stage Manager: JASON BUDAHAZY *ƒ*; For Potter, Clarence, & Others: MEL HOLLEY; For Violet & Others: TESSA KAPLAN NESBET *ƒ*; For Mary Hatch: MALIA VARGAS *ƒ*

* - Members of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.
ƒ - FSU/Asolo Conservatory Student

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.

THE VIDEOTAPING OR MAKING OF ELECTRONIC OR OTHER AUDIO AND/OR VISUAL RECORDINGS OF THIS PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTING RECORDINGS OR STREAMS IN ANY MEDIUM, INCLUDING THE INTERNET, IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED, A VIOLATION OF THE AUTHOR(S)'S RIGHTS AND ACTIONABLE UNDER UNITED STATES COPYRIGHT LAW. FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE VISIT: https://concordtheatricals.com/resources/protecting-artists

asolorep

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

OFFICERS

Scott Greer | *Board Chair*
Pauline Wamsler | *Vice Chair*
Teri A Hansen | *Vice Chair*
Charles Wilson | *Treasurer*
Mary Braxton Joseph | *Secretary*
Tom McLaughlin | *General Counsel*

Carolyn Hess Abraham
David Bass
Sondra Biller
Terry O. Brackett
Susan C. Buck
Lucy Calautti
Ann Charters
Carole Crosby
Jaime DiDomenico
Deborah A. Farrington
Wendy Feinstein
Kathleen France
David Harding
Lawrence Haspel
Beth Hirsch
Judith Hofmann
Barbara Howton
Charlie Huisking
Caryl Barrie Kaplan
Ruth Kreindler
Lucie Lapovsky, Ph.D.
Jeffrey A Lenobel
Enid Marshall
Nikol Miller
Sandra C. Miranda
Melanie Natarajan
Ellen Sandor
Belle Stikeleather
Chris Voelker
Marysue Wechsler
Mary Lou Winnick
Geri Yonover

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS

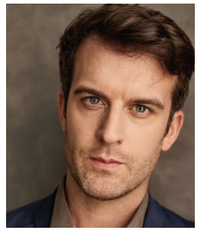
James Frazier
Dean, College of Fine Arts, Florida State University

Richard McCullough
President, Florida State University

PRESIDENT'S COUNCIL

Bob Bartner
Beverly Bartner
Linda DiGabriele
Andrew Economos
Carolyn Keystone
Beverly Koski
Nancy Markle
John Welch

THE CAST



MATT KOENIG (George Bailey) is thrilled to join Asolo Repertory Theatre for his first production. He has previously performed in Sarasota in *Straight White Men* at Florida Studio Theatre. Other credits include: Utah/Idaho/Lake Tahoe/Island/New Swan Shakespeare Festivals; Cleveland Play House, Great Lakes Theater, PCPA, Laguna Playhouse, Garry Marshall Theatre, McCoy/Rigby Entertainment, etc. Matt is the head of BFA Acting at Baldwin Wallace University and a certified teacher in Fitzmaurice Voicework and Knight-Thompson Speechwork. MFA: UC Irvine



ANN MORRISON (Violet & Others) is tickled to be back with Asolo Repertory Theatre, where her previous credits include: *1940's Radio Hour, Swingtime Canteen, All I Need To Know I Learned In Kindergarten, My Fair Lady, We Need a Little Christmas, The Sound Of Music, Jesus Christ Superstar.* Broadway: *Merrily We Roll Along* (1981 original), *Children And Art, Lovemusik.* West End London: *Peg.* Off-Broadway: *Goblin Market.* And lead roles in regional theaters throughout the country. She recently starred in the Broadway National Tour of *Kimberly Akimbo.* Ann is Co-founder/Artistic Director of SaraSolo Productions. She plays herself in the documentary *Best Worst Thing That Ever Could Have Happened.*



MICHAEL A. SHEPPERD (Potter & Others) is very excited to be back in Sarasota after being away for 29 years. Michael recently completed the National Tour of *Two Trains Running* (The Acting Company) as Memphis. Broadway/Off and National tours include: *Little Shop of Horrors* (Audrey 2), *Cathy Rigby is Peter Pan* (Starkey), *Matilda* (Miss Trunchbull), *The Producers* (Roger), *Fences* (Troy), *The Color Purple* (Mister), *Master Harold and the Boys* (Sam), *Intimate Apparel* (George), *Choir Boy* (Headmaster), *Caroline, or Change* (Bus/Dryer). You can catch him on *NCIS: Origins* as your favorite bar owner, Smitty. @ShepDawg1122



JOZ VAMMER (Mary Hatch) Asolo Repertory Theatre debut! Off-Broadway: *Bernie and Mikey's Trip to the Moon* (59E59). Regional credits include: *Red Taxi* (La Jolla Playhouse), *Twelfth Night, Measure for Measure, Midsummer, Thinking Shakespeare LOVE!* (Old Globe), *The Play that Goes Wrong* (Cleveland Playhouse), *Merchant of Venice, Fiddler on the Roof* (Arkansas Shakes), *Cyrano* (Saratoga Shakes), *Into the Woods* (Hope Summer Rep). As director, playwright, choreographer, and composer: Asolo Rep on Tour, Tuacahn, Urbanite Modern Works, Virginia Stage, Havoc Movement, North Coast Rep, USD, and FSU. MFA: Old Globe. Love to Raccoon-Whisperer Tate and The Unbreakable Buffalo. jozvam.com



PETER VITALE (Foley Artist/Stage Manager/Composer/Music Supervisor) is thrilled to return to Asolo Repertory Theatre after composing and performing live music for last season's production of *Primary Trust.* Recent regional credits include *Hamlet, Much Ado About Nothing* (Playmakers Rep). He was the Resident Composer/Music Director at Ten Thousand Things Theater in Minneapolis for over twenty-five years before relocating to Hatteras Island, NC. He holds an AB in music from Duke University and an MM in vocal performance from UNC-Greensboro. Peter is the creator of the new musical, *Island Time,* about a small, scrappy community theatre on the Outer Banks reopening their doors after the pandemic. petervitalemusic.com



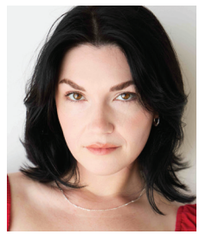
DONOVAN WHITNEY (Clarence & Others) is ecstatic to be making his Asolo Repertory Theatre debut! Regional credits include: *Father Comes From The Wars Parts (1,2, & 3)* (Quintessence Theatre Group); *A Clockwork Orange, The Comedy of Errors, Picasso at The Lapin Agile* (Jobsite Theater); *Prowess* (Storefront Theater of Indianapolis); *Between Riverside and Crazy, Footloose* (American Stage); *Evil Dead The Musical* (Stageworks Theatre); *Fences, Flyin' West, A Soldier's Play* (Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe). Film credits include *Paper Made* and *Paper Line.* He received his BA in Political Science and Theatre from Wabash College. He thanks his family and friends for their unwavering love and support. @donoacts93



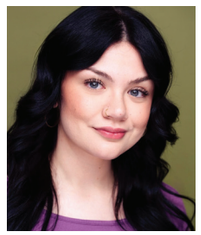
JASON BUDAHAZY (Understudy George Bailey/Foley Artist/Stage Manager) is an actor, writer, comedian, and returned Peace Corps Volunteer. Some of his theatre credits include: *Beyond Therapy, Stop Kiss, The Real Inspector Hound, A Streetcar Named Desire,* plus *Lenny Bruce: Sick Comic,* and *Holiday Problems Anonymous,* both of which he also wrote and directed. Other credits include the hit video games *Mafia: Definitive* and *Watch Dogs 2,* plus national voiceover campaigns for Toyota, Liberty Mutual, and others. jasonbudahazy.com



MEL HOLLEY (Understudy Potter, Clarence & Others) is an actor and playwright who is joyously making his Asolo Repertory Theatre debut. Recent regional credits include: *Choir Boy* (Pittsburgh Playhouse REP), *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical* (Pittsburgh CLO), *Come from Away* (Front Porch Theatricals/New Hazlett Theater), and *RENT* (BDE Productions/Greer Cabaret Theater). He is ecstatic to work with such an awesome team in such an awesome city. @melholley26 | @periodpiecemusical



TESSA KAPLAN NESBET (Understudy Violet & Others) is thrilled to make her debut with Asolo Repertory Theatre! Theatre credits include: *King Lear* (U/S Regan, San Francisco Shakespeare), *The Pig Farm* (Bunny, LA Fringe Festival), *Plaza Suite* (Muriel, C.D. Productions), and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Helena, NYU Tisch). On screen, she stars in *Good Dogs* featured at Culver City, Indy, and MSC Gardena Cinema Film Festivals. Keep an eye out for *Eat Me* coming soon! tessakaplannesbet.com



MALIA VARGAS (Understudy Mary Hatch) is thrilled to be a part of *It's a Wonderful Life* and is currently in her first year at the FSU/Asolo Conservatory. Previous credits include the premiere production of Rajiv Joseph's newly edited *Mr. Wolf,* Anton Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya,* and Neil Simon's *Rumors.* Malia has received regional and national recognition from the American College Theatre Festival for performance and directorial work and is a recipient of the Robert R. Buseick Award.

SPECIAL THANKS

The extraordinary work that takes place on our stages, in our classrooms, and throughout our community is made possible by the generosity of our donors. We are proud to recognize the supporters whose philanthropy helps Asolo Rep create world-class theatre, inspire lifelong learning, and enrich the cultural life of our region. The following listings reflect contributions and pledges received from September 1 to October 15, 2026. Gifts received after this date will be recognized in subsequent playbills throughout the season.

Individual Giving

$125+
Anonymous (2)
Anonymous, in memory of James Courter
Debbie and Steve Grob
Ingeborg Herdegen
Fred Rekker

$500+
Kathy and Sam Dibiase
Leonard S. Engelberg
Helene and Gene Noble Testamentary Fund
John and Antje Munroe
Ron and Gayle Timmerman

$2,500+
Katherine Benoit and John Brooks
The DiDomenico Family Charitable Fund

$5,000+
Neil and Sandra DeFeo

Angel Hissom Education Circle

The Angel Hissom Education Circle recognizes donors whose philanthropy supports Asolo Rep's education and engagement initiatives, including the FSU/Asolo Conservatory for Actor Training, student matinees, school partnerships, community engagement, and lifelong learning programs. The following listings reflect contributions and pledges received from September 1 to October 15, 2026. Gifts received after this date will be recognized in subsequent playbills throughout the season.

$100+
Anonymous

$1,000+
Terry O. Brackett
David and Lucie Lapovsky

$2,500+
Jack E Block Fund of Gulf Coast Community Foundation

$10,000+
Huisking Family Fund, Charlie Huisking

Institutional Giving

Asolo Rep gratefully recognizes the following corporate, foundation, and government funders whose generous contributions were received during the period from September 1 to October 15, 2026.

$25,000+
Cordelia Lee Beattie Foundation

THE CREATIVES



JOE LANDRY (Adaptor)'s plays have been produced across the country and internationally and include *It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play* (named one of the top ten most-produced plays by American Theatre Magazine). His other Live Radio Play adaptations include *Vintage Hitchcock, Meet Me in St. Louis, War of the Worlds: The Panic Broadcast, The Great Gatsby,* and *A Christmas Carol,* published and licensed by Concord Theatricals. Other plays include *The Wicked Stage, Reefer Madness, Numb,* and *Hitchcocked!*. He attended Playwrights Horizons/NYU and has taught playwriting at Sacred Heart University. For more information visit joelandry.com.

SCOTT KEYS (Director) is a freelance director and theatre educator based in Sarasota, FL. He served as Chairman of the Theatre Department at Booker's Visual & Performing Arts High School for 21 years. He is a graduate of NYU and Syracuse University with degrees in Musical Theatre Performance and Writing. He recently directed Asolo Repertory Theatre's summer theatre production of *A Year With Frog and Toad,* as well as productions of *Fun Home, Parade, The Mousetrap,* and Stephen Sondheim's *Assassins.* He served as Interim Artistic Director for Players Theatre and is currently on the Board of Trustees. He is the recipient of many awards for his work including a Lifetime Achievement Award in Theatre Education from The Florida Theatre Conference. Additionally, Scott is a published writer, lyricist, and composer.

MICHAEL ANDREW RODGERS (Scenic Design) has been with Asolo Rep for 10 seasons and is currently the Director of Production. Other work includes International tours: Priscilla: Queen of the Desert, Burn the Floor and Blue Man Group. NYC premiere of Tony Kushner's Intelligent Homosexual's Guide directed by Michael Greif (Public). World premieres: Terrence McNally's Golden Age directed by Walter Bobbie (Kennedy Center), A Midsummer Night's Dream directed by Anne Bogart (SITI), as well as work for Lincoln Center, Barrington Stage and Legends in Concert. BA Flagler College, MFA University of Alabama.

DAVID M. COVACH (Costume Design) is excited to be designing this production of *It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play,* giving him the opportunity to work again with his partner, Scott Keys (Director) and this incredible cast and creative team. David has been with the Asolo for 31 years, having recently stepped down from his former role as Costume Shop manager in August. David now spends most of his time behind a sewing machine in the Asolo Shop instead of a computer. In addition to creating costumes for the Asolo stage, he recently designed *Ahoy, Hoy!* for Urbanite Theatre where he will also design this season's productions of *The Garbologist* and *1999.* Enjoy the show and Merry Christmas!

ETHAN VAIL (Lighting Design) is pleased to return to Asolo Rep where he previously designed *Grand Horizons, Fannie: The Music and Life of Fannie Lou Hamer, Camelot.* Other designs and theatres include Urbanite Theatre: *Spaceman, No One is Forgotten, At the Wake of a Dead Drag Queen;* Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe: *Ruby, Dreamgirls;* Significant Productions located at the Villages: *Next to Normal, Angel Street.* He was the 2013 recipient of the U.S. Institute for Theatre Technology's Young Designers, Managers & Technicians Award, sponsored by Barbizon Lighting Company, for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, at Purdue University. He is also the Production Manager and Resident Lighting Designer for the Sarasota Ballet. His work with the ballet has been seen at Jacob's Pillow, New York and the Royal Opera House in London.

MATTHEW T. PARKER (Sound Design) received his B.F.A. from Ohio University and has been a fixture at Asolo Repertory Theatre since 1993, marking his thirty-third season with the company. Serving as Head of Sound, he manages audio systems while also overseeing video and projection infrastructure for all house productions. His stage credits span from classic repertory plays to world premiere musicals, including original scores for *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *Nicholas Nickleby.* A member of I.A.T.S.E. Local 412 and Master Theatre Sound Designer, he has frequently collaborated with director Peter Amster. Outside theatre, Matthew designed interactive entertainment systems at Livingston's and produced virtual exhibitions for the National Watercolor Society during the pandemic.

MICHELLE HART (Hair, Wig, and Makeup Design) designs for Asolo Repertory Theatre and the FSU/Asolo Conservatory. Other credits: Sarasota Ballet, Palm Beach Dramaworks, freeFall Theatre, Urbanite Theatre, Florida Studio Theatre, Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe, Banyan Theatre, Ruth Eckerd Hall, Venice Theatre, Dorset Theatre, Barrington Stage, and Open Stage Theatre. She has also done hair and/or makeup for Joan Rivers, Doris Roberts, Martin Short, Jane Russell, Arlene Dahl, Soledad Villamil, Jane Pauley, Richard Dreyfuss, Castille Langdon, Christopher Higgins, Justin Long, and Paul Downs. Music videos: "Second Chance" by Shinedown, "Reverse Cowgirl" by T-Pain. Film and television: *The Loyalists, Lady of the Manor, The Real Stephen Blatt,* and *Paradise, FL.*

MURNANE CASTING (Casting) led by Chad Eric Murnane, CSA, and Amber Snead, CSA, casts for Broadway, tours, and regional theatre. Recent projects include tours of *The Wiz, Shucked, TINA, Dear Evan Hansen, Mrs. Doubtfire, The Sound of Music,* and *Kinky Boots.* We regularly collaborate with major theatres nationwide, including Arena Stage, Asolo Rep, Bay Street, Denver Center, Goodspeed, and The Hollywood Bowl. Learn more at MurnaneCasting.com and follow @MurnaneCastingNYC.

PATRICIA DELOREY (Voice and Dialect Coach) Asolo Repertory Theatre 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,* and *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), and *Stone Cold Dead Serious,* and *Nocturne* (world premiere American Repertory Theatre).

MATTHEW ROHAN (Stage Manager) is excited to be back at Asolo Repertory Theatre for his fourth season, where previous credits include: *Fiddler on the Roof, Jesus Christ Superstar, Primary Trust,* Ken Ludwig's *The Three Musketeers,* and *Chicken & Biscuits.* Off-Broadway: Pan Asian Repertory Theatre. Regional: Arizona Theatre Company, American Players Theatre, Goodman Theatre, Two River Theater, Westport Country Playhouse, the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center, and Utah Festival Opera and Musical Theatre. Matthew is a proud member of AEA and graduate of the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

HANNA HAGERTY (Assistant Stage Manager) is very excited to be returning to Asolo Repertory Theatre for her third season! Her previous Asolo Rep credits include: *Lady Disdain, Agatha Christie's The Mirror Crack'd, All is Calm: The Christmas Truce of 1914* as Assistant Stage Manager, and *Much Ado About Nothing* on tour as Stage Manager. She'd like to thank her parents, family, friends, and partner for their unwavering support, and Asolo Rep for welcoming her back!

PETER ROTHSTEIN (Producing Artistic Director) directed *Fiddler on the Roof,* The U.S. Premiere of *The Unfriend, 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 Repertory Theatre. 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, South Coast Rep, and Seattle's 5th Avenue, as well as the Minnesota Opera, Boston Lyric 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.

ROSS EGAN (Managing Director) leads Asolo Repertory Theatre, one of the nation's premier regional theatres. He previously served as Managing Director of Barter Theatre in Abingdon, Virginia, one of the longest-running professional theatres in the country, and as Director of Operations at the Illinois Shakespeare Festival. Earlier in his career, he founded Refuge Theatre Project, a Jeff Award-winning Chicago company celebrated for its groundbreaking productions. Ross currently serves as Board President of the Arts and Cultural Alliance of Sarasota County. He holds an MBA and a BFA in Acting. Away from the theatre, you'll find him on the hockey rink.

It's a WONDER-ful Life

BY SCOTT KEYS

"I wonder as I wander out under the sky
How Jesus the savior did come for to die
For Poor orn'ry creatures like you and like I
I wonder as I wander…out under the sky"

— Traditional Appalachian Folk Carol



Donna Reed and James Stewart in the *It's a Wonderful Life* film, 1946.

The word "Wonder" can be used as a noun, a verb, or an adjective. It means a state of awe, deep admiration, curiosity, surprise, astonishment, and deep contemplation. It inspires big existential questions, like "What is my purpose?" or "Why am I here?" And while Frank Capra's film might initially conjure a sense of heartwarming sentimentality and Christmas spirit, the themes of the show are so much bigger and deeper and more complicated than that.

Redemption, Renewal, Rebirth…

Christmas, the Winter Solstice, Saturnalia, The Yuletide: they all fall during the darkest part of the year, astronomically speaking. They celebrate the crossover from the darkness and cold of winter, toward the light, and warmth, and rebirth of spring.

Consider the other perennial holiday favorites like *A Christmas Carol, How the Grinch Stole Christmas,* even *A Charlie Brown Christmas;* these stories share themes of redemption and a sense of community. They center on a character who is in deep despair, depression, and disillusionment with a hostility toward the season. Through some divine intervention, that character is transformed, renewed, and discovers a genuine gratitude for life, family, friendship. It is the anguish of a George Bailey, an Ebenezer Scrooge, or a Charlie Brown that bring families together, huddled eating popcorn and Christmas cookies and sipping cocoa as they watch the spirit of Christmas ultimately prevail and redeem these characters. The viewer finds their own faith in humanity renewed.

George is an "everyman" character. His overwhelming sense of dread and disappointment, helplessness, and hopelessness is so familiar to all of us these days. Whether we admit it or not, we all reach for, or pray for, some divine intervention to set our world right; to help us regain a balance of humanity. He is plagued by past mistakes, regrets, and a dim view of his future. But it is his collision with the present that is his ultimate present. He comes to appreciate the sacrifices he has made that seemingly dashed his dreams, goals and ambitions, that in fact led to a much more profound and purposeful existence.

The story is so timely and relevant, addressing economic distress; suicidal ideation and mental health, greed and tyranny; and the need for forgiveness, comfort, and joy.

A Crisis of Faith…

It's a Wonderful Life came out in 1946, just after the conclusion of World War II, the greatest catastrophe for human life we've ever inflicted on ourselves. In the midst of war, when so many are making the ultimate sacrifice in the name of a greater cause, the individual tends to lose a sense of self. There is little room for a person to deem their own life so worthless and expendable that it can be thrown away. Post-war, there is a necessary rebirth of the individual and their existential purpose, which can bring much good but also much uncertainty. We all have the need to realize one person can make a difference. I can make a difference. We all need blessings. We all need redemption. A light in the dark when we are having a crisis of faith.

"God rest ye Merry Gentlemen
Let nothing you dismay…"

It's interesting that *It's a Wonderful Life* was not an instant holiday classic as it is now (you can pretty much watch it 24/7 from Thanksgiving through New Year's). It was nominated for Academy Awards but didn't win any. Not until the 1970s when it could air on TV did it become a quintessential holiday staple. The movie came into the home with its message of "every person touches so many lives" at the same time that Christmas commercialism was on the rise. The film struck a balance between the secular celebration and the more personal, internal meaning of the season. Christmas is not about presents and materialism, it's about *being* present, giving the gift of our presence to others.

Hark how the bells…

For me, my fondest memory of Christmas was putting up the tree. Dad put a multi-color rotating light on it that changed from red, to blue, to amber, to green. I would sit for hours mesmerized as it slowly spun around while Johnnie Mathis and Andy Williams Christmas albums festively spun on the stereo. It was magical. It was mysterious. It was transformative. It made me believe in…something other, something beyond. It sat in front of our bay window. I would look up at the solstice moon and pray for a snowfall.

I remember too, Granny Helen, with her gnarled veiny hands, plodding away on the Wurlitzer in the basement with her quivering soprano, leading our reluctant family choir in carols on Christmas Eve. We were terrible, but I, who would eventually go into musical theatre as a career, was enchanted. I knew there was something essential about this ritual, however humble and cacophonous.

Speaking of music, Peter Vitale (Foley Artist and Music Composer) and I discussed a lot and decided on almost a constant soundscape under the show. We even decided to add a little jazzy medley of "snow songs" at the top of the show to give us the feel of the 1940s, as well as the Christmas mood. In our story, snow acts as a sort of metaphor for the connection between heaven and earth, the spiritual and the worldly. The hymns underscore George's crisis of faith, in himself, in humanity… while the juxtaposition of the secular Christmas tunes celebrate the comfort and joy of family and friends. The image of snow represents that **wonder**, enlightenment, and ultimately renewal that comes with a landscape quilted in pure white.



THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO CLARENCE

BY JAMES MONAGHAN

It's a Wonderful Life is a faithful expansion on its source material in many respects. Philip Van Doren Stern's 1943 short story, "The Greatest Gift," which he was compelled to self-publish as a Christmas pamphlet for friends because no magazines were interested, weighs in at only 36 pages, including full-page illustrations. So, some additional details are incorporated and others embellished, but the heart of the film is unquestionably true to the text.

While we don't get as much detail surrounding George and Mary's courtship in "The Greatest Gift," and there is less drama about the Building and Loan because Potter is only mentioned as the owner of a photography studio, George's journey from darkness to light is intact in both versions…with one key exception.

DID YOU KNOW?

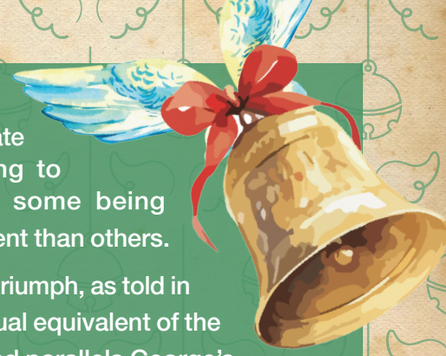
In "The Greatest Gift," George's last name is Pratt, not Bailey, and the town he lives in remains unnamed.

Distraught at the state of his life and contemplating ending it all, George encounters a mysterious figure on a bridge with preternatural knowledge of his life and thoughts. The stranger then miraculously alters the world to function as if George had never been born to demonstrate the positive influence his life has had on others. In the film, this is Clarence Odbody, a class-two angel who has come to embody the very idea of what a guardian angel is for many. In the short story, it is an unnamed, unexceptional man apparently from the World Cleaning Company, who suggests that George might find selling brushes door to door an instructive experience.

A two-hour film must of course make a little bit more of the characters than the pithy short story does. That it chooses to do so by adding an entire subplot about a kind-but-hapless lesser angel who is beginning to feel a little put out by the fact that he hasn't earned his wings in the 200 years since his death, reveals much about the psychology of the film and attests to its durability as an American holiday classic.

To be clear, the idea that some or all humans have a kind of guardian angel was not invented by Frank Capra or Philip Van Doren Stern. It's a concept that goes back at least to the Bible – Psalms 91:11 for instance – but ask the ancient Greeks about daimons or the original Romans about what a genius or a juno is, and you'll get close to our contemporary concept. These are all examples of supernatural forces working for our benefit, sometimes shepherding an individual personally, sometimes overseeing a nation or group of people on the way to fulfilling their appointed destiny.

For all that history and spiritual etymology, Clarence Odbody departs from tradition to create a guardian angel with a uniquely *American* sensibility. We are introduced to Clarence as a celestial object – literally a glowing cluster of stars – before he is tasked by his bosses with re-humanizing himself and intervening in George's life. It is already a departure from mainstream Christian theology to represent angels as galaxies. The concept that Clarence was once a person who has become an angel is a further step away from recognized doctrine: most Christian denominations hold that humans and angels are entirely separate orders of beings and one does not become the other. However, the idea that through striving and good works, a person can earn their stripes and transform themselves into something more perfect, is constitutionally American. And while the idea that there are "orders" or "classes" of angels can be traced back to Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite in the 5th century C.E. and later popularized by Thomas Aquinas, neither of those celebrated Christian thinkers contemplates an angel needing to "earn" their wings or that the system is anything other than fixed. The film presents a much more bureaucratic process that involves angels rotating through responsibilities and ascending a corporate structure according to their merits, with some being clearly more proficient than others.



Clarence's ultimate triumph, as told in the film, is the spiritual equivalent of the American Dream and parallels George's own journey of actualization. To tell this story live on stage, and as a radio play where the actor playing Clarence also plays several very human human beings, only serves to highlight the ways in which Clarence's theology has deep roots in Judeo-Christian belief as well as contemporary American Idealism. It blends the spiritual with the material, a balance many of us, regardless of a particular faith, are aiming at during this time of year.

Marguerite Stern Robinson, Van Doren Stern's daughter, recalled delivering some of those Christmas Pamphlets with her father, who "was himself from a mixed religious background, [and] explained to me that while this story takes place at Christmas time and that we were sending it as a Christmas card to our friends, it is a universal story for all people in all times." The film—and the play—honors this dictum by delivering confirmation of Clarence's newly winged status not in the form of heavenly trumpets or other identifiably Christian modes, but as a simple note inside The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, Mark Twain's American classic.



THINK ABOUT IT:

Can you name any other 'guardian angel' types either in literature or your personal life? Here are some literary ideas to get you started: Virgil in Dante's *Inferno,* Jiminy Cricket from *Pinocchio,* any number of Fairy God Mothers…

DONOR SPOTLIGHT



Greg and Belle Stikeleather

1. Tell us a little about yourself.

We're Greg and Belle Stikeleather, both with backgrounds in behavioral science. Greg was a serial entrepreneur in Silicon Valley, while Belle held leadership roles in the for-profit and nonprofit sectors, helping those with unique abilities.

2. What should fellow patrons know about you?

We believe in being more than spectators in the communities we care about. Whether through the arts, education, behavioral science, or philanthropy, we enjoy encouraging others to build and create.

3. How long have you lived in Sarasota, and what brought you here?

We've called Sarasota home for more than five years. Belle grew up in the Philippines and Greg in the Midwest, but we met in California. When we decided to move to Florida, Sarasota stood out for its arts and culture. We love the smart, generous, creative friends we've made here.

4. What first brought you to Asolo Repertory Theatre?

Seeing *Knoxville*—more than once—was what really drew us in. Asolo Rep offers the quality and professionalism of national-level theatre in an intimate regional setting, and the more we experience, the more we appreciate the creativity and leadership behind Asolo.

5. Is there a particular production or moment at Asolo Rep that has stayed with you?

Knoxville and *All Is Calm* have both stayed with us. They reminded us that being open to other perspectives, embracing differences, and learning from history can help us become more thoughtful and more human.

6. Is there anything else you would like to share?

One of the things we value most in our marriage is encouraging each other to keep learning, creating, exploring, and supporting others. We often say, "We are fortunate to realize that we are fortunate," and we try to let that awareness shape how we live and give.



Jeremy Radin as Tevye in Asolo Rep's 2026 production of *Fiddler on the Roof.*

SUPPORT THE MAGIC OF LIVE THEATRE

Every performance on our stages is made possible by the generosity of donors who believe in the power of the arts to inspire, educate, and bring people together.

Your support helps Asolo Rep produce world-class theatre, provide transformative arts education programs for students of all ages, develop new works, and ensure that live theatre remains accessible to our community.

Whether you're making your first gift or deepening your commitment, every contribution makes a meaningful difference.

Join our community of supporters today.

Scan the QR code to make a gift and help keep great theatre thriving in Sarasota.

Thank you for supporting Asolo Repertory Theatre—where world-class theatre is made in Sarasota.

STAFF

ARTISTIC
Producing Artistic Director
Peter Rothstein

Managing Director
Ross Egan

General Manager
Corinne Deckard ++

Director of New Works and Dramaturgy
James Monaghan

Associate Artistic Director
Cat Brindisi

Associate General Manager
Crystal McCall

Artistic Administrator
Nathaniel Avery

Cultural Competency Consultant
DeWanda Smith-Soeder

Company Manager
Cameron Thorp-Conquest

Company Management Apprentice
Christian Kahl

Executive Assistant
Savannah Broshow

BUSINESS OFFICE
Finance Director
Ron McDonough

Human Resource Director
Audra Lynn Barrie

Business Associate
Ellen Dudley

Staff Accountant
Serena Phillips

OPERATIONS
Systems Administrator
Aron Lamerson

Facilities Manager
Shane Streight ++

Custodial Tech
Nick Martinez

DEVELOPMENT
Director of Development
Juliana Han Witt

Major Gifts Officer
John Anderson

Individual Giving Associate
Kiley Snobeck

Special Events Manager
Cedric Blue II

Development Operations Associate
Rachel Morris

EDUCATION & ENGAGEMENT
Education & Engagement Director
Terrance Jackson

Education & Engagement Manager
Delaney Eischen

MARKETING
Marketing & Communications Director
Ruba Audeh

Associate Marketing & Communications Director
Emiliano Mejías

Digital Communications Specialist
Adriana Muñiz

Creative Content Manager
Adrian Van Stee

Graphic Designer & Layout Coordinator
Kat Paraspolo

PATRON SERVICES
Ticket Services Manager
Mike Jones

Assistant Ticket Services Managers
Jennie Coburn, LaWanda Green

House Services Manager
Karen Collins

Front of House Managers
Tom Aposporos, Nancy Milligan

Customer Service Representatives
Ben Daniels, Hannah Owen, Katie Stone, Heidi Thomas

Concessions & Bar Operations Manager
Cristina Bickerstaff

Assistant Bar Manager
Patty Doty

Bar Apprentice
Penny Witt

Beverage Specialist
Andre DeJournette

PRODUCTION
Director of Production
Mike Rodgers

Associate Production Manager
Emily Lowney

Technical Director
Daniel Kilgore

Scene Shop Foreman
Peter MacBeth +

Assistant Shop Foreperson
Jordan Quiles

Properties Supervisor
Anna Baldwin Lack

Assistant Properties Supervisor
Garrett Wilson

Property Artisans
Bill Fenner +, Ansley Eddy

Scenic Charge Artist
Joann Waters-Atkins +++

Assistant Scenic Charge
Peter Everly

Scenic Artists
Abby Knauber, Paige Spizzo

Scenic Craftsman
Taj Medeiros, JR Lallemand

BACKSTAGE CREW
MERTZ
Master Stage Carpenter
Christian Wadman

Assistant Master Carpenter
Geovi Urias

Master Sound Engineer
Matthew Parker +++

Audio 1
Carter Erickson

Audio 2
Krishna Amin

Master Electrician
Will Johnson

Assistant Master Electrician
Talon Sams

Hair, Wigs, Makeup Head
Jonathan Hall

Wardrobe Head
Chelsea Allen

Theatre Properties Head
Lew Jones

COOK
Sound Board Operator
Shad Schoonover

Electrician
Travis Prol

Stagehand
Christy Perry

Wardrobe
Carmen Torres

COSTUME SHOP
Costume Shop Manager
Jordan Jeffers

Assistant Costume Shop Manager
Ning Goff

Resident Hair/Wig & Makeup Designer
Michelle Hart ++

Lead Draper
Laine June Marr +

Drapers
Jessica Hayes, Skyler Niedziela

Lead Cutter/First Hand
Teresa Consolvo ++

First Hands
Kris Grooms, Christine Fenner

Lead Stitcher
David Covach +++

Stitchers
Madelyn Debrine, Cassidy Van Brink

Dyer-Crafts Artist
Sarah Cox

Resident Cook Designer
Joshua Waltz

STAGE MANAGEMENT
Production Stage Manager
Kimberly Ann McCann

ADDITIONAL PRODUCTION CREDITS
Production Assistant
Alayna Domboski

Consent Consultant
Summer Dawn Wallace

Many thanks to these staff members for their years of service with Asolo Rep.

\+ 10 plus years
++ 20 plus years
+++ 30 plus years

asolorep

941.351.8000
asolorep.org

26
27
SEASON

Subscribe Today!

THE GREATEST SEASON ON EARTH

