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# **NOTES FROM LEADERSHIP & DIRECTOR**

LEADERSHIP'S NOTES

What's happening with the building?

It's the question we're hearing most often at Curious, and we completely understand. The building is still on the market for sale, and we want to assure you that we will continue to call our beloved Acoma Street building home through our upcoming Season 28, kicking off in early September 2025. As we get closer to wrapping up this season, we're more energized than ever, fueled by your incredible support and enthusiasm.

The truth is, we're in a fortunate position with the building. We're not just waiting for any offer; we're being thoughtful about the deal we pursue. In partnership with our realtor, we're looking for the right fit—one that aligns with the future we envision for Curious and supports everything we've built together.

We're committed to transparency about our future and are excited for what's ahead. Season 28 marks another bold chapter in our journey, and we can't wait to keep creating, innovating, and sharing the magic of live theatre with you. Your continued support means the world to us, and we're ready to rise even higher.

Let the ascent begin!

Jada Suzanne Dixon Producing Artistic Director

#### DIRECTOR'S NOTES

When I first encountered *Downstate*, I was struck by how its characters—convicted sex offenders living in a group home—invite us into a world that society prefers to ignore. Bruce Norris has written a play that asks us to confront uncomfortable truths, question our own assumptions, and above all, wrestle with the idea of forgiveness.

At its core, *Downstate* is not just about the people we deem irredeemable—it is about us. It explores how we navigate the complexities of morality, justice, and the possibility of atonement. What does it truly mean to pay one's debt to society? Can someone who has committed an unforgivable act ever be seen as fully human again? And perhaps most provocatively, where do we draw the line on forgiveness?

This play challenges our assumptions. It doesn't give us a villain to hate or a hero to root for. Instead, it compels us to confront our own biases. In a world quick to demonize, Norris does not shy away from humanizing these characters—not to excuse them, but to remind us of the humanity behind labels like "criminal" or "monster." It asks: Can we extend empathy to those we deem unworthy of it?

The setting—a group home under stringent surveillance—highlights how our justice system refuses to release its grip on those it deems irredeemable. The residents are not free in any conventional sense. Their constant monitoring and continued punishment serve as a reminder that once someone is labeled, society rarely allows them to escape the cage we've built around them.

In rehearsal, our focus has been on the complexities of each character—how their struggles with regret, defiance, and yearning for dignity shape their relationships. As Bruce Norris himself puts it: This play is about "tolerating" their existence—allowing them simply to be. Can we watch them with empathy, knowing what they've done? Can we see them as fully human, despite their Past?

As you sit in the theater, we invite you to consider the tough questions this play raises. What is the limit of your compassion? Where do you draw the line between justice and revenge? And perhaps most importantly, when you leave, we hope you take a moment to reflect on what kind of society we want to be: one that seeks retribution, or one that dares to imagine redemption.

*Downstate* will not easily leave you. It lingers in the air, in the silence, in the spaces between the lines of dialogue. It's uncomfortable, yes, but it is precisely in that discomfort that we are forced to grapple with our own assumptions about justice, forgiveness, and humanity. It is a difficult but necessary conversation.

I am honored to bring this story to life at Curious Theatre Company, and I hope it sparks conversations that extend well beyond the theater walls.

#### Christy Montour-Larson Director

Curious Theatre Company

Presents

## Downstate

by

## Bruce Norris Directed by Christy Montour-Larson\*

#### SETTING:

A group home. Downstate, Illinois. The time is present.

#### CAST

#### (in order of appearance)

GIO	Rd	akeem Lawrence
DEE	C	ajardo Lindsey*
IVY		GerRee Hinshaw
FELIX		Sam Gilstrap
EFFIE		. Julia McGowan

#### **PRODUCTION TEAM**

Scenic Designer	Caitlin Ayer**
Scenic Coordinator.	Nick Kargel
Costume Designer	Erin Carignan**
Lighting Designer.	Jonathan Spencer**
Original Music and Sound Design	Max Silverman
Properties Design	Katie Hopwood
Stage Manager	Wayne Breyer*
Assistant Stage Manager	Drake J. Susuras
Assistant Director	
Deck Crew	Adara Balthazar, Nadia White
Fight Director.	Sean Scrutchins

Special Thanks to: Luke Sorge and Adrian Egolf; Lauren Rivas; Erica Johnson

#### DOWNSTATE will be performed with a 15 minute 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.

\*\* = Member of the United Scenic Artists, Local USA 829

\* = Director is a Member of the Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers Society, a national theatrical labor union







The Director is a member of the **STAGE DIRECTORS AND CHOREOGRAPHERS SOCIETY**, a national theatrical labor union.

# **ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES**



**Sam Gilstrap** (he/him) has been a fixture in the Colorado theater scene since 2008. With a degree in performance from Metropolitan State University in Denver, he's earned opportunities at most of the major play houses in Colorado. Recently, Curious patrons saw him as the Wolf in the critically acclaimed REFUGE. As well as his Denver Center debut in THEATRE OF THE MIND. From the stage to film and tv (that is if you don't blink) you can find him grinding for his art.



**GerRee Hinshaw** (she/her) GerRee Hinshaw is thrilled to return to the Curious stage. She last appeared in the world premiere of REFUGE (season 24), WATER BY THE SPOONFUL and THE HAPPIEST SONG PLAYS LAST (season 19), and THE WAR ANTHOLOGY (season 8). A Curious artistic company member, GerRee is also an associate artist and board member at Local Theater Company. Colorado stage credits include MEN ON BOATS (The Catamounts), MISS YOU LIKE HELL (The Aurora Fox), and RAISED ON RONSTADT (Local), a play written by Ms. Hinshaw, for which her performance received a Henry Award. Her directing credits include DREAMHOUSE (Theatreworks) and THE BALLOT OF PAOLA

AGUILAR (BETC). This fall, she'll direct DANCE NATION for Phamaly.



Jim Hunt (he/him) Jim Hunt has been active in Denver-area theatre for over fifty years, twenty-five of which include mainstage productions at Curious (ART, EURYDICE, AFTER THE REVOLUTION, CHARLES IVES TAKE ME HOME, and THE MINUTES). Recent roles include Scrooge in Josh Hartwell's adaptation of the Dickens classic, A CHRISTMAS CAROL (Miners Alley), Aslaksen in AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE (BETC), Oldfield in THE MINUTES (Curious Theatre), John in FOR PETER PAN ON HER 70TH BIRTHDAY (a show that sadly closed on opening night, March 13, 2020, after one preview (Aurora Fox Arts Center), the Stage Manager in OUR

TOWN (Miners Alley), Homer/Simon in THE REMBRANDT (BETC), and Joe in GOING TO A PLACE WHERE YOU ALREADY ARE (BETC). Jim is honored to be an artistic company member at Curious Theatre Company and a BETC ensemble member. In 2013 he received the Colorado Theatre Guild's Lifetime Achievement Award at the annual Henry Awards Ceremony—an event that he, Gloria Shanstrom, and Josh Hartwell produced for its first eleven years.



**Rakeem Lawrence** (he/him) is grateful to be returning to the Curious stage! REGIONAL: ROMEO AND JULIET (Shakespeare Theatre Company), BITE SIZE: TOXOPLASMOSIS, GOODNIGHT MOON (Denver Center), GLORIA(Curious Theatre Company), SIX DEGREES OF SEPARATION (Redhouse Arts Center); PETER AND THE STARCATCHER (Virginia Stage Company), PIPELINE, A RAISIN IN THE SUN, LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS, (THEATREWORKS Colorado Springs), STOCKADE (Local Theatre Company); AIRNESS (Benchmark Theatre); KILL MOVE PARADISE (Unicorn Theatre); TWELFTH NIGHT, ROMEO AND

JULIET(Colorado Shakespeare Festival); MY FAIR LADY, LITTLE WOMEN, MARY POPPINS (Quintessence Theatre Group); ADA AND THE ENGINE (Studio Theatre, Tierra Del Sol) @svhman



**Cajardo Lindsey** (he/him) is an actor, screenwriter, director, and attorney. Some of his theatre credits include: Curious Theatre Company: THE MINUTES, HILLARY AND CLINTON, SKELETON CREW, DETROIT '67, THE BROTHER SISTER PLAYS, FENCES, THE WHIPPING MAN; Denver Center Theatre Company: ALL THE WAY, JUST LIKE US, A RAISIN IN THE SUN; Arvada Center: TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD, WAIT UNTIL DARK, A RAISIN IN THE SUN; The Aurora Fox: CRUMBS FROM THE TABLE OF JOY; Shadow Theatre Company: Joe Turner's COME AND GONE, WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF, BLOOD KNOW; Miners Alley Playhouse: THE NIGHT OF THE IGUANA, LOBBY HERO AND

MISERY. He is a multiple Denver Post Ovation, Best of Westward, Colorado Theatre Guild Henry Nominee and Award-winning actor. Social media = @cajardo.



Julia McGowan (she/her) is thrilled to be making her Denver area theatre debut with Curious Theatre! Recent credits include ALICE IN CHAOS(Alice), IN THE HEAT OF IT ALL (Marie), DOG SEES GOD(Van's Sister). Education: B.A Theatre University of Southern California



**Sean Scrutchins** (he/him) is an active teaching artist in the Denver area. He has worked as a theatre instructor for the CSF Education and Outreach programs and at the Denver Center for the Performing Arts. He received his MFA in theatre performance from the University of Southern Mississippi and his BFA from the University of Central Oklahoma. Curious Theatre acting credits include AMERIKIN, HEROES OF THE FOURTH TURNING, AMERICAN SON, THE BODY OF AN AMERICAN, APPROPRIATE, DUST, THE WHIPPING MAN, and 9 CIRCLES. Other acting credits include MACBETH, MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR, MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING, KING LEAR, TWO GENTLEMEN OF

VERONA (Colorado Shakespeare Festival); THE LIAR, ANIMAL FARM, TARTUFFE, BUS STOP, WAITING FOR GODOT, (Arvada Center); ELEPHANT & PIGGIE'S: WE ARE IN A PLAY, LITTLE RED, GOODNIGHT MOON (DCPA).



**Karen Slack** (she/her) is originally from Denver, Colorado and trained at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts and HB Studio in New York City. Karen is honored to have worked at Curious Theatre Company for the better part of two decades and is a proud company member. Some favorite productions at Curious include: THE LONG CHRISTMAS RIDE HOME, 9 PARTS OF DESIRE, EURYDICE, GOD OF CARNAGE, THE MINUTES, and TRUTH BE TOLD. Other favorite roles include: Medea in MEDEA, Lady Macbeth in MACBETH, Frida Kahlo in PAINTED BREAD, Beatrice in MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING, and the one woman show THE SYRINGA TREE. Slack has worked with various theaters

throughout Colorado receiving awards and accolades for her work.

**Caitlin Ayer** (she/her) Caitlin is delighted to return to Curious, where she previously designed sets for TRUTH BE TOLD, TIME STANDS STILL, and GOOD PEOPLE. Recent/favorite design credits include EVIL (Set Designer, S2-4, CBS); UnCOUPLED (Art Director, S1, Netflix); GODFATHER OF HARLEM (Set Designer, S3-4, MGM+); ONLY MURDERS IN THE BUILDING (Set Designer, S3&5, Hulu); WILLA'S AUTHENTIC SELF (Production Designer, Lisa Clair Group; THE RENDER (Art Director, Big Art Group @ Teatro Nazionale); SOME LIKE IT HOT (Asst Set Designer, Broadway); AMERICAN BUFFALO (Asst Set Designer, Broadway); WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF (Asst Set Designer, Broadway). Recipient of 2 Henry Hewes noms, Henry Award for Best Scenic Design, the Rose Brand Scene Design Award. Proud member of USA 829. BFA Webster University. MFA Carnegie Mellon University. www.caitlinayer.com.

**Wayne Breyer** (he/him) is the production manager and resident stage manager for Curious. With Curious, he stage managed A CASE FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD, 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, SHICKHEADED 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.

**Erin Carignan** (she/her) Erin is a versatile costume designer and textile artist who has worked in regional theatre, opera, dance, music videos, and print ads in roles ranging from costume designer, stylist, painter-dyer and breakdown artist, to crafts artisan. She has been a part of over 200 professional productions with several theatre companies, most notably Old Globe Theatre, Los Angeles Opera, La Jolla Playhouse, Pioneer Theatre, and Curious Theatre. Her research centers around her most passionate subjects: costume design, textile surface modification, and wearable art. This research ties in with her own book Dyeing for Entertainment: Dyeing, Painting, Breakdown, and Special Effects for Costumes (Focal Press/Routledge 2023). She is an Assistant Professor of Costume Design at Colorado State University, Fort Collins and the Chair of the KCACTF Design Technology Management Region 7. She is an active member of USITT, Costume Society of America, Society of Dyers and Coloursists, and United Scenic Artists 829.

**Samantha Heppenstall** (she/her) An apprentice through the Curious Bridge Program, Samantha Heppenstall is a recent graduate from the BA Theatre Studies and English programs at the University of Northern Colorado, and is thrilled to make her professional debut with Curious. Directing credits include THE TRAIL TO OREGON!, NEVER THE SINNER and ROPE, and she most recently served as assistant director for WORKING: A MUSICAL at UNC. Acting credits include THIS RESTLESS HOUSE (Chorus), NO EXIT (Estelle), INAUGURATION (Dina), and MACHINAL (Telephone Girl/Ensemble), and dramaturgy THIS RESTLESS HOUSE, THE EARLY GIRL, INFORMATION FOR FOREIGNERS, and RED. She currently serves as the Assistant Artistic Director for the Little Theatre of the Rockies in Greeley, Colorado.

**Katie Hopwood** (she/her) Katie is excited to be working with Curious for the first time! Her prop work was most recently featured in BETC performances HOPE & GRAVITY, ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE, and HOLLY, ALASKA! She graduated from Salisbury University with a degree in Theatre Production and loves showing her creative side through prop design. She looks forward to working on more productions in the community! **Christy Montour-Larson** (she/her) has been a member of the Artistic Company for over 20 years, and her recent directing credits at Curious include TRUTH BE TOLD, THE MINUTES and THE LIFESPAN OF A FACT. Christy's work has also been seen in Colorado at the Denver Center (SHADOWLANDS, THE GIVER) the Arvada Center (THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK, CABARET), Creede Repertory (AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY) Local Theatre, Town Hall Arts Center, Phamaly, BETC, Theatreworks, Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, Theatre SilCo and the Aurora Fox. Nationally, Christy has directed at Pioneer Theatre, Tent Theatre, New American Theatre, Rochester Civic Theatre, the Duluth Playhouse, Dark Horse Theatre and for Seven Devils Playwrights Conference. A passionate supporter of new work, she has directed many staged readings and world premieres, including; TWO DEGREES by Tira Palmquist, GENERAL STORE by Brian Watkins, STOCKADE by Andrew Rosendorf and YOU WILL GET SICK by Noah Diaz. Christy's accolades include 4 Colorado Theatre Guild Henry Awards, out of 16 nominations. She has also been named Top Director by the Denver Post, Westword, 5280 Magazine and CBS4 Denver. MFA in Directing from Rutgers University.

**Max Silverman** (he/him) is a Composer and Sound Designer. Curious Theatre Company: A CASE FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD, 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. 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, three time OnStage Colorado Award winner and six time Henry Award nominee. max-silverman.com

Jonathan Spencer (he/him) Broadway, Touring, and Regional designs having collaborated on over 130 productions and counting, including the world premier MR. HOLLAND'S OPUS at Ogunquit Playhouse. RENT 20th – 25th Anniversary Tours with over 1200 performances, PRISCILLA QUEEN OF THE DESERT National Tour, Off-Broadway: WHO'S HOLIDAY (West Side Theatre), CARRIE MAE WEEMS GRACE NOTES: REFLECTIONS FOR NOW (John F Kennedy Center, Spoleto USA) YOU ARE MINE OWN Directed by Atom Egoyan (Spoleto USA). Recent designs include the lighting for NEWSIES and LITTLE SHOW OF HORRORS with Theatre Under The Stars, Houston. Jonathan teaches design in the University of Colorado Boulder Theatre & Dance BFA and Southern Oregon University Masters programs. Member USA 829. www.JSpencerDesign.com

**Drake J. Susuras** (he/him) Drake J. Susuras is a multidisciplinary theatre artist born and raised in Colorado with a BFA in Acting from the University of Evansville. Some of his more current acting credits include Lou in SISTERS OF SWING with Vintage Theatre and Ovation West Performing Arts, Benedick and Claudio in ADO written for The New Harmony Project, and Tom Collins in RENT at Shanklin Theater. Drake's written work has been read, workshopped, and staged throughout Southern Indiana and Colorado including a recent staged reading at DCPA's Champa Arts Studio. Drake is the recipient of the Jack Reynolds Outstanding Thespian Award and the Virginia Lowell Grabill Award for Playwriting. Drake has worked with Curious Theatre, 24 Hour Plays, Two Cent Lion, Vintage Theatre, Ovation West Performing Arts, and Roshni Light.

## GO DEEPER: DOWNSTATE

Compiled by Christy Montour-Larson

### Exploring Downstate: Interviews & Reviews

- Bruce Norris on Downstate Steppenwolf Theatre Insights from Norris on the creation of Downstate, its themes, and the challenges of addressing such a provocative subject. steppenwolf.org
- Bruce Norris on the Moral Complexities of Downstate Observer Norris discusses society's tendency to identify collective villains and the moral ambiguities explored in the play.
   observer.com
- Theatre Review The New York Times: "A Foulness in the Very Air They Breathe" Laura Collins-Hughes examines the play's emotional intensity, its unflinching engagement with taboos, and the questions it raises about justice and redemption.

nytimes.com

## Justice & Punishment: Ethical and Legal Perspectives

• Life on the Sex Offender Registry: The Human Cost – The Marshall Project Personal stories and investigative journalism exploring the real-life impact of sex offender registries.

themarshallproject.org

 Sex Offender Registries: Balancing Public Safety and Rehabilitation – Tibbs Law Explores how registries impact housing, employment, and reintegration, highlighting the tension between safety and rehabilitation. tibbslaw.com

## Survivor Voices: Advocacy & Trauma

- What Sexual Assault Survivors Want You to Know Time Magazine A first-person narrative piece featuring multiple survivor voices on healing, justice, and public perception. time.com
- Effects of Sexual Violence RAINN
   A comprehensive look at the psychological, emotional, and physical effects of sexual violence.

   rainn.org

## Second Chances? Community Attitudes & Reintegration

- Can Sex Offenders Change? A Look at Rehabilitation and Reintegration NPR A discussion featuring experts and formerly incarcerated individuals on the possibilities and challenges of reintegration.
- Ethics and Religion Talk: Should Congregations Welcome Sexual Offenders? The Rapidian

A discussion on religious communities' ethical considerations in accepting offenders.

therapidian.org

 Who is Allowed to Write About Difficult Topics? – America Magazine Examines the role of theatre in exploring sensitive social issues, sparked by controversy over Downstate's Washington Post review.
 americamagazine.org

## Crime, Consequence & Policy: What Works?

Evaluating the Effectiveness of Sex Offender Registration and Notification Policies

 OJP

Analyzes whether registration laws actually reduce recidivism. ojp.gov

 Moral Panics and Sex Offender Recidivism – Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice

Explores how fear-driven policies often lead to ineffective legislation. cjcj.org

## Questions to Consider: Engaging with Downstate

- Downstate challenges audiences to consider the humanity of individuals who have How does Downstate complicate the idea of redemption?
- Do the characters in Downstate serve their time, or does society impose ongoing punishment?
- How does the play balance justice for survivors with the treatment of those who have served their sentences?
- Does the play ask us to empathize with characters we might otherwise reject? If so, how?
- How do power dynamics play out between the parolees and their parole officer, *lvy*?
- How does Bruce Norris use humor in the play? Does it challenge or complicate the subject matter?
- How does the play's setting (a group home) influence the story?

## DONORS

BELOW IS A LIST OF PEOPLE WHO BELIEVE THAT THEATRE CAN CHANGE THE WORLD, AND WHO GAVE BOLDY, FIERCELY, AND GENEROUSLY TO SUPPORT FEARLESS ART. THEY MAKE IT ALL POSSIBLE FROM JANUARY 1, 2024 TO DECEMBER 31, 2024.

To donate to Curious, call 303-623-0524 ext 707, talk to the box office today, or visit www.curioustheatre.org/donate.

## \$100 - 499

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ARTISTIC COMPANY

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#### ARTISTIC COMPANY EMERITI

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.

Dee Covington Chip Walton