

## Blood at the Root

June 29, 2021 - July 18, 2021



Chautauqua Theater Company

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## BLOOD AT THE ROOT

by **Dominique Morisseau**

Directed by **Stori Ayers**

*"If there is no struggle, there is no progress."*

On a hot day in October, a black high school senior breaks one too many rules when she decides to seek shade under an oak tree. The tree is located in the school's courtyard and is traditionally a gathering place for white students. The next day, racial tensions mount when a school yard fight leaves black students charged with attempted murder. In this story about opposition and unity, the students of Cedar High desperately contemplate the nature of racial bias and whether justice is truly blind while the lives of six black students hang in the balance. Inspired by true events.

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*Blood at the Root* was commissioned by the Penn State School of Theatre, and was first produced by Penn State Centre Stage, Dan Carter, Producing Artistic Director.

The New York Premiere of *Blood at the Root* was produced by Penn State Centre Stage and presented by Hi-ARTS and the national Black Theatre, Inc.

"*Blood at the Root*" is presented by arrangement with Concord Theatricals on behalf of Samuel French, Inc.

[www.concordtheatricals.com](http://www.concordtheatricals.com)

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*Blood at the Root* (90 minutes)

**BE ADVISED:** There will be lights flashing at certain points of the performance.

**Director's Note**

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## Stori Ayers

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Director

*Blood at the Root* is inspired by the December 2006 events surrounding the “Jena Six,” six black teenagers (Robert Bailey, then aged 16; Mychal Bell, then 16; Carwin Jones, then 17; Bryant Purvis, then 17; Jesse Ray Beard, then 14; and Theo Shaw, then 17) convicted in the alleged beating of Justin Barker, a white student at Jena High School in Jena, Louisiana. While the case was pending, liberal commentators often cited it as an example of racial injustice in the United States, believing the defendants were initially charged with too-serious offenses and treated unfairly. The case sparked protests by those who saw the arrests and charges—initially attempted second-degree

murder (though later reduced)—as excessive and racially discriminatory. Protesters argued that white Jena youths involved in other incidents, such as the hanging of nooses from a tree in the courtyard, were treated leniently. On September 20, 2007, between 15,000 and 20,000 protesters marched on Jena in what was described as the “largest civil rights demonstration in years.” Related protests took place in other US cities that same day.

Bryant Purvis has since authored a book, *My Story as a Jena Six*, which gives a vivid account of the incident and his experience being a young black boy in Jena: “When I was seventeen years old, I was charged with attempted murder. It was a crime I did not commit; in fact, I wasn’t even in the room when it happened. But I was soon implicated as a conspirator, and from that moment on, my life changed forever. I should have known that it was only a matter of time before either myself or someone I cared about would be hurt by living in Jena. White people stayed on one side of town, and black people stayed on the other. If you didn’t follow these unwritten rules, then someone was going to get hurt. But I was an optimist kid, and all I cared about was hanging out with my friends, being good to my mom, and playing ball. I didn’t understand at the time that there were people in the world that would attempt to ruin a black man’s reputation, or even take his life, just to prove a point.”

Playwright Dominique Morisseau uses this event to develop the fictitious story for *Blood at the Root*. The story challenges the audience with the social responsibility of dealing with “the other” to create change: How do we judge and treat people who are different? How does that judgment keep us apart from one another and impede our progress? Everyone has an “other” and we all deal with people who are unlike ourselves. This play follows a group of high school students desperately trying to define themselves and navigate around those who identify themselves differently. These students learn that without struggle there is no progress and that that struggle requires uniting despite differences. United, they find their power to reverse injustice. In the journey of these six high school students, Morisseau also addresses propaganda, individual freedoms, and racial inequality in the judiciary system.

This is a protest piece and a call to action. If the past year has not ignited within you a spirit of activism, I pray the story of Jena 6 reimagined through Dominique’s Morisseau’s compelling characters will ignite within you a social responsibility to fight racism. “*We all have a part to play and what you do with that part determines whether you added value or destruction.*” - Toria, *Blood at the Root*

## Further Reading

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For more information and media coverage on the events surrounding the Jena Six, please visit the links below.

[Timeline of Events](#)

[The Case of Louisiana’s ‘Jena Six.’ NPR Special Series.](#)

[“Racial demons rear heads.” Chicago Tribune.](#)

[“5 years later, Jena 6 move on.” NBC News.](#)

## Cast, Creative & Production

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## Chautauqua Institution

### Cast

Justin – Malachi Beasley  
Toria – Rachael Fox  
De'Andre – Christopher Portley  
Asha – Daphne Kinard  
Raylynn – Jada Owens  
Colin – Justin Von Stein

### Creative Team

Director – Stori Ayers  
Scenic Designer – Efren Delgadillo Jr.  
Costume Designer – Erin Barnett  
Lighting Designer – Annie Garrett-Larsen  
Sound Designer – Meghan Roche  
Projection Designer – Omkar Purandare  
Voice, Speech & Dialects Coach – Chris Corporandy  
Choreographer – Kikora Franklin  
Production Stage Manager – Emily Glinick\*  
Assistant Stage Manager – Jean E. Compton\*  
Properties Master- Cooper Nickels

### Production Team

Master Carpenter- John Oberg  
Master Electrician- Jeff Emory  
Master Sound- Colin Braeger  
Head Audio & Video- Graham Riggle  
Head of Props- Kevin Kyser  
Wardrobe Supervisor- Jaylene Ogle  
Technical Director- John P. Woodey



\*The noted Actors & Stage Manager are members of the Actors' Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers in the United States.

\*\*The noted designers are represented by United Scenic Artists, Local USA-829 of the IATSE.

\*Actors' Equity Association, founded in 1913, is more than 49,000 actors and stage managers in the United States. Equity seeks to advance, promote, and foster the art of live theatre as an essential component of our society. Equity negotiates wages and working conditions, providing a wide range of benefits, including health and pension plans. AEA is a member of the AFL-CIO, and is affiliated with FIA, an international organization of performing arts unions. The Equity emblem is our mark of excellence. [www.actorsequity.org](http://www.actorsequity.org).

### Leadership & Staff

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## **Chautauqua Institution**

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Managing Director – Sarah Clare Corporandy

Associate Artistic Director – Stori Ayers

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Co-Company Manager – Logan McDonald

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Arts Marketing Associate – Gabrielle Ghaderi

Costume Supervisor – Cece Hill

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## **Letter from Leadership at CTC**

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In one of her reflective essays written during the time of COVID the writer Zadie Smith shares that art and the creation of art at its core is really just “something to do.”

During this last year and a half of “the global humbling” as Smith calls it, the theater world was at 94% unemployment, and we were simply unable to do the something that we do.

Whether driven by the maxim “The show must go on!” or from the fear that an artist who ceases to create is like a shark who stops swimming and will die, most of us did our best to continue to work in some way. And though we learned a great deal about our art form -and about how much Zoom we could and could not bare-these efforts, though creative, often amplified the isolation we all had from one another. In the best of circumstances, we were together, alone.

As we created films, Zoom readings, cleaned the garage, reorganized the bookshelves, sent more emails than any humans should have to type and, oh yes, planned, replanned, and re-replanned seasons and scenarios trying to hit the ever-moving target of what might be possible to stage, Richard II’s 400-year-old reprimand pinged pointedly in our heads, “I’ve wasted time, and now does time waste me.” We were working, spending time doing the something that we do, why was it so unsatisfying?

Because for us, theater is something that we do *together*. We do it and we share it with each other and with you the audience. As we land back on grounds, in person, and in many ways return to our roots of performances under a tent by the lake, as we awaken to a world that is inequitable and fragile, we are finally here again with “something to do.”

And even though as this is being written we may not be able to see your smiling faces from that required social distance, we return with open eyes, relief and gratitude that we can come together, share space, take stock, cry, laugh, spend time and convene with you.

Thanks so much for being here, we’ve missed you, let’s do something.

**—Andrew, Sarah Clare, & Stori**

## Take Action

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### Anti-Racism Action Planning Workshop

Thursdays - July 1, July 15, July 22

2:30-3:30 p.m.

Children's School Pavilion (26 Hurst Ave, enter from Wythe Avenue)

*Blood at the Root* brings up key issues of race and racism in contemporary America. Audience members who feel compelled to move from dialogue to action are invited to attend an Anti-Racism Action Planning workshop with Amit Taneja, Chautauqua Institution's inaugural Senior VP and Chief IDEA Officer (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility). Those interested in participating are asked to [register for free here](#).

If you are unable to attend the workshop, but would like to participate in a self-paced action planning process, please visit <http://www.holycross.edu/anti-racism-guidebook> for a free step-by-step guidebook authored by Amit Taneja. If you have any questions, please contact Amit at [ataneja@chq.org](mailto:ataneja@chq.org)

### Cast Bios

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#### Malachi Beasley

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Justin

San Diego, CA • CTC: First Season

SoCal: *Harlem Duet* (Coronado Playhouse); *Fun Fair* (West Coast Premiere); *Antigone X* (Cal Rep); *The Human[oid] Experience* (Hollywood Fringe). Educational: *Smart People* (Theatre Threshold); *When the Party's Over* (World Premiere). Film: *Under the Law* (Mitsu Miyashima). MFA Candidate: Yale School of Drama. BA: CSU Long Beach.



#### Rachael Fox

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Toria

Kansas City, MO • CTC: First Season

Off-Broadway: *The Inferno*, *The King's Masquerade*, *The Forgotten* (Sleep No More/Punchdrunk). Regional: *Why Did Desdemona Love the Moor?* (The Provincetown Tennessee Williams Festival); *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Learned Ladies*, *Tovarich*, *Trelawny of the Wells*, *Measure for Measure*, *Macbeth*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey); *King Lear*, *Much Ado About Nothing* (Arkansas Shakespeare Theatre). MFA: University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana.

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### Christopher Portley

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De'Andre

Dallas, TX • CTC: First Season

Regional: *Father Comes Home From the Wars Parts 1, 2 & 3* (African American Repertory Theatre). Educational: *Electra/Orestes*, *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*, *Middletown* (Case Western Reserve University/Cleveland Play House); *The Tempest*, *Measure for Measure* (Shakespeare Academy at Stratford); *Stick Fly* (University of North Texas). MFA Candidate: Case Western Reserve University/Cleveland Play House. BS: University of North Texas.



### Daphne Kinard

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Asha

Dallas, TX • CTC: First Season

Regional: *Passage* (Son of Semele Ensemble); *The Diviners* (Dallas Contemporary); *The Relapse* (Sweet Tea Shakespeare). Educational: *Romeo and Juliet*, *This is Our Youth*, *Buried Child*, *Richard III*, *Miss Julie*, *Spin* (World Premiere), *Girlhood* (World Premiere). Film & TV: *Dickinson* (Apple TV+); *Amends* (USC Thesis). MFA Candidate: Columbia University. BFA: Carnegie Mellon University.



### Jada Owens

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Raylynn

New Orleans, LA • CTC: First Season

Regional: *An Evening with the San Diego Black Artist Collective* (reading) (Old Globe Powers New Voices Festival). Educational: *Orestes 2.0*, *Letters From Cuba*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Farside* (UC San Diego). MFA Candidate: UC San Diego. BFA: Texas State University.



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### Justin Von Stein

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Colin

Memphis, TN • CTC: First Season

Community: *Boeing Boeing* (Flying Anvil Theatre). Educational: *Native Gardens*, *#Matter*, *The Living*, *The Madwoman of Chailot*, *The Real Inspector Hound*, *King Charles III*, *A Christmas Carol* (Clarence Brown Theatre); *The Winter's Tale*, *Coriolanus* (Shakespeare Academy at Stratford). BA: University of Tennessee.

## Creative Team Bios

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### Dominique Morisseau

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Playwright

Dominique Morisseau is an American playwright from Detroit, Michigan. Her plays include *The Detroit Project*, a 3-Play Cycle that includes *Skeleton Crew* (Atlantic Theater Company), *Paradise Blue* (Signature Theatre), and *Detroit '67* (Public Theater, Classical Theatre of Harlem and NBT); *Pipeline* (Lincoln Center Theatre); *Sunset Baby* (LAByrinth Theatre); and *Follow Me To Nellie's* (Premiere Stages). She is also the Tony-nominated book writer on the new Broadway musical *Ain't Too Proud - The Life and Times of the Temptations* (Imperial Theatre). She most recently served as Co-Producer on the Showtime series *Shameless*. Dominique is an alumna of The Public Theater Emerging Writer's Group, Women's Project Lab and Lark Playwrights Workshop. Awards include Spirit of Detroit Award, Steinberg Playwright Award, NBFT August Wilson Playwriting Award, Edward M. Kennedy Prize for Drama, OBIE Award (2), Ford Foundation Art of Change Fellowship, Variety's Women of Impact for 2017-18, and a recent MacArthur Genius Grant Fellow.

### Stori Ayers

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Director

Washington, DC • CTC: Fifth Season

CTC: Acting: *Detroit '67*, *The Christians*; Directing: *Blood at the Root*; Asst. Directing: *An Octoroon*, *Into the Breeches!*, *The Amish Project*, *One Man Two Guvnors*. Acting: Off-Broadway: *Pipeline* (Lincoln Center); *Travisville* (Ensemble Studio Theatre); *Blood at the Root* (National Black Theatre). Regional: *Glorious World of Crown Kinks and Curls* (Baltimore Centre Stage); *Detroit '67* (Signature, DC); *Gem of the Ocean*, *Father Comes Home From The Wars Parts 1, 2 and 3* (Round House Theatre); *A Raisin in the Sun* (Indiana Repertory Theatre & Syracuse Stage); *Foster Mom* (Premiere Stages); *Barbecue*, *Doubt*, *Love's Labours Lost*, *In the Red and Brown Water* (Pennsylvania Centre Stage); *Jitney* (Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park); *Yellowman* (Anacostia Playhouse); *Blood at the Root* (Pennsylvania Centre Stage, Grahamstown Fringe Festival, Edinburgh Fringe Festival, Adelaide Fringe Festival); *An Adult Evening of Shel Silverstein*, *Voodoo*, *Sex*, & *Magic* (Horizon Theatre). TV: *The Last O. G.* (TBS). Directing: Regional: *Skeleton Crew* (Ensemble Theatre Cincinnati); *Blood at the Root* (University of Michigan); *Single Black Female* (Penn State School of Theatre); *Hip Hoperella*; *Here I Go, Boys*. *Wish Me Luck*; *Fires In the Mirror* (Fletcher Collins Theatre); *You Can't Take It With You* (Waynesboro). Upcoming: Directing: *Paradise Blue* (The Geffen), *Confederates* (Signature, NY); Associate Directing: *Skeleton Crew* (Broadway).

### Efren Delgado Jr.

## Chautauqua Institution

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Scenic Designer

Los Angeles, CA • CTC: First Season

New York: *The Three Musketeers* (The Acting Company); *Mycenaean* (BAM, Brooklyn Academy of Music). Notable Regional Theatre: *American Mariachi* (South Coast Rep., Arizona Theatre Company); *Romeo and Juliet* (Oregon Shakespeare Company); *BLKS* (Woolly Mammoth); *Bordertown Now* (Pasadena Playhouse); *Smart People, Indecent* (Denver Center for the Performing Arts); *Othello* (Hartford Stage); *Mojada: A Medea in Los Angeles* (The Getty Villa/Boston Court); *Prometheus Bound* (The Getty Villa/Center for New Performance).

MFA: California Institute of the Arts. BFA in Studio Arts from University of California, Irvine. Efen is an Assistant Professor of Scenic Design at UC Irvine. [www.efrendelgadillojr.com](http://www.efrendelgadillojr.com)

## Erin Barnett

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Costume Designer

Marietta, GA • CTC: First Season

Regional: *Footloose*, *The Robber Bridegroom*, *A Charlie Brown Christmas* (Jenny Wiley Theatre); *The Gondoliers* (GLOW Lyric Theatre). Educational: *Little Women*, *Bonnets: (How Ladies of Good Breeding Are Induced to Murder)*, *The Servant of Two Masters*, *By the Bog of Cats*, *Only Child* (World Premiere). MFA: Indiana University. BA: Furman University. [www.erin-barnett.com](http://www.erin-barnett.com).

## Annie Garrett-Larsen

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Lighting Designer

Brooklyn, NY • CTC: Season

Regional: *The Seagull* (Cleveland Play House/CWRU); *Hi, Are You Single?* (Cleveland Play House/New Ground Theatre Festival). New York: *Virgin* (Ars Nova); *Shared Evening of Dance* (HERE Arts Center); *Quilt, a Musical Celebration* (Judson Memorial Church); *The Séance Machine* (The Tank), *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Spring Awakening*, *Assassins* (The Secret Theater); *Cabaret* (Gallery Players). BA: Bard College. [www.anniegarrrett-larsen.com](http://www.anniegarrrett-larsen.com).

## Meghan Roche

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Sound Designer

Seattle, WA • CTC: Second Season

Regional: *CAUGHT*, *Bootycandy* (Intiman Theatre); *Richard III*, *Pericles*, *Twelfth Night*, *House of Sueños* (Seattle Shakespeare Company); *63 Trillion* (Sandbox Radio); *Dry Land* (Seattle Public Theatre); *Pageant* (ACTLab); *Happy, Happy, Happy* (Macha Theatre Works); *Sex with Strangers* (ReACT Theatre); *The Twilight Zone: Live!* (Theater Schmeater); *3 Americans: Voices of Hope* (West of Lenin); *Twelfth Night*, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Twisp Merc Theatre). Educational: *Living Out* (UC Irvine); *Snow Angel*, *Radio Play Disaster* (South Coast Rep. Conservatory); *Picnic*, *House of Sueños*, *12 Ophelias: A Play with Broken Songs* (Seattle University). MFA Candidate: UC Irvine. BA: Seattle University.

## Omkar Purandare

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Projection Designer

Please visit [omkarpurandare.com](http://omkarpurandare.com) to learn more about Omkar's work.



## Chautauqua Institution

### Emily Glinick

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Production Stage Manager

Brooklyn, NY • CTC: Ninth Season

CTC select credits: *Philadelphia Story*, *Three Sisters*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Death of a Salesman*, *The Cherry Orchard*, *Twelfth Night*. Broadway: *Seminar*. Off-Broadway: *Blood and Gifts*, *A Minister's Wife*, *When I Come To Die* (Lincoln Center Theater); *County of Kings* (Public Theater); *The Metal Children* (Vineyard); *Things of Dry Hours* (NYTW). Regional: *Far East*, *Bad Dates*, *Intimate Apparel*, *Trying* (Stamford Theater Works); *Paris by Night*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Richard III*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (Trinity Rep); *Master Class*, *Lost in Yonkers* (Paper Mill Playhouse). International: *County of Kings* (Sweden, Netherlands, Norway, South Africa).

### Jean E. Compton

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Assistant Stage Manager

New Windsor, MD/Chicago, IL • CTC: Third Season

CTC: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *An Octoroon*, *Into the Breeches!*. Regional: *Into the Breeches!* (Cleveland Play House); Seasons at Two River Theater and Cleveland Play House. Chicago: *The Miscellany*, *All-One: The Dr. Bronner's Play*, *Spirits to Enforce* (The Passage Theatre); *3:35PM*, *Candide*, *Mudpie 2018* (Mudlark Theater Company); *Thirst* (Strawdog Theatre Company); *The Death of Gaia Divine* (Momentary Theatre); *You for Me for You* (Sideshow Theatre Company); *Lizzie* (Firebrand Theatre); *Shining Lives* (Northlight). Company Member of The Passage Theatre. Graduate of The Theatre School at DePaul University. [www.jeanecompton.com](http://www.jeanecompton.com)

### Kikora Franklin

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Choreographer

State College, PA • CTC: First Season

Franklin is an Associate Professor of Theatre/Dance and the Associate Director of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion for the Penn State School of Theatre where she teaches Intro to West African Dance, Hip Hop Theatre, jazz, and Mojah dance. Franklin's professional career spans 25 years; she has performed, choreographed and taught in cities across the globe including Linz, Austria, Grahamstown, South Africa, Dakar, Senegal, Minas Gerais, Brazil, Kingston, Jamaica, throughout China, Europe, and the United States. Franklin was an original collaborator and choreographer for Dominique Morisseau's *Blood at the Root*. JD/MPA: Georgia State University. BA: Howard University.

### Chris Corporandy

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Voice, Speech & Dialects Coach

Detroit, MI • CTC: Seventh Season

CTC: Voice/Speech/Dialects: *One Man Two Guv'nors*, *Airness*, *Noises Off*, *One Arm*, *Taming of the Shrew*. Acting: *Dan Cody's Yacht*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Romeo & Juliet Project*. Regional Coaching: *The Letts Fest* (Alliance Theater); *American Hero*, *Murder Ballad*, *Dot*, *Beauty Queen of Leenane* (Detroit Public); *Venus*, *Angels in America Parts 1 & 2*, *The Colored Museum*, *King Lear*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *As You Like It* (Hilberry Rep). MFA: Hilberry Rep. BFA: Acting, NYU Tisch. Christopher is certified in Knight-Thompson Speech Work, and currently teaches at The College for Creative Studies in Detroit.

### Friends of the Theater

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the arts community at Chautauqua by working to enhance appreciation and engagement with the theater and the institution. Your membership supports new theater initiatives and helps us to enhance the experience of our company members through various events connections. Benefits include invitations to members-only live and virtual programming to enhance your theater experience prior to performances, and our annual "Meet the Company" event.

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