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NOTES FROM LEADERSHIP & DIRECTOR

LEADERSHIP'S NOTES

As we end one season and welcome another, we find ourselves in a time of change. This summer we made some bold announcements, including the sale of our building. And while there are sentiments out there that would look at that news and see fear, we see opportunities for growth and positive change; shifts that bring us in alignment with our highest potential.

I have always been fascinated by the change a caterpillar goes through in the chrysalis. Everything that the caterpillar has ever known is wholly stripped away, reduced to ooze as it slowly reforms. For some that change could seem scary. To a caterpillar, it is a simple progression. Curious is in that stage in the chrysalis, redefining, rebuilding, and wholly transforming into "a beautiful butterfly" in the words of Eric Carle. A progression that doesn't mean letting go of what has served us and made us who we are today but truly a progression that builds upon the richness of what has come before.

Native Americans have considered butterflies as symbols of transformation and hope. Our hope for this season is that you have theatre-going experiences that transform you. From a chaotically funny political romp, to an unpacking of parallel experiences of institutional racism, to a search for hope and human connection, to a playwright who asks us through his play, "...who we are willing to extend ourselves to...give compassion to? Or tolerate?" and ending with a one-woman powerhouse of a show that tells the story of Iris, an African American woman who recalls pieces of her childhood as she integrated a school in Muskogee, Oklahoma. A fresh, incendiary, and high-voltage season indeed!

As friends, advocates, and supporters who believe in the transformative power of theatre, we welcome you to Season 27! Enjoy!

Jada Suzanne Dixon Producing Artistic Director

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Directing A Case for the Existence of God has been one of the most profound experiences of my career. Samuel D. Hunter's script is a masterclass in subtlety, capturing the quiet desperation and resilience of two men grappling with life's injustices. At its heart, this play is about the human need for connection, and it has challenged me to embrace restraint and lean into the stillness of the story.

Working with Brian and Cameron to bring Ryan and Keith to life has been a deeply rewarding process—watching them inhabit these characters with vulnerability and authenticity has been nothing short of inspiring. Together, we've explored the delicate interplay of silence and words, distance and closeness, to bring Hunter's beautiful vision to the stage.

This production is an intimate meditation on hope in the face of despair, a story that feels as fragile as it does universal. It's my hope that, as you watch Ryan and Keith's unlikely bond unfold, you'll find yourself reflecting on your own relationships and the connections that sustain you. This journey has reminded me why we tell stories in the first place—to illuminate our shared humanity and offer a space to feel seen, understood, and, perhaps, even healed.

Warren Sherrill Director

Curious Theatre Company Presents A Case for the Existence of God

by Samuel D. Hunter Directed by Warren Sherrill

SETTING:

Twin Falls, Idaho

CAST

KEITH	avis
RYAN Brian Ku	JSIC*

PRODUCTION TEAM

Scenic Designer	Brian Watson
Costume Designer	Connor Sullivan
Lighting Designer	
Original Music and Sound Design	
Properties Design	
Stage Manager	
Scenic Coordinator.	Michael Morgan

A CASE FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD will be performed without an intermission

BOLD = Curious Artistic Company Member

* = Appearing through an Agreement between this theatre, Curious Theatre Company, and Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.



ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES



Cameron Davis (he/him) Cam Davis is thrilled to return to Curious Theatre Company for his second production. He made his debut with the company during the fall, in *Confederates* by Dominique Morisseau. Other theatre credits include Romeo in *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare & Company), Donalbain in *Macbeth* (Oregon Shakespeare Festival), Fish in *The Royale* (Boulder Ensemble Theatre Company) and Jim in *The Glass Menagerie* (Vintage Theatre). At Creede Repertory Theatre; Algernon in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Ensemble in *Young Frankenstein*, Charlie in *Mountain Octopus*, Mr. Boddy/The Motorist in *Clue*, Watson in *Baskerville: A Sherlock Holmes Mystery*, and the Sheriff in *Sherwood: The Adventures of Robin Hood*. Cam holds a BFA in

Performance from Southern Oregon University and is represented by Radical Artists Agency. He is grateful for the opportunity to collaborate with Curious Theatre Company once again and to share this compelling story with the audience.



Brian Kusic (he/him) has performed all over Colorado for over 15 years. He grew up in Denver and studied at Metro State University. Some of his favorite shows include: *Gloria* (Curious Theatre), *Art Emergency* (Denver Art Museum), *August: Osage County* (Creede Repertory Theatre) *Mad Librarians* (BETC), *Peter and the Wolf* (Curious Theatre and the Colorado Symphony Orchestra) and many more. He currently works as a science communicator at DMNS where he enjoys teaching space science to all ages. **Wayne Breyer** (he/him) is the Production Manager and Resident Stage Manager for Curious. With Curious, he stage managed cullud wattah, Letters of Suresh, The Minutes, On the Exhale, Amerikin, Franklinland, Heroes of the Fourth Turning and the world premiere of Refuge. Other stage management credits: Elephant & Piggie's "We are in a Play"; Ghost Variations at the Colorado New Play Summit (Denver Center Theatre Company), Public Domain Theatre Festival, Eddie and Dave, Land of Milk and Honey, The Whiskey Tasting, The Rough, Shockheaded Peter, and Everybody (The Catamounts); Queens Girl in the World and The Music of Black Nativity (Aurora Fox Arts Center); Recipe (Theater Artibus); the 2024 Henry Awards (Colorado Theatre Guild); and the 2019 Colorado New Play Festival. He is also a Properties Designer and has designed for Curious, The Catamounts, Phamaly Theatre Company, Thunder River Theatre Company, and Vintage Theatre. Wayne trained as an apprentice Stage Manager with the Denver Center Theatre Company and is an associate company member of The Catamounts.

Max Silverman (he/him) is a Composer and Sound Designer. Curious Theatre Company: Amerikin (OnStage Colorado Theatre Award). Other highlights include: Denver Center for the Performing Arts, Arvada Center, Colorado Shakespeare Festival, Lone Tree Arts Center, Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, Creede Repertory Theatre, The Catamounts, Local Theater Company, Cherry Creek Theatre, University of Colorado Boulder, Theatre Or. NYC: Atlantic Theatre Company, MCC, Theatre For A New Audience, Brooklyn Academy of Music, Encores! Off-Center, 5th Floor Theatre, Inproximity Theatre, New York Deaf Theatre, Epic Players, Actionplay, Columbia University, American Academy of Dramatic Arts and Juilliard. International: Hoodoo Immersive, Berlin and CLB Berlin. Regional: George Street Playhouse, Williamstown Theatre Festival, Trinity Repertory Theatre, Hartford Stage, Penguin Repertory Theatre, Cara Mía Theatre, 4th Wall Theatre, Quintessence Theatre and Bard College. Max has written music for podcasts, advertisements and short films. Max is a 2023 True West Award recipient, two time OnStage Colorado Award winner and six time Henry Award nominee. max-silverman.com

Warren Sherrill (he/him) is excited to be making his directorial debut at Curious Theatre. Currently the Associate Artistic Director at Miners Alley Performing Arts Center, he has directed, produced and acted in numerous productions in the Denver area for the past 30 years. In 2000 he co-founded Denver's critically acclaimed Paragon Theatre and served as its Artistic Director until the company closed its doors in 2012. Recent productions he has directed at Miners Alley include *School of Rock* and *Misery* (recently nominated for 6 Henry Awards). Some past favorites he has directed include *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*? (Henry Award – Best Director), *Jerusalem*, (The Edge), *Death of a Salesman* (The Edge), and *Quality of Life* (Benchmark).

Connor Sullivan (he/him) is a Costume Designer and technician based in Denver, Colorado. He is excited to be making his Curious debut with A *Case for the Existence of God*! Favorite past design credits: *Ragtime, Othello, Pippin, Rocky Horror*. Connor has proudly served as the Costume Shop Manager at the Metropolitan State University of Denver since 2022. He also designs costumes for select MSU Theatre productions and mentors students in the costume area. When not at MSU, Connor works as a technician in the world of opera, having served in various costume roles at The Glimmerglass Festival from 2019-2023 (*Carmen, La Traviata, La Bohème, II Trovatore, Die Zauberflöte, Pique Dame, Show Boat*, and others) and at Bravo! Vail in 2024 (*La Bohème*). BA Theatre, Drake University; MA Costume, Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts. connorsullivancostumes.com

Ryan Thomas (he/they) is the Lighting Designer for A Case for the Existence of God. He is a Lighting Designer working in Denver as well as an electrician at the Arvada center. He is a recent graduate from DU and has designed several shows recently including *The Taming* (DU), *Circling* (Denver Theatre Ensemble), and *Cendrillon* (UNC opera).

Brian Watson (they/he) is making their Curious Theatre Company debut with this production! Formerly from the Bay Area, they have been residing in the Denver Metro Area for a little over 2 years. In Colorado you could have seen Brian's work in *Scarlet Pimpernel, The Little Mermaid, Crazy For You* and *High School Musical* (Candlelight Dinner Theatre), *Matilda and Jersey Boys* (Town Hall Arts Center), *The Ballot of Paola Aguilar* (Boulder Ensemble Theatre Company), *The City Dog and the Prairie Dog* (Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center), *Lyle the Crocodile* and the immersive lobby display for *Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812* (Arvada Center for Arts & Humanities). They hold a B.A. in Theatre Arts from CSU Sacramento and also works as an actor with Actor's Equity Association. Follow them on Instagram @BWatScenic and visit bwatscenic.weebly.com

GO DEEPER: A CASE FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Compiled by Christy Montour-Larson

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AN INTERVIEW WITH PLAYWRIGHT SAMUEL D. HUNTER

Excerpts from Interview in American Theatre Magazine by Rob Weinert-Kendt



ROB WEINERT-KENDT: Where did this play come from and what's that title about?

SAM HUNTER: I wrote the play before the pandemic. The very clear starting point was that we adopted a kid, right after we had a horrifically hard time buying this apartment. It just came from the sense of: These middle-class, normal things of having a family and owning an apartment don't sound like they should be some of the hardest things you've ever endeavored to do; these should be sort of normal American things. But it was so incredibly complicated and so hard.

When I first started writing it, I was like, I don't know if this is a play. I had this initial idea of two guys in a cubicle who don't stand up. And I was like: That is not a good idea. But let me try. And the only thing that made me think, maybe this is a play, is when I came up with the title. Because I thought, maybe the movement of this play is: It has this title that could not be more grandiose, it's as big as a cathedral, and then you walk in and there are two guys sitting in a cubicle talking about mortgages for a really long time. I don't know if the play would fundamentally work without that title. The movement of the play is that it starts in this tiny, quotidian way, and it grows and grows and grows in an effort to meet that title.

I happened to be reckoning the fear of replicating patterns among generations. That fear seems to be very alive in your play too.

The idea the play implicitly talks about is that a life is actually quite short. A life is kind of a simple thing: You're born, you age for an undetermined amount of time, and then you die. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. But a day is incredibly long and complicated, and almost infinitely complex — getting through a day is like Ulysses. It's this monumental thing.

I hear you on the daily struggle. I think it becomes particularly acute once you became a parent and are responsible for other humans.

Totally. Because I don't have hope that is neatly delivered by a religion or a set of cultural values or the government or whatever. So, clearing all that away, it's sort of like, where are the places that I can find hope for me and my kid in this deeply complicated world?

Shifting gears a bit, have you ever written a two-hander before?

I wrote a two-hander in graduate school. I love two-handers but they're really hard to write. I probably had more first drafts, or skeletal drafts, of this play than any other play I've written. But I love the form, because you can just dive so deep.

Is the main challenge of a two-hander just varying it up, keeping it interesting?

I think the dramaturgy of the play is really trying to consistently offer the audience new information or a new turn, a new kind of perception shift on who these guys are, and what the nature of their relationship is.

You don't live in Idaho anymore, but do you visit regularly? And do you feel you have to, to keep up with the state so that your plays about people there feel fresh?

I definitely go back to Idaho, at least twice a year. But, and I've said versions of this over the years, it's just become a really useful container for me to be able to write about the kinds of people that I want to write about, which are people who exist in the margins in some way. I've just never had the instinct of like, writing about fashionable people in New York City.

When you talked about wanting to find a place of hope for you and your family, I wonder if you think of the theatre that way? I'm not the only person I know who thinks of theater as kind of a church.

Yeah. I've wanted to find a church for my daughter, not for the religion of it, but there is a physical thing that goes on when you pray together, or sing together, or chant together—that is something that humans are meant to do. Having gone to a fundamentalist Christian school, and having been outed [as gay] there, I felt very rejected and hurt by Christianity. But I still also feel a real pull toward that gathering and that communion. I think that's why I started writing plays

rather than novels or poems or whatever, because I'm really interested in that kind of shared experience. That sounds kind of pretentious.

If that's pretentious, guilty as charged. Do you still feel that way, though, given the existential challenges theatres have faced in the past two years?

Yeah. I mean, the theatre is really suffering right now, that's obvious. But there's never not going to be an American theatre. We don't know what it's gonna look like; it might get really hard. If things get really hard, TV and movies might even go away, but theatre is never gonna go anywhere. We're always going to need it. It's always going to be made. I think maybe that's one of the reasons that I wanted to write a play that can be produced so simply, because I don't want there to be any barriers to being able to do this play.

STRENGTH IN EXPOSURE: EXPLORING MASCULINITY AND VULNERABILITY



Samuel D. Hunter's play *A Case for the Existence of God* delves into the intricate relationship between masculinity and vulnerability through the evolving friendship of its two central characters, Ryan and Keith. Set within the confines of a small office in Idaho, the narrative explores how these men confront personal and societal challenges, revealing the complexities of modern masculine identity.

Masculinity and Vulnerability in the Play

Ryan and Keith, both grappling with issues of parenthood, financial instability, and personal trauma, find solace in their shared experiences. Their interactions challenge traditional masculine norms that often discourage emotional openness, highlighting the strength found in vulnerability. As noted in a review by <u>Intermission Magazine</u> the play's potency lies in its gentle portrayal of male vulnerability and platonic intimacy, suggesting that the absence of such expressions can lead to self-destruction or harm to others.

Contemporary Perspectives on Masculinity and Vulnerability

Recent studies reported in <u>The Times</u> indicate a shift in how masculinity is perceived and expressed. A survey by the National Research Group found that nearly half of young men seek role models who display emotional openness and maintain meaningful friendships, moving away from traditional stoic figures.

However, challenges persist. Research published in the *American Journal of Public Health* suggests that adherence to traditional masculine norms correlates with poorer health outcomes, as men may avoid seeking help to maintain a facade of toughness.

Statistics on Male Vulnerability

- **Mental Health**: Men are less likely to seek psychological help, often due to societal <u>expectations of stoicism</u>. This reluctance contributes to higher rates of suicide among men compared to women.
- Health Behaviors: Men endorsing traditional masculine beliefs are more likely to engage in risky behaviors, such as heavy drinking and smoking, and less likely to pursue preventive healthcare.

IDAHO AS LANDSCAPE AND METAPHOR: THE ROLE OF PLACE



The setting of Twin Falls, Idaho, serves as more than just a backdrop in *A Case for the Existence* of God —it is integral to the characters' emotional and existential struggles. As an Idaho native, Hunter often uses his home state to explore themes that resonate deeply with rural America: economic hardship, social isolation, and the search for identity and connection. These themes are not only central to the play but also reflect the broader realities of rural life, which is marked by distinctive challenges and complexities. The stark, often unforgiving Idaho landscape mirrors the emotional terrain of Hunter's characters, whose lives are shaped by the isolation and limitations of their environment.

Economic Hardship in Rural America

The economic struggles of rural America, particularly in towns like Twin Falls, are central to the characters' experiences in *A Case for the Existence of God*. Rural areas across the U.S. have long faced higher poverty rates than urban regions. According to the Economic Innovation Group, the <u>average poverty rate in rural areas is nearly three percentage points higher than in non-rural areas</u>. In *A Case for the Existence of God*, characters grapple with the reality of limited opportunities, often finding themselves stuck in jobs or situations they feel unable to escape. The shift from traditional industries like agriculture and mining to the service and retail sectors, which have seen the most job growth in recent decades, reflects the economic shifts that define many rural communities.

Social Isolation and Loneliness

Isolation and loneliness are central themes in Hunter's play, and they are exacerbated by the setting of rural Idaho. National surveys show that approximately half of U.S. adults report experiencing loneliness, and this sense of isolation can be particularly pronounced in rural areas. According to one survey, nearly <u>one in five rural Americans often feels isolated or lonely</u>. This statistic resonates with the characters in *A Case for the Existence of God*, who are not only struggling with personal demons but are also emotionally distanced from those around them. Despite living in a small community, the sense of social separation is palpable, with few opportunities to truly connect in a meaningful way.

The Quest for Identity and Connection

The characters in *A Case for the Existence of God* are on a quest for meaning and redemption, mirroring the larger search for identity and connection that defines many rural Americans. <u>About 17% of the U.S. population resides in rural</u> counties, a demographic that faces unique challenges when it comes to forging a sense of community and belonging. For the characters in Hunter's play, this search for connection is both personal and communal. They seek not only to make peace with their past actions but also to find a way to reconcile with their place in a world that often seems indifferent to their struggles.

FRAGILE FOUNDATIONS: EXPLORING HOMEOWNERSHIP, DEBT, AND BELONGING



In Samuel D. Hunter's play, *A Case for the Existence of God*, the pursuit of homeownership serves as a central motif, reflecting broader societal challenges related to financial stability, personal identity, and the complexities of the American Dream.

Homeownership as a Central Motif

The protagonist, Ryan, seeks to purchase a parcel of land that once belonged to his family, symbolizing a desire to reclaim his heritage and establish a sense of permanence. This quest underscores the emotional and cultural significance of homeownership in American society, where owning property is often associated with success, stability, and legacy.

Role of the Mortgage Broker

The figure of Keith, the mortgage broker could serve as a metaphor for the promises of the American Dream—the belief that homeownership is within everyone's reach. Mortgage brokers are often seen as facilitators of this dream, but their role can also represent the dangers of financial instability, exploitation, or the fleeting nature of the idealized life that the characters seek.

Contemporary Context and Statistics

To contextualize the themes presented in the play, consider the following contemporary statistics:

- **Homeownership Rates**: As of 2024, approximately <u>64% of Americans own real estate</u>, indicating that a significant portion of the population does not own their homes.
- Mortgage Prevalence: About <u>63% of U.S. homeowners have mortgages</u>, reflecting the reliance on financing to achieve homeownership.
- **Mortgage Rates**: In 2024, <u>mortgage rates have fluctuated</u>, with the 30-year fixed mortgage rate averaging around 6.85%. This volatility impacts affordability and accessibility for potential homeowners.

- Home Equity: U.S. homeowners with mortgages have seen their <u>equity increase</u> by a total of \$1.3 trillion since the second quarter of 2023, an 8% year-over-year gain, bringing the total net homeowner equity to over \$17.6 trillion in the second quarter of 2024.
- Affordability Challenges: In 2024, homeowners are facing <u>increased costs</u>, with many paying more for home insurance and property taxes than their mortgage payments. This trend adds financial strain and affects the overall affordability of homeownership.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



- 1. What does the title of the play mean to you? What could possibly be another title?
- 2. Ryan and Keith's relationship is central to the play. How does their dynamic evolve, and what do they teach each other?
- 3. What moments of vulnerability between the characters were the most impactful for you?
- 4. What role does the setting (Idaho) play in grounding their identities?
- 5. Discuss the significance of the shared grief between Ryan and Keith, and how it creates a sense of connection despite their differences.
- 6. How does the financial and legal system contribute to the characters' struggles? What commentary do you think the play makes about systemic inequality in America?
- 7. The play takes place in a small office. How did this confined space affect your experience of the story? How might the minimalistic setting underscore the themes of the play?
- 8. How does the play resonate with your own experiences of loss, grief, and the search for meaning?
- 9. Do you believe the play offers any hope or insight into the human condition?
- 10. How did you feel the set, lights, costumes and sound added to your experience of the play?



The Denver Public Library recommends these library resources to enhance your theatre experience of A Case for the Existence of God.

READ

<u>Commitment</u> by Mona Simpson

This engrossing and empathetic novel follows the lives of three siblings after their single mother enters a California state hospital in the 1970s. The story shifts perspectives between each sibling over many decades, exploring themes of single parenthood, the foster care system, complicated relationships, and rebirth.

WATCH

Old Joy dir. Kelly Reichardt (2019)

Two old friends reunite for a quietly revelatory overnight camping trip. As they drive from Portland into the woods in search of a secluded hot spring, expectant father Mark and nomadic Kurt make fumbling attempts to reconnect, butting up against the limits of their friendship and coming to grips with just how much their paths have diverged since their shared youth.

LISTEN

Kid A by Radiohead

Some consider the fourth studio album, *Kid A*, by English rock band Radiohead to be one of the band's best works as it defies musical genres and is a departure from their earlier sound. However, part of what makes *Kid A* so unique is that it represents a turbulent time for the band - all were suffering burnout from the intense touring for their previous album, singer songwriter Thom Yorke was experiencing writer's block, and the band felt they were being made to live up to the success of *Ok Computer* and that other bands were copying their sound.

DOWNLOAD

The Heart of It All by Christian Kiefer

In a small town in Northern Ohio, the inhabitants are dealing with things that life throws at them. The novel is comprised of multiple distinct points of view, deeply intimate in nature of people connected to each other as family, coworkers, and friends, each carrying their own burdens. It's a slice of life portraying the realities of how grief and loss take a toll on a family, the difficulties of race, blue collar work, and poverty - yet is balanced with scenes of friendship and acceptance, love in the midst of threat, and people doing the right thing.

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Thank you to our founding Artistic Company Members whose dedication, hard work and artistic vision has helped make Curious the amazing theatre it is today.

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