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PATRICK HAMILTON'S



# GASLIGHT

A NEW VERSION FOR THE STAGE BY **STEVEN DIETZ**

DIRECTED BY **COURTNEY SALE**

PRODUCED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH CINCINNATI SHAKESPEARE COMPANY

## OCTOBER 18 - NOVEMBER 5



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# COURTNEY SALE

NANCY L. DONAHUE EXECUTIVE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



**Welcome to MRT's 45th Anniversary season!** It is an absolute joy and pleasure to greet you after a summer of preparation and planning. Our efforts will soon be apparent, as you enjoy the first of five subscription productions we are crafting for you. This season's journey is meant to surprise, delight, and stir thoughts while inviting you to experience your humanity in its deepest capacity. There is nothing like live theatre to remind us of our rich connectedness to ourselves and one another.

We open our season with the classic thriller *Gaslight*, newly adapted for the stage by the prolific Steven Dietz. MRT audiences will most recently remember Steven's directing work on *Best Summer Ever* in the 21-22 season. Nationally, Steven has often topped Theatre Communication Group's (TCG) Most Produced Playwright list and you will see why tonight. He is an extraordinary craftsman, a bold imaginer, and a builder of worlds artists wholeheartedly embrace. *Gaslight* allows one of our field's greatest dramatists the opportunity to envision a classic

# WELCOME!

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with more velocity, guts, and verve. For fans of the original play (*Angel Street*) or the film, you will visit some known emotional territory. For those new to the story, you will experience a juggernaut of an evening where a woman musters extraordinary courage to change her life in the course of one night. In either instance, **we hope to entertain and surprise you.**

We are also delighted to have many MRT favorites in the cast as well as welcome newcomers. This production was produced in partnership with Cincinnati Shakespeare Company and the creative team reflects artists from both cities. **Our collaboration was defined by generosity, a tenacious eye toward artistic excellence, and the importance of championing new takes on tried & true stories.** Thank you to the entire CSC company for your care and presence.

**Let the thrills begin!** And welcome to what we intend to be MRT's best season ever!

In Service,  
Courtney

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PATRICK HAMILTON'S  
**GASLIGHT**  
A NEW VERSION FOR THE STAGE BY STEVEN DIETZ DIRECTED BY COURTNEY SALE

PRODUCED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH CINCINNATI SHAKESPEARE COMPANY  
STUDY GUIDE BY ALLISON BACKUS  
DESIGNED BY EMILY BOYER

**OCTOBER 18 - NOVEMBER 5**

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PATRICK HAMILTON'S



**GASLIGHT**

**STUDY GUIDE**

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## ABOUT US

The Sahel is a largely semi-arid belt of barren, sandy and rock-strewn land, the Sahel marks the physical and cultural transition between the continent's more fertile tropical regions to the south and its desert in the north. At Sahel Restaurant & Lounge "SAHEL", our leitmotiv is the quality of the food and service. Our menu represents the traditional culinary African and Caribbean cuisines with some Cameroonian-influenced alternatives. SAHEL is situated in the heart of downtown Lowell (City of Lowell, MA) in a 3,500 square feet of newly renovated space just about a mile away from the main campus of UMass Lowell. Sahel is open everyday from 11am to 10pm. SAHEL offers a 200 seats fine dining restaurant upstairs with 75 seats lounge area in the basement lower level.

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SAHEL'S front of the house staff members are hired to communicate the menu and specials and enhance your overall dining experience. Our staff goes through extensive training, ensuring high quality customer service.

In addition to in-house dining, the restaurant will offer a full and complete take-out and catering services as well.



## POPULAR DISHES

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Jamaican braised oxtail with white beans. Fall off the bone tender. Served with sauteed vegetables and rice of choice.



### CURRY RASTA PASTA

Penne pasta in a creamy coconut curry sauce with bell peppers and red onions.



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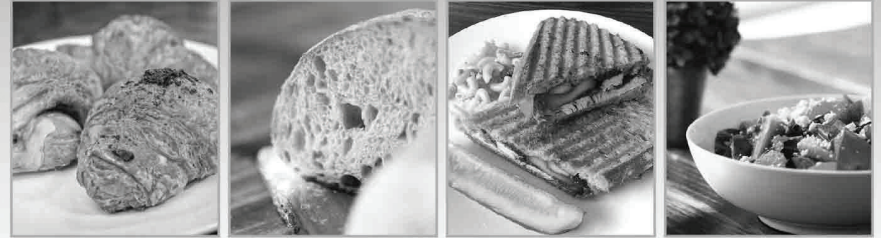


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PRESENTS

# GASLIGHT

A NEW VERSION FOR THE STAGE BY  
**STEVEN DIETZ**

FEATURING

**TOM COINER\***  
**CANDICE HANDY\***  
**JIM HOPKINS\***  
**KAREN MACDONALD\***  
**VANESSA WAUGH**  
**KRISTIN YANCY\***  
**LAUREN YEE**

SCENIC DESIGNER  
**SAMANTHA RENO**

COSTUME DESIGNER  
**RAINY EDWARDS**

LIGHTING DESIGNER  
**LAURA GLOVER**

SOUND DESIGNER  
**ROBERT CARLTON STIMMEL**

PROPERTIES DESIGNER  
**KARA EBLE TRUSTY**

STAGE MANAGER  
**ELIZABETH ROBINSON\***

DIRECTED BY  
**COURTNEY SALE+**

**OCTOBER 18-NOVEMBER 5, 2023**

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\*Appearing through an Agreement between this theatre, Merrimack Repertory Theatre, and Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States

^Member of United Scenic Artists

+Member of the Society of Stage Director and Choreographers

## CAST

Tom Coiner\* ..... Jack  
Candice Handy\* ..... Nancy  
Jim Hopkins\* ..... Sergeant Rough  
Karen MacDonald\* ..... Elizabeth  
Vanessa Waugh ..... First Police Officer  
Kristin Yancy\* ..... Bella  
Lauren Yee ..... Second Police Officer

## ADDITIONAL PRODUCTION CREDITS

Andrew Andrews ..... Interim Production Manager  
Kay Coughlin ..... Production Assistant  
Chris Holloway ..... Technical Director  
Mike Finke ..... Lighting and Sound Supervisor  
Rhiannon Downer ..... Lighting and Sound Assistant  
Kara Eble Trusty ..... Props Designer  
Emily Allinson ..... Props Supervisor  
Kate Dyson ..... Costume Shop Supervisor  
Adam Smith ..... Sound Engineer  
Gina Cerimele-Mechley ..... Fight Choreographer  
Candace Leyland ..... Wig Stylist



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



+Member of the Society of Stage Director and Choreographers, a national theatrical labor union.



^The Scenic, Costume, Lighting, and Sound Designers in this production are represented by United Scenic Artists (USA) Local USA-829, IATSE.



Merrimack Repertory Theatre is a constituent of Theatre Communications Group (TCG), the national organization for the American theatre.



Merrimack Repertory Theatre operates under agreements between the League of Resident Theatres (LORT), a consortium of regional theatres throughout the nation, and AEA (Actors' Equity Association), SDC (Stage Directors and Choreographers Society), and USA (United Scenic Artists).

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## WHO'S WHO



**TOM COINER** (Performer, Jack) Tom Coiner (he/him) is thrilled to be returning for MRT's 45th season.

A graduate of Kenyon College and the National Theater Conservatory, Tom has appeared Off-Broadway in *The Daughter in Law* (Mint Theater) and *God Said This* (Primary Stages). At MRT he's performed in *The 39 Steps*, *A Christmas Carol*, and *Silent Sky*. He's also worked on *The Invisible Hand* (Milwaukee Rep), *The Full Catastrophe*, *On Clover Road*, *Wrecked*, and *Support Group for Men* (Contemporary American Theater Festival), *God Said This* (Humana Festival), *Good Men Wanted* (New York Stage & Film), *Both Your Houses*, *Our Betters*, *The Little Foxes*, and *The Great Society* (Asolo Rep). Onscreen Tom has appeared in *Law & Order: SVU*, *The Good Fight*, *Boardwalk Empire*, *The Night Of*, *Person of Interest*, *It's Bruno!*, and in one of the best video games ever made, *Red Dead Redemption 2*.



**CANDICE HANDY** (Performer, Nancy) Candice Handy (she/her), is the Director of Education and resident Cincinnati

Shakespeare Company's Director of Education. Ms. Handy is thrilled to be making her debut at MRT! Some of Ms. Handy's favorite roles at CSC include, Wiletta in *Trouble in Mind*, Phoebe in *As You Like*, Cordelia in *King Lear*, Coretta

Scott King/Fannie Lou Hammer in *All The Way*, Malcom in *Macbeth*. She has also played at Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park (*A Christmas Carol*), Human Race Theatre (*The Cake*), the Island Shakespeare Festival (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Winter's Tale*), StageOne Family Theatre (*Frankenstein*) and Theatre Monmouth (*The Pirates of Penzance*). Ms. Handy recently directed CSC's *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* and the Know Theatre's *The Twunny Fo'*. She was the Creative Director for the Educational Theatre Association project, Finding Voice- New Works for Young Theatre Artists of Color and is the founder of Cincinnati Black Theatre Artist Collective. Candice thanks God, her family, and friends for their unwavering support throughout the course of her career.



**JIM HOPKINS** (Performer, Sergeant Rough) Jim Hopkins (he/him) is originally from Nebraska and spent many years performing in the Dallas area, but calls Cincinnati home thanks to Cincinnati Shakespeare Company. Among Jim's many CSC roles, he has been LBJ in *All the Way*, Big Daddy in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Mr. Van Daan in *The Diary of Anne Frank*, Julius Caesar in *Julius Caesar*, Lennie in *Of Mice and Men*, Henry IV in *Henry IV Parts 1 and 2*, Bolingbroke in *Richard II*, Lord Capulet in *Romeo and Juliet*, and Lady Bracknell in *The*

## WHO'S WHO

*Importance of Being Earnest*. Other past appearances include *The Liar* and *School for Wives* at The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey, *The Manbeast* at The Know Theater, *Romeo and Juliet* at The Human Race Theatre; *Hands on a Hardbody* at Ensemble Theatre, and *Jerry Springer: The Opera* for Playhouse on the Square in Memphis. In 2017, Jim wrote and performed *White Privilege* for the Cincinnati Fringe Festival. Jim holds an MFA from the University of Nebraska, Lincoln.



**KAREN MACDONALD** (Performer, Elizabeth) Karen MacDonald (she/her) has appeared at MRT many times, over the years, most

recently as Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol*. She has appeared on many Boston/ New England stages including the Huntington Theatre Company, Commonwealth Shakespeare Company, Trinity Rep, Hartford Stage, Portland Stage, The Lyric Stage, Speakeasy Stage and with the Boston Pops and the Boston Symphony Orchestra. As a Founding Company Member of the American Repertory Theatre, she appeared in 73 productions, in both the US and Europe. On Broadway, she understudied and performed the role of Amanda Wingfield in John Tiffany's production of *The Glass Menagerie*. New York credits include Theatre for a New Audience, Roundabout Theatre and Second Stage. Nationally, she has

worked extensively from The Wilma Theater to Berkeley Rep. She is the recipient of the Robert Brustein Award for Sustained Achievement in the Theatre and the Eliot Norton Prize for Sustained Excellence.

**VANESSA WAUGH** (Performer, First Police Officer) Vanessa is a second-year student at Middlesex Community College (MCC) and is thrilled to be making her MRT debut! Past Credits include MCC's *Dead Man's Cell Phone* (Jean), *RENT* (Ms. Cohen), and Tewksbury Memorial High School's *Mamma Mia!* (Donna Sheridan). Additionally, in late November Vanessa will be playing "Phoebe" in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* at MCC. Vanessa would like to thank her family, friends, and her director/professor at MCC, Karen Oster, for their unconditional love and support! She would also like to thank Courtney, her fellow cast members, and the production team at MRT for this amazing experience!



**KRISTIN YANCY** (Performer, Bella) Kristin Yancy (she/her) is thrilled to be performing for her first time with Merrimack

Repertory Theatre. Broadway: *The Cher Show*; *Summer*, *The Donna Summer Musical* (u/s Disco Donna). Off Broadway: *Queen of the Night*. National Tour: *West Side Story* (u/s Anita). Select Regional: *Sunset Boulevard*, *Guys & Dolls*,

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## WHO'S WHO

*Tommy* (The Kennedy Center), *Chicago* (Roxie, Lexington Theatre Company), *Catch Me If You Can* (Arena Stage), *West Side Story* (Guthrie Theater, The REV Theatre Co.), *Seven Brides For Seven Brothers*, *Camelot* (The Muny). TV: *Hawkeye*, *Katy Keene*, *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee*. Big gratitude to the wonderful Courtney Sale and Steven Dietz for trusting me with this special project. Love to her hunny-cutie Eric Chaves, her family, the brilliant Jamie Carroll, Bella Crotti, and the kookiest, most wonderful community of friends. Washington University in St. Louis grad. @kristinyancy.

**LAUREN YEE** (Performer, Second Police Officer) Lauren Yee is making her MRT debut in *Gaslight*. She has finished her first year of Meisner Training at the Michael Chekhov Actors Studio Boston, and is studying film and theater at Middlesex Community College. In her spare time, she enjoys writing and directing short films. The film she assistant directed, *Sunday*, played at the Independent Film Festival Boston, Spring 2023. Thanks to my teachers, Karen, Peter, Jen, and François for opening my eyes to what is out there and believing in me.

**COURTNEY SALE** (Director) Courtney Sale (she/her) joined MRT in March of 2020. Most recently she directed *The Overview Effect* at Contemporary American Theatre Festival. Past CATF credits include *Support Group for Men*,

*The Cake*, *Wild Horses*, and *Not Medea*. At MRT her directing credits include *The 39 Steps*, *A Woman Of The World*, *Wild Horses*, and *A Christmas Carol*. She previously served as the Artistic Director at Seattle Children's Theatre (SCT), the nation's leading generator of new work for family audiences. Selected additional credits: *Tiny Beautiful Things* (Seattle Rep), *The Mountaintop*, *The Mousetrap*, *April 4 1968*, (Indiana Rep, also Associate Artistic Director 2013-2016), *On Clover Road* (Phoenix Theatre), *Twelfth Night* (IndyShakes). She has developed new work with Denver Center, New Harmony, Dorset Theatre Festival, Emerson Stage, TheatreWorks Silicon Valley, and the Orchard Project. Other distinctions include Cornish College Distinguished Alumni Award, IBJ's 40 under 40 designation, and the 2017 keynote at the International Council of Fine Arts Deans. BFA, Cornish College of the Arts. MFA, The University of Texas at Austin.

**STEVEN DIETZ** (Playwright) Steven Dietz's thirty-plus plays have been produced at over one hundred regional theatres, as well as Off-Broadway and in twenty-five countries internationally. Recent premieres: *Murder on the Links* (North Coast Rep / Laguna Playhouse); *How a Boy Falls* (Northlight Theatre); *The Great Beyond* and *The Ghost of Splinter Cove* (Actor's Theatre of Charlotte, Children's Theatre of Charlotte). Upcoming film: *"What Happens Later"*, directed by Meg

---

## WHO'S WHO

Ryan, adapted by Dietz from his play, *Shooting Star*, along with playwright Kirk Lynn. Awards: American Theatre Critics Association's Steinberg New Play Citation for *Bloomsday*; Kennedy Center Fund for New American Plays Award for *Fiction* and *Still Life with Iris*; PEN USA Award in Drama for *Lonely Planet*; Edgar Award® from the Mystery Writers of America for *Sherlock Holmes: The Final Adventure*. Dietz taught for twelve years in the MFA program at UT/Austin, and continues to conduct master classes around the country in playwriting, directing, story-making and collaboration. He and his wife, playwright Allison Gregory, divide their time between Seattle and Austin.

**ELIZABETH ROBINSON** (Production Stage Manager) Elizabeth Robinson (she/her) is delighted to help bring *Gaslight* to MRT audiences. She is currently living in Cincinnati where she stage managed the Cincinnati run of *Gaslight*. After receiving her BA in Theatre at Saint Louis University, Elizabeth has worked with Norwegian Cruise Line, Cincinnati Shakespeare Company, Cincinnati Ballet, Cincinnati Chamber Orchestra, and Cruise to the Edge. In addition to stage management, she is the Co-Founder of Thunderhead Multimedia, and has worked as a wedding coordinator and a riverboat cruise director. Elizabeth is eternally grateful for her unbelievable family and life's endless opportunities.

**SAMANTHA RENO** (Scenic Design) Samantha Reno (she/her) has been thrilled to work with MRT and Cincinnati Shakespeare on *Gaslight!* She is going into her third season as resident scenic designer for Cincinnati Shakespeare Company; favorite productions include *Romeo and Juliet*, *Comedy of Errors*, and *Night of the Living Dead*, and *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Previous to her time in Cincinnati, she was the resident scenic designer for eight seasons for B Street Theatre in Sacramento, California, where she designed productions such as *The Forever Question*, *A Dolls' House, Part Two*, and *Ironbound*. She sends all her love to her wonderful husband, beloved two children, and awesome theatre family.

**RAINY EDWARDS** (Costume Design) Rainy Edwards has been then Resident Costume designer at Cincinnati Shakespeare Company since 2018. Since receiving her MFA in Costume Design at Florida State University she has worked all over the country. Some of her credits include: *The Importance of Being Earnest* (CSC); *The Living Dead* (CSC); *The Comedy of Errors* (CSC); *Titus Andronicus* (CSC); *The Winter's Tale* (CSC); *The Passion of Teresa Rae King* (Triad Stage); *Elephant & Piggie "We Are In a Play!"* (Lexington Children's Theatre); *West Side Story*, *Romeo et Juliette* (GLOW Lyric Theatre). Her work has been seen on stage at Utah Shakespeare Festival (2012-2016) and The Arts Center of Coastal Carolina



## WHO'S WHO

(2017-2018). She is grateful for the support of her partner Chris, and their dog Obi.

**LAURA GLOVER** (Lighting Design) Laura E. Glover, (she/her) (Debut) is the Resident Lighting Designer for Dance Kaleidoscope and a company member of the Indianapolis Shakespeare Company, both based in Indianapolis. She also has also designed lighting for the Phoenix Theatre, Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, the Indiana Repertory Theatre, Butler University, Summit Performance Indianapolis and American Lives Theatre. She has worked internationally with the Martha Graham Dance Company, Rioult, Taylor 2, Todd Rosenlieb Dance, Ballets de San Juan and Workshop Theatre Group. She is a Creative Renewal Arts Fellow with Indy Arts Council and holds an M.F.A. in Lighting Design from SUNY Purchase, where she studied with Brian MacDevitt and William Mintzer.

**ROBERT CARLTON STIMMEL** (Sound Design) Robert Carlton Stimmel (he/him) is thrilled to be bringing his work to Merrimack Repertory Theatre! Robert is the Co-Technical Director at Cincinnati Shakespeare Company, where he also works as a Sound, Projection and Lighting Designer. He is a Cincinnati area native, hailing from Fairfield, Ohio. After receiving his BA in Theatre at Miami University, he has worked with various theatres including Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park,

Alliance Theatre, Short North Stage, and Tantrum Theatre. In addition to his technician and design work, he is also a performer and producer and is always working to expand his artistic knowledge. He would like to thank his wife Kayla for her constant support of his artistic aspirations and her unconditional love.

**KARA EBLE TRUSTY** (Properties Design) Kara Eble Trusty (she/her) is in her fourth season of making art with the Cincinnati Shakespeare Company. A Cincinnati native, Kara is delighted to get to work with some of the artists that inspired her love of theatre and art from a young age. Kara has also worked with the Clarence Brown Theatre, The Know Theatre of Cincinnati, New York Classical Theatre, and the Carnegie, and is delighted to have gotten this opportunity to collaborate with Merrimack Rep. Kara is a proud member of the Society of Props Managers (S\*P\*M). She would like to thank her friends and family, especially her parents Bob and Sue and partner Henry, for their love, support, and encouragement as she continues down this incredible path.

**GINA CERIMELE-MECHLEY** (Fight Choreography) Gina Cerimele-Mechley (she/her) a Cincinnati native, has been involved with the Cincinnati Shakespeare Company since its inception. Gina is a long-time member of the Society of American Fight Directors, and one of the few female Certified Teachers

## WHO'S WHO

within the organization. She runs the nationally recognized Cincinnati Actor's Studio & Academy, and she was the first recipient of the CAA's Arts Educator Award. Some of her favorite regional credits include Alabama Shakespeare Festival, Denver Center Theatre Company, and Opera Theatre St. Louis.

**MERRIMACK REPERTORY THEATRE** ([www.mrt.org](http://www.mrt.org)) Merrimack Repertory Theatre (MRT) celebrates 45 years this season as the Merrimack Valley's professional theatre. With a steadfast commitment to new plays, MRT's season includes several premieres, in the 279-seat Nancy L. Donahue Theatre at Liberty Hall.

Under the leadership of the **Nancy L. Donahue Executive Artistic Director Courtney Sale**, MRT strives to fulfill its mission to "create remarkable new and contemporary plays that bring joy to our art form while engaging, entertaining and enriching our community." The non-profit company guarantees that shows are accessible to audiences of all incomes; partners with businesses and other non-profits to fully engage the community; and contributes to the economic vitality of Lowell by attracting diverse audiences from throughout the region.

Recent acclaimed productions include *Letters from Home*, *The 39 Steps*, *Best Summer Ever*, *Erma Bombeck: At Wit's End*, *Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*, the bestselling production

in MRT's history, and *The Wickhams: Christmas at Pemberley*, both by Lauren Gunderson and Margot Melcon; *Cambodian Rock Band* by Lauren Yee and *KNYUM* by Vichet Chum, works in celebration of Lowell's Cambodian community; *The Haunted Life*, a world premiere adaptation of Jack Kerouac's unfinished novel; the world premiere of *The Rise and Fall of Holly Fudge* by Trista Baldwin; and plays about the Black experience, including *Until the Flood* by Dael Orlandersmith, *Nina Simone: Four Women* by Christina Ham, and *Back Together Again: The Music of Roberta Flack and Donny Hathaway*.

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### CLOSER LOOK: PLAYWRIGHT SPOTLIGHT WITH STEVEN DIETZ

EXCERPTED FROM THE CININNATI SHAKESPEARE COMPANY PLAYBILL WITH PERMISSION

Perhaps the brightest week this summer, Cincinnati Shakespeare Company began rehearsals on a play with a particularly dark, brooding subject: *Gaslight*. This psychological Victorian thriller follows the descent of a marriage when the wife's reality is twisted, forcing her to question the truth and her husband's intentions.

A play originally written in 1938 by Patrick Hamilton, *Gaslight* has seen many versions, most notably the play *Angel Street* and the film noir adaptation

starring Ingrid Bergman in 1944. Now Patrick Hamilton's play sees a new life with an adaptation by Steven Dietz, co-produced by Cincinnati Shakespeare Company and Merrimack Repertory Theatre.

A part of CSC's New Play Development program, *Gaslight* has undergone several workshops over the last year. On August 15th, CSC passed the first rehearsal milestone, entering the home-stretch until Opening. In the upcoming weeks, the work continues both within

the rehearsal room and on the page.

Later that week, Kyrié, CSC's Communications and Engagement Manager, had the pleasure of sitting down with Steven Dietz to discuss his new play, writing process, and the world of theatre.

**KO: What is the enduring appeal of *Gaslight* and how does your adaptation capture it?**

**SD:** The enduring appeal of *Gaslight* is that there are secrets in our lives and marriages. These can be delicious or dangerous secrets. In his 1930s play, Patrick Hamilton put that in a pot boiler atmosphere where the secrets are dangerous and urgent, seeking to unsettle and entertain at the same time. *Gaslight* was also adapted into a well-known film, which helped that story last across time. And then, of course, in recent years the term "gaslighting" - created by this very play - entered our contemporary lexicon. *Gaslight* is a compelling narrative and I'm grateful for the opportunity to take a crack at it.

**KO: What inspired you to revisit this story?**

**SD:** I asked the publishers of the original 1938 play, *Angel Street*, if that version was still regularly produced. It was my feeling I could update and streamline it, making it newly come alive onstage. They put me in touch with the Hamilton estate, who agreed with my proposal. It was a chance to test my story-making against what I believe is the gold standard of stage thrillers. I have been fortunate to write plays in a variety of

styles, and I had reached a point in my writing of thrillers where I wanted to challenge myself against what I believe is the best thriller the theatre has to offer. A challenge like that is just as inspiring to me as an original idea.

**KO: *Gaslight* is known for its psychological suspense. How did you approach capturing and enhancing this element in your adaptation?**

**SD:** The psychological suspense in *Gaslight* is thrilling and provocatively familiar. I wouldn't want anyone who encounters the play to this to be in a situation like our heroine Bella, but my approach was to make her dealings with her husband as real as possible, and his dealings with her as real as possible. And no sooner do I say that, than I have to add that what passes for "real" in the theatre tends to be much bigger than our lives. It's more provocative— more dangerous. This fantastic group of actors and directors will find their way to root it in reality of the world we live in, while heightening it for the world of the play.

**KO: I'm so glad you said that. Rickerby Hinds, another playwright and professor once said, "The person on stage is larger than life just by being on stage. Therefore, everything is amplified." Why would you say stakes are heightened in this medium?**

**SD:** The stakes are heightened in a play because you've stopped to observe someone's life unravel. You don't go over to your friend's or neighbor's house and pull up a chair to watch their life unravel. (Or at least I don't.)



Another challenge is the assumption that everything I put on stage will be interesting. That's not true [laughs]. The challenge is when you put something on stage, it will compel attention for a moment, but audiences are so intuitively masterful at narrative (whether they are "regular theatre goers" or not) that they remain hungry for change ... and you have to keep feeding them. What *Gaslight* feeds you is mystery and tension and questions.

I also want to make sure that we talk about how entertaining this play is. There's humor, drama, and mystery inside, but what this play tries to deliver is not sadness— not even psychology— but *thrills*. It's trying to make you jump. I believe you will root for certain characters in this play, but differently than you would in a drama. In a drama you are awaiting resolution. In a thriller, you are awaiting *release*. To have the villain get caught, or the heroine escape, or whatever. I think that's fundamentally entertaining.

**KO: This play is a part of CSC's New Play Development program to commission new works. You mentioned the rewrites you're doing this week. For people who don't know about the process of developing new plays, how does the revision process work?**

**SD:** As a playwright you are not in the room to see/hear the play the way you saw/heard it in your head, alone in your studio. You are there to change/strengthen/tighten/complicate it - using the new information you receive when it comes to life in front of you - with the skills of professional actors - in the

rehearsal room. There's this misnomer that to write a play you get inspired, go away for a long weekend to write, then hand it to the actors. If that's the truth, it has never happened to me in my forty-some plays. I love that I get to generate an early draft of the play, but every day in rehearsal, I have a chance to make it better. Rehearsal gives actors time to craft their performance and directors time to craft their staging. I need to make just as much use of this process - crafting my revised script in tandem with my collaborators. I don't have to get it right the first time and I won't. Every day I get to learn something. A play is a fungible, transitional thing and by the time the audience comes - the first audience to ever have seen this new version of the story - we will have it ready. But the process of playwriting is the process of rewriting in rehearsal. Thank goodness.

**KO: As you work on these revisions, can you speak about the collaborative process with the creative team and cast in bringing your vision of *Gaslight* to life?**

**SD:** As a writer, you have a lot of time alone. Many of us crave that, however, the other side of my personality wants to be in a room of smart people with expertise and craft. My job in rehearsal is to learn from the actors, directors, and designers. As I said earlier, my play is being shaped by that process. My definition of collaboration is that what changes in the room is me, meaning I am being open. Not all artists can or want to collaborate (after all, collaboration is not a virtue, it is a tactic) but it's what I

adore about theatre. If you're going to stay in this business, you are choosing to learn from the other people in the room. That ethos is extraordinarily powerful and not found in any other art form in the same way.

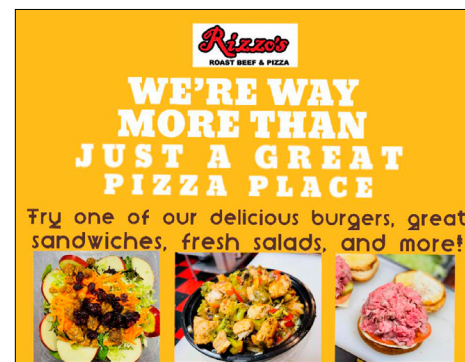
This process is also unique because I'm collaborating with an existing script from the thirties that I've changed and updated. And two theatres are collaborating here- Cincinnati Shakespeare Company is collaborating with Merrimack Repertory Theatre outside Boston, so you're seeing two theaters come together and do a joint world premiere of this play. It's a collaboration on every level, and it means we will see this play with a variety of audiences [in Cincinnati] and elsewhere. That is something to really be praised because new plays need that launch. They need that booster rocket under them. I'm terribly grateful that this play will get that here.

**KO: As a teacher and playwright, what advice do you have for aspiring playwrights?**

**SD:** Lean in. Do your work. Do it every chance you get. Show up for your own writing as you would show up for a good friend. Not as a habit, but as a practice. Challenge and disrupt your own thinking, attitudes, opinions about what a play is or isn't. Don't wait for inspiration. I believe inspiration is a myth- I honestly do. It's a thing that writers want to believe other writers have. There's a lot of half-truths about playwriting. There's a lot of half-truths about "write about you know" and "show-don't-tell." I'm not saying these aren't true, but they're insufficient. So, I would say, if you see something that interests you, make a start. John Cage said, "begin anywhere."

**KO: Thank you for the John Cage reference! [laughs] It was lovely chatting with you. The script is breathtaking and I'm excited to see the final product on stage. Good luck in rehearsal today!**

*Written by Kyrié Owen  
Published August 18, 2023*



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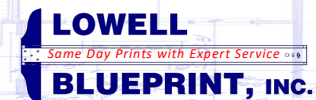
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Leenya Rideout in *Wild Horses* at Stevens-Coolidge House and Gardens.  
Photo courtesy of Megpix/Meghan Moore

# MRT STAFF

Nancy L. Donahue Executive Artistic Director ..... Courtney Sale

## ARTISTIC

Young Company Director ..... Robert Cornelius  
Commissioned Playwrights ..... Vichet Chum, Kevin Kling, Melinda Lopez,  
Dael Orlandersmith, Klean Ung  
Young Company Coordinator ..... Kaitlyn Crockett

## PRODUCTION

Interim Production Manager ..... Andrew Andrews  
Lighting and Sound Supervisor ..... Mike Finke  
Lighting and Sound Assistant ..... Rhiannon Downer  
Costume Shop Supervisor ..... Kate Dyson  
Company Manager ..... Elena Ring  
Resident Dramaturg ..... Allison Backus

## ADMINISTRATION

Director of Finance ..... Edgar Cyrus  
Director of Development & Engagement ..... Kristin A. McCauley  
Graphic Designer ..... Emily Boyer  
House Manager ..... John Dyson  
Box Office Manager ..... Eve Foldan  
Box Office and Front House Assitant ..... Robert McKenzie  
Database Projects Manager ..... E Larocque  
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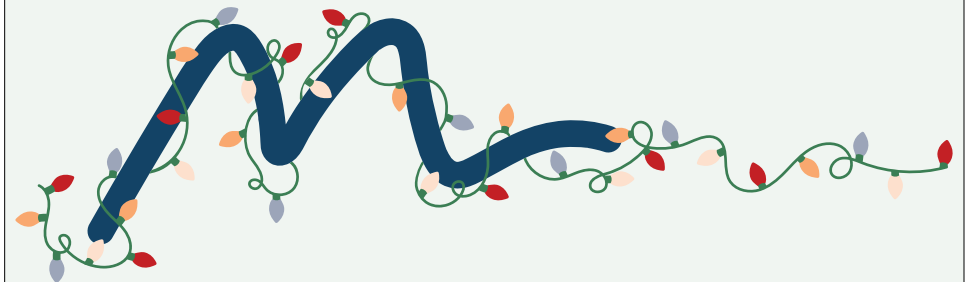
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