



# SPIRITUS/VIRGIL'S DANCE

WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY **DAEL ORLANDERSMITH**  
DIRECTED BY **NEEL KELLER**

PHOTO BY SETH FREEMAN

## MAY 8-26



MERRIMACK REPERTORY THEATRE  
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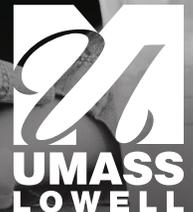
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# COURTNEY SALE

NANCY L. DONAHUE EXECUTIVE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



**Welcome to our final show of the 45<sup>th</sup> season, Dael Orlandersmith's moving and poignant *Spiritus/Virgil's Dance*, a Merrimack Repertory Theatre commission. We are privileged to welcome this extraordinary artist to the MRT stage. You may remember Dael's *Until the Flood*, which was our first filmed show in the spring of 2021 after many months of closure. **How grateful we are now to have Dael performing her work and in community with us.****

I have long been enamored by Dael's work. My first professional job in the American Theatre was assistant directing *Monster*, a piece which Dael wrote and performed at ACT in Seattle. Her writing illuminates all facets of humanity with fierceness and expansive creativity. What a master class I received witnessing her craft the show. Lucky for me, I have been able to stay in close touch with Dael for over twenty years. She has deservedly collected many awards, built multiple productions in the biggest theatres across the country, and stayed true to her singular voice.

With *Spiritus*, Dael explores death; how we depart, what impact our departure makes, and how we find meaning in the face of that inevitability. She has

assembled a prolific team of artists including her long-time collaborator, Neel Keller, who leads with scorching intellect and voracious curiosity. We have benefited from rich collaborations with Contemporary American Theatre Festival and NYC's Rattlestick Theater to bring the production to life. I am certain this isn't the final stop for the production and I am honored MRT is where the commission originated.

**I want to take this opportunity to thank you for joining us for the 45<sup>th</sup> season. We hope to see you again next year as we announce titles for season 46. We couldn't do it without you.**

In Service,  
Courtney Sale

Nancy L. Donahue Executive Artistic Director

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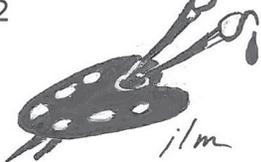
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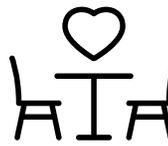
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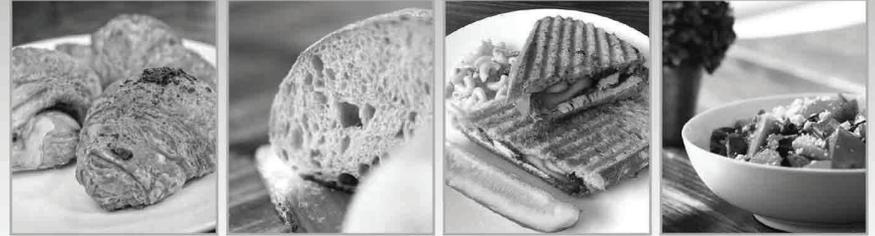


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PRESENTS

# SPIRITUS/VIRGIL'S DANCE

WRITTEN BY AND FEATURING

**DAEL ORLANDERSMITH\***

SCENIC DESIGNER

**TAKESHI KATA^**

COSTUME DESIGNER

**KAYE VOYCE^**

LIGHTING DESIGNER

**MARY LOUISE GEIGER^**

COMPOSER/SOUND DESIGNER

**LINDSAY JONES^**

PROJECTIONS DESIGNER

**NICHOLAS HUSSONG^**

STAGE MANAGER

**DEB ACQUAVELLA\***

DIRECTED BY

**NEEL KELLER+**

**MAY 8-26, 2024**

\*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 Directors and Choreographers

## CAST

Dael Orlandersmith\* ..... Virgil

## ADDITIONAL PRODUCTION CREDITS

Veronica Lancaster ..... Associate Sound Designer

Betsy Chester ..... Associate Lighting Designer

Emily Allinson ..... Scenic Charge and Props Artisan

William O'Donnell ..... Projections Technician

Lynn Sullivan ..... Production Assistant

Elena Ring ..... Substitute Production Assistant

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



+Member of the Society of Stage Directors 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



### **DAEL ORLANDERSMITH**

( P l a y w r i g h t , Performer; Virgil) she/her/hers. Dael's plays include *Stoop*

*Stories*, *Black n' Blue Boys/Broken Men*, *Horsedreams*, *Bones*, *The Blue Album*, *Yellowman*, *The Gimmick*, *Monster*, and *Forever*. Ms. Orlandersmith was a Pulitzer Prize finalist and Drama Desk Award nominee for *Yellowman* and the winner of the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize for *The Gimmick*. Dael is the recipient of a New York Foundation for the Arts grant, The Helen Merrill Award for Emerging Playwrights, a Guggenheim, along with several other awards and honors. Her play, *FOREVER*, was commissioned and performed at the Mark Taper Forum/Kirk Douglas Theatre Fall of 2014, followed by performances at the Long Wharf Theatre Winter of 2014/15, New York Theatre Workshop Spring 2015, and Portland Center Stage Winter of 2016. Her play *Until the Flood* was done at St Louis Repertory Fall of 2016. She is currently working on two commissions for Artists Repertory Theatre in Portland and Milwaukee Repertory Theatre. *Until the Flood* was done at Rattlestick Theatre in 2018 and Milwaukee Rep in 2019 it was done at Portland Center Stage, ACT Seattle, The Arcola Theatre in London, The Galway Arts Festival at the Druid Theatre, and at the Traverse at Edinburgh Festival. *Until the Flood* was also performed in Berlin at the Schaubuhne Theatre in

April of 2022 and at the Spoleto Festival in Charleston, SC in June of 2022. Ms. Orlandersmith is working on a commission for Rattlestick Theatre called *Watching the Watcher*, and had two plays opening at Milwaukee Repertory Theatre in 2022–*NEW AGE*–directed by Jade King Carroll and *Antonio's Song/I Was Dreaming of a Son* directed by Mark Clements which opened at the Goodman Theatre Spring 2023. Ms. Orlandersmith's new play *SPIRITUS/VIRGIL'S DANCE* commissioned by Merrimack Repertory Theatre in Massachusetts was done at CATF Theatre in West Virginia Summer of 2023 and Rattlestick and Merrimack Theaters in 2024. Ms. Orlandersmith is currently working with writer/performer David Cale and director Robert Falls on a play called *You Don't Know the Lonely One*. Ms Orlandersmith received a Doris Duke Award in 2020.

**NEEL KELLER** (Director) he/him/his. Neel has enjoyed a long and happy collaboration with Dael Orlandersmith. They have worked closely on creating and producing Orlandersmith's acclaimed plays *Until The Flood*, *Forever*, and, *Spiritus/Virgil's Dance*, on stages across the US and Europe. Neel's other recent productions include, the world premieres of Julia Cho's *Office Hour*, Eliza Clark's *Quack*, Jennifer Haley's *The Nether*, Kimber Lee's *to the yellow house*, and Lucy Alibar's *Throw Me On The Burnpile* and *Light Me Up!* Neel has directed at many theaters including,

## WHO'S WHO

The Public Theater, New York Theatre Workshop, Rattlestick Playwrights Theater, La Jolla Playhouse, Goodman Theatre, South Coast Repertory, and Williamstown Theatre Festival. He is excited to be working at Merrimack Repertory Theatre for the first time and grateful for their partnership and support. Neel is a member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society and the Directors Guild of America.

### **TAKESHI KATA** (Scenic Designer)

**Broadway:** *Water For Elephants*, *Prayer for the French Republic*, *Clyde's*, *Derren Brown's Secret*. **Off Broadway:** Atlantic, NYTW, Playwrights, Public, Rattlestick, Second Stage, Signature, Vineyard, among others. **Other Recent Projects:** *Until the Flood* (Shaubühne, Berlin) and *Bug* (Steppenwolf). Michael Merrit Award, Drama Desk, Obie, and Jeff Awards. Associate Professor, University of Southern California, School of Dramatic Arts.

### **KAYE VOYCE** (Costume Designer)

Merrimack Repertory Theatre debut! **Broadway:** *Uncle Vanya*, *Sea Wall/A Life*, *True West*, *The Nap*, *Significant Other*, *The Real Thing*, *The Realistic Joneses*, and *Shining City*. **Off-Broadway/ New York:** *Jonah* (Roundabout), *The Bedwetter* (Atlantic), *Morning Sun* (MTC). **International:** *Harry Clarke* (London West End), *The Listeners* (Den Norske Opera), *Close-Up* (Avignon Festival 2024)

**MARY LOUISE GEIGER** (Lighting Designer) **Broadway:** *The Constant Wife* (Roundabout Theatre Company, American Airlines Theatre). **Off-Broadway:** *Spiritus/Vigil's Dance* (Rattlestick Theatre); *Partnership, Becomes a Woman* (Mint Theatre). *Halfway Bitched Go Straight to Heaven*, *Good Television*, *The New York Idea* (Atlantic Theatre Company); *Kindness*, *Blue Door*, *The Busy World is Hushed* (Playwrights Horizons); *Finn*, *Mabou Mines' Dollhouse*, *Red Beads* (Mabou Mines); **Regional:** *All My Sons* (Hartford Stage), *At the Wedding* (Studio Theatre, DC); *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar and Grill* (Syracuse Stage), *Last Night and the Night Before* (Steppenwolf) Act Theatre, Alley Theatre, Actor's Theatre Of Louisville, Asolo Theatre, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Center Theatre Group, Cincinnati Playhouse In The Park, Geva Theatre Center, Guthrie Theatre, Indiana Repertory Theatre, Intiman Theatre, Seattle Repertory Theatre, Portland Center Stage, Portland Stage Company, Virginia Stage Company, Repertory Theatre Of St. Louis, Pioneer Theatre, Playmakers Repertory Company, La Opera, Philadelphia Orchestra. Education/**Training:** MFA, Yale School of Drama; **Faculty:** NYU/Tisch [www.mlgeiger.com](http://www.mlgeiger.com)

**LINDSAY JONES** (Composer/Sound Designer) **Merrimack Repertory Theatre:** *Until The Flood*, *Four Women*, *The Lowell Offering*. **Broadway:** *Slave Play* (Tony nominations for Best Score

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## WHO'S WHO

and Best Sound Design of a Play), *The Nap*, *Bronx Bombers* and *A Time to Kill*. **Off-Broadway:** *Privacy* (The Public Theater), *Bootycandy* (Playwrights Horizons), *Feeding the Dragon* (Primary Stages), *Top Secret* (New York Theatre Workshop) and many others. **Regional:** Guthrie Theater, Center Stage, American Conservatory Theater, Hartford Stage, Alliance Theatre, Goodman Theatre, Arena Stage, Old Globe Theatre, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Steppenwolf Theatre and many others. **International:** Stratford Festival (Canada), Royal Shakespeare Company (England) and many others. **Audio dramas:** Marvel, Audible, Next Chapter Podcasts, award-winning "The Imagine Neighborhood." **Film/TV scoring:** HBO Films' *A Note of Triumph* (2006 Academy Award for Best Documentary, Short Subject) and over 30 other films. He is the co-chair of Theatrical Sound Designers and Composers Association, and teaches Composition For Theatre and Music History at the University Of North Carolina School Of The Arts. [www.lindsayjones.com](http://www.lindsayjones.com)

**NICHOLAS HUSSONG** (Projection Designer) **Broadway:** *Skeleton Crew* (MTC) Tony Nomination. **Off-Broadway/New York:** *Skeleton Crew*, *These Paper Bullets* (Atlantic, Drama Desk Nom) *Wet Brain* (Playwrights Horizons, OBIE award, Lortel Nomination) *On That Day in Amsterdam* (Primary Stages, Drama Desk Nom) *White Guy on the Bus* (59E59) *Until the Flood*, *Spiritus* (Rattlestick) *bathhouse*.

*pptx* (The Flea). **Regional:** *The Wizard of Oz* (Geva) *RENT!* (Paper Mill Playhouse) *Vietgone* (The Guthrie) *To the Yellow House* (Lajolla) *Kleptocracy* (Arena) *Until the Flood* (15 regional and international locations); *Haint Blu*, *Hair & Other Stories* (Urban Bush Women); *Woman's Party* (Clubbed Thumb); *Grounded* (Alley); Arden Theater, Playmakers Rep, Berkshires Theatre Group, Triad Stage. **International:** England, Scotland, Ireland, Germany, China, Canada and Vienna. **Television:** 70th & 71st Tony Awards, Interview with a Vampire AMC+. **Education:** Yale MFA. **Other:** Atlanta Opera, Virginia Museum of Art, David Zwirner Gallery, Marc Jacobs, Mass MoCA, Complex Magazine, San Diego Shell, San Diego Symphony, Nashville Symphony, Hartford Symphony, Ask Ronna Podcast. Co-Creator of FEAST, an immersive dining experience with Listen&Breathe.

**DEB ACQUAVELLA** (Production Stage Manager) **Broadway:** *Metamorphoses* directed by Mary Zimmerman; *Jane Eyre*, *The Musical* directed by John Caird; *Master Harold... and the boys* directed by Lonny Price. **Off-Broadway:** Playwrights Horizons; Manhattan Theatre Club; Promenade Theatre; SITI Company; Hudson Guild Theatre **Theatre:** *Ragtime*, *the Symphony Concert* with The Boston Pops at Symphony Hall; 15 seasons, Actors Theatre of Louisville, 200 productions; CATF, 16 seasons, 31 productions including *Spiritus / Virgil's Dance*; 4 seasons Baltimore Center Stage; Huntington Theatre;

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## WHO'S WHO

ArtsEmerson, etc. **Day Job:** Head of Stage and Production Management Program at Emerson College, Boston.

**LYNN SULLIVAN** (Production Assistant) she/they/hers. Lynn is a graduate from UMass Lowell with a BA in English Creative Writing and a minor in Theatre Arts. This is their fourth show as a Production Assistant at MRT after spending their fall semester as the Marketing Intern, and they are so appreciative of all the opportunities. Lynn is grateful for everyone's dedication towards this production, as well as to their friends and family for their endless love and support.

**COURTNEY SALE** (Executive Artistic Director) she/her/hers. Courtney proudly serves as the MRT's Executive Artistic Director. She joined the company in March of 2020 and is honored to work for a remarkable organization with incredible people. At MRT she has directed *Gaslight*, *The 39 Steps*, *A Woman Of The World*, *Wild Horses*, and both seasons of *A Christmas Carol*. Playwrights commissioned under her tenure include Trista Baldwin, Vichet Chum, Kevin Kling, Melinda Lopez, Dael Orlandersmith, Kalean Ung. She launched the Sokhary Chau Playwriting Fellowship. Under her leadership, MRT has increased service to students, strengthened its partnership in community, and ensured artistic excellence. She serves on Lowell's Canal Cultural District Management Committee. Courtney's

directing has been seen across the country: *Tiny Beautiful Things* (Seattle Rep), *The Overview Effect*, *Support Group For Men*, *The Cake*, *Wild Horses*, *Not Medea* (Contemporary American Theater Festival), *The Mountaintop*, *The Mousetrap*, *April 4 1968*, (Indiana Rep, also Associate Artistic Director 2013-2016), *Gaslight* (Cincinnati Shakes), *On Clover Road* (Phoenix Theatre), *Twelfth Night* (IndyShakes). She previously served as the Artistic Director at Seattle Children's Theatre (SCT), the nation's leading generator of new work for family audiences. 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. Courtney is a member of the National Theatre Conference. BFA, Cornish College of the Arts. MFA, The University of Texas at Austin.

**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 voices, 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**

## WHO'S WHO

**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*.

## NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

I heard Dael before I met her. One night in the early 1990s I went to the Nuyorican Poets Cafe on the lower east side. Dael was one of the poets who read their work that night. I was struck by her ferocity and kindness. She balanced clinical observation with an open, empathetic heart. She was, and remains, a uniquely compelling presence. I am grateful that the conversation we began that night has lasted for almost 40 years.

Over that time we have had the great fortune to present Dael's plays throughout the country and across Europe. Because of that, we have spent a lot of time walking together in many very different cities. I love these times because I get to be with Dael when she is observing people going about their daily lives. She has an uncanny ability to watch people and pick up on their states of mind and the circumstances of their lives. On these walks I get to witness the beginning of her process and the observations and empathy that will lead to complex characters and new plays that challenge and welcome us all.

*Spiritus/Virgil's Dance* is about the search for vocation, for purpose. The very human drive to find value and fulfillment. Our work on the play has paralleled that search. It was born, perhaps unconsciously, from the pandemic. Dael knew that the crisis forced us all to confront our notions of life and death. As those of us fortunate to make it through and began to return to life, Dael was interested in how we would navigate our fears of death and our recognition that we had been given an opportunity to find new paths.

When Dael first wrote and performed *Spiritus/Virgil's Dance* we were all, like Virgil, re-emerging from the land of the dead. We had witnessed the Inferno and were in a process of reflection and discovery, and action. I know that the play will continue to shift and grow as people move on in that process. Appropriately, that process harkens back to Dante. We suddenly discovered ourselves in an unknown world, a world that had changed enough to be, in some ways, unrecognizable. What is the way forward? Which path to take?

In the play, Virgil is keenly aware of the power and importance of time. Time has been a blessing and force in my relationship with Dael. Over nearly four decades, we have become trusted traveling partners, geographically and spiritually. Time has let us build mutual trust and respect. Collaborating with Dael is a way to support her deep, life-long exploration of the world and what humans do to find their way through the dark woods. I am grateful that she has invited me along.

-Neel Keller

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Kalean Ung in *Letters from Home* (2023).

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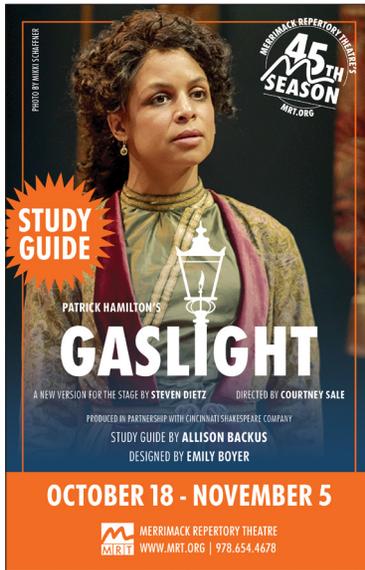
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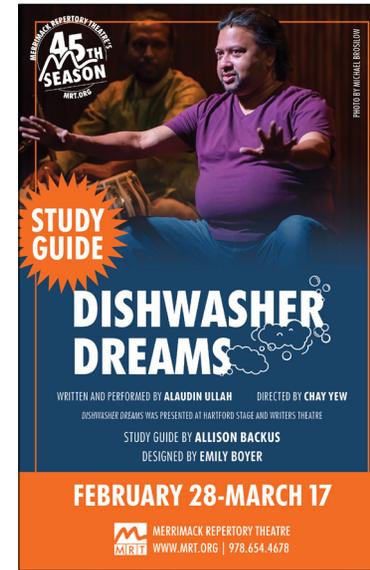
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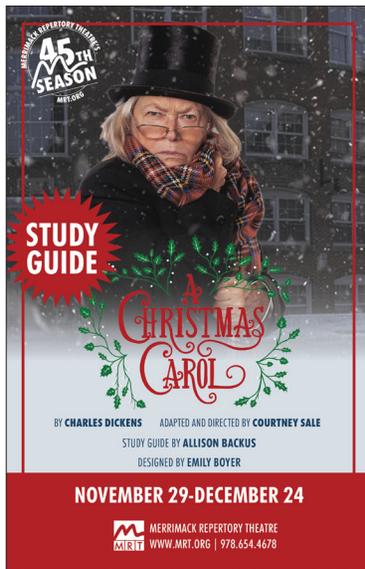


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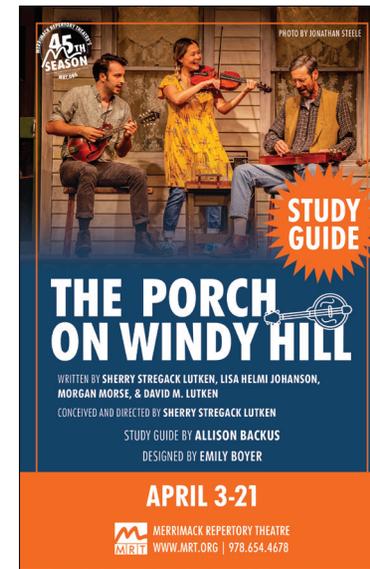
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Chris Thorn and Alexis Bronkovic with the Green Youth Cast in *A Christmas Carol* (2023).  
Photo courtesy of Megpix/Meghan Moore

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