



# Absent Friends

By  
**Alan Ayckbourn**

Directed by  
**Barta Lee Heiner**

Oct. 28– Nov. 14, 2009  
Margetts Theatre  
Harris Fine Arts Center

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## Absent Friends

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By  
**Alan Ayckbourn**

Directed by  
**Barta Lee Heiner**

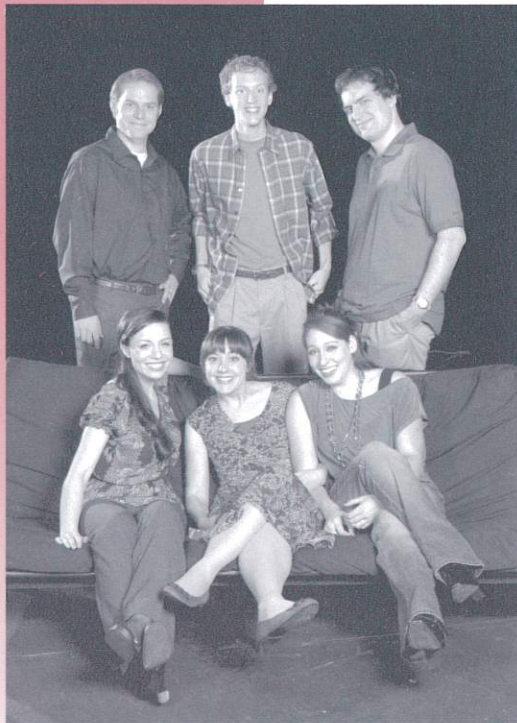
**Setting**  
2009, London, England

Produced by special arrangement with Samuel French Inc.



## Cast

Diana Megan Ann Jones  
Evelyn Alice Johnson  
Marge Emily Foster  
Paul Joseph Reidhead  
John Gene Ledbetter  
Colin Christopher Davis



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Hair Designer

Dialect Coach

Barta Lee Heiner  
Chelsea Cordell  
Allan Davis

Heather Starr  
Sara Hardman  
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Joseph Craven  
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Daniel Riggs  
Brittney Patterson

Christopher Davis  
Emily Burnworth

## Enjoy these upcoming performances

### *Children of Eden*

Nov. 11–Dec. 5, Pardoe Theatre

Music by Stephen Schwartz, directed by Jeffrey Martin

### *Tartuffe*

Jan. 20–Feb. 6, Pardoe Theatre

By Jean Baptiste Molière, directed by Stephanie Breinholt

### *As You Like It*

Mar. 17–Apr. 2, Pardoe Theatre

By William Shakespeare, directed by Kymberly Mellen

### *Blood Wedding*

Mar. 3–20, Margetts Theatre

By Federico Garcia Lorca, directed by Rodger D. Sorensen

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## Fire & Ice

"Fire has always been a fascination to me. It's sort of like a life, a living form to me. In a way, it's like love. It's warm, it's constant as long as it's cared for, destructive without respect, it goes away when it's neglected and yet when it's gone...its presence still lingers . . . only waiting to be wanted."

—From *Diantha*, a one-person show

Alan Ayckbourn is a master storyteller about the comedy of human frailties and failings. He is able to meld the idiosyncrasies of different personalities with the harsh results of choices and circumstances. We find ourselves laughing at other people's pain and eventually at the end of his plays we find ourselves, through introspection, examining our own frailties.

All of the relationships in this play most probably began in the fires of hope and passion, but are now facing the many kinds of ices created when those fires are thoughtlessly disregarded or forgotten, i.e.: the black ice that is created when speeding into a relationship when caution is advised, the green ice of deception and jealousy, the blue ice of indifference and the white ice of stagnation and assumption.

It is possible that there is a clear form of ice, or a glass through which we do not see darkly, that makes it attainable for us to keep "the home fires burning"? I believe Ayckbourn holds up that glass or, in some cases a mirror, and prompts us to ponder our choices and hopefully commit to choose more wisely how we treat one another. □

FROM THE COMPOSER OF WICKED



## CHILDREN OF EDEN

BOOK BY JOHN CAIRD • MUSIC AND LYRICS BY STEVEN SCHWARTZ  
ORCHESTRATIONS BY BRUCE COUGHLIN AND MARTIN ERSKINE  
CONCEPT BY CHARLES LISANBY

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## Meet the Company

**Christopher Davis**  
Colin

From Pepperell, Mass. Senior in the BFA acting program. Recent credits include Willard Hewitt in *Footloose* and Harry the Horse in *Guys and Dolls* both at the Playmill Theater, as well as Ross in *Macbeth* and Michael in *Dancing at Lughnasa* at BYU. He was also seen recently as Simon in the webseries *The Book of Jerzmiah*. Christopher also studies Russian.

**Emily Foster**  
Marge

From Las Vegas, Nevada. Senior in the BFA acting program. Recent credits include BYU's *Houseboat Honeymoon* and *The Seagull* and Pinnacle Acting Company's production of *Medea*.

**Alice Johnson**  
Evelyn

From Price, Utah. Native of Littleton, Colorado. Alice is a senior in the BFA acting program. Favorite credits include an upcoming character mask production of *They Shoot Horses, Don't They*; Phebe in Hale Center's *As You Like It*; Jeanie in BYU's *Houseboat Honeymoon*; and Augusta in Brecht's *Drums in the Night*. She has also been in various student film projects. Alice was received a KCACTF Irene Ryan nomination for her role as Jeanie.

**Megan Ann Jones**  
Diana

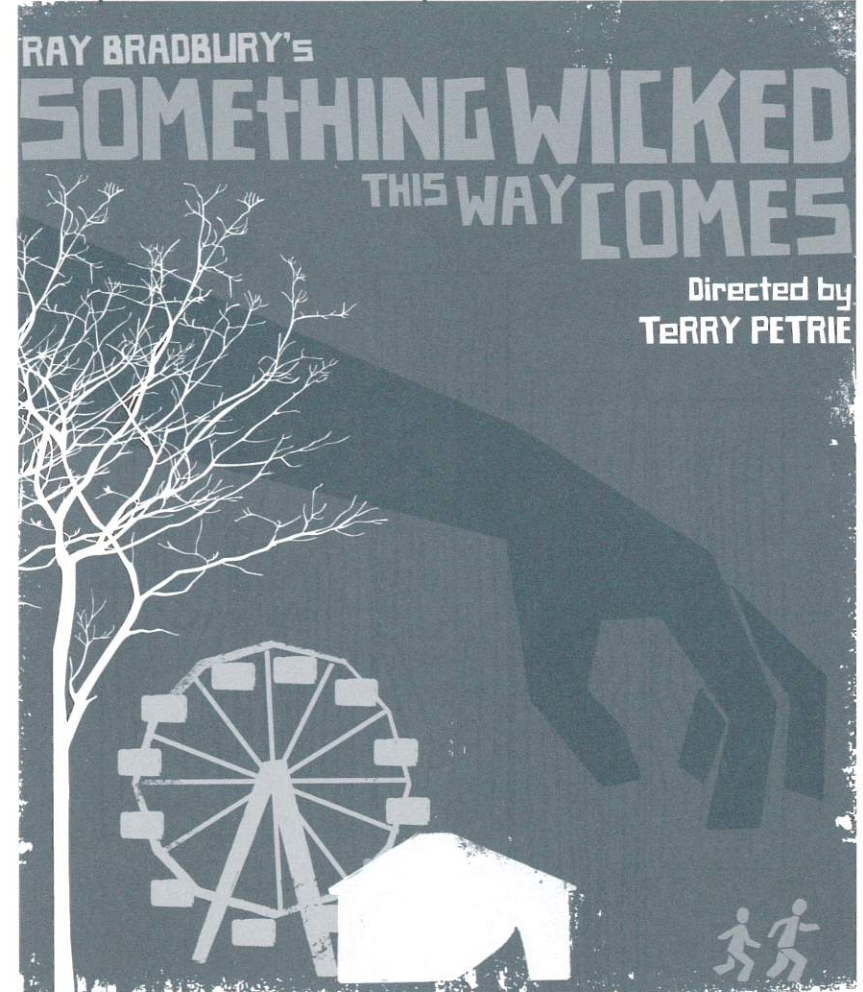
Megan grew up in Taylor, Utah. Senior in the BFA acting program and also studies American Sign Language. Recent credits include Susannah in *Joyful Noise* and Natalia in Chekov's *A Marriage Proposal* at the Covey Center for the Arts, Carmen in *The Pajama Game* at Springville Playhouse and Peaseblossom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Sundance Resort Theater.

**Gene Ledbetter**  
John

From Provo, Utah. Senior in the BFA Acting program at BYU. Recent credits include Geoffrey in *The Lion in Winter* with Actors Repertory Theatre Ensemble, Krojack in *Don't Drink the Water* at the Hale Center Theater, and Titus in *Bérénice* at BYU, for which he was nominated to compete in the Irene Ryan Acting Competition at the American College Theatre Festival.

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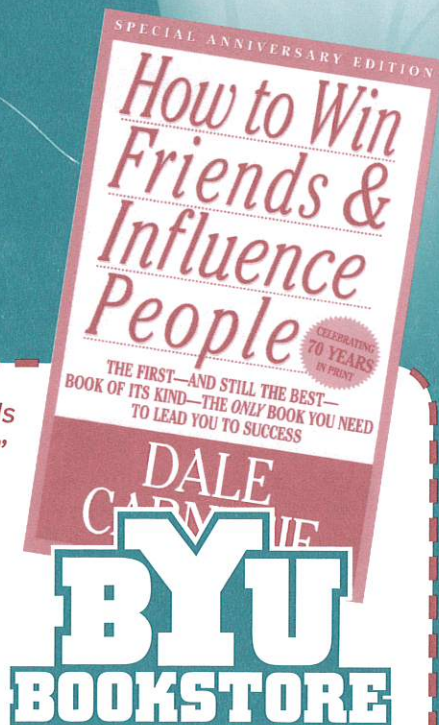
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## Absent Friends Study Guide

Allan Davis, dramaturg

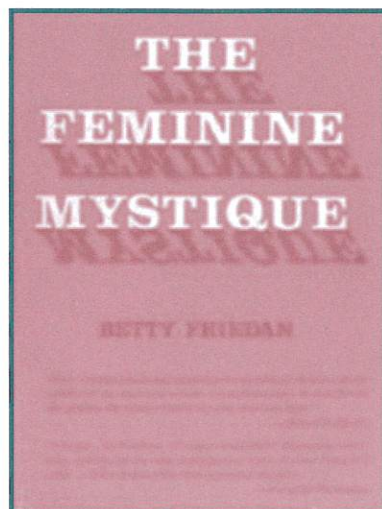




## Fire & Ice

Many of Ayckbourn's plays portray how middle-class institutions hurt women emotionally and mentally.

Ten years before Ayckbourn wrote *Absent Friends*, Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*. Many consider it a text that ushered in second-wave Feminism in America. Though British and American forms of Feminism differed, they shared many basic concerns.



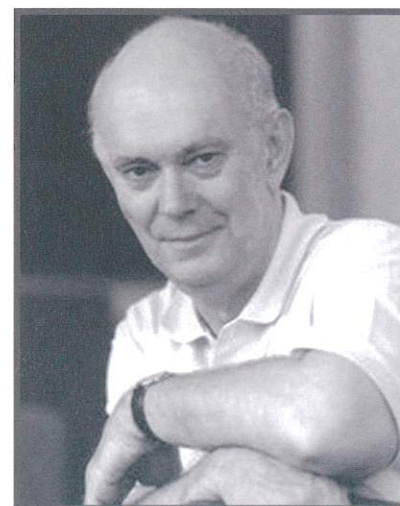
At one point Friedan asks about girls who marry at a young age:

"What if the terror a girl faces is the terror of freedom to decide her own life, with no one to order which path she will take? What if those who choose the path of 'feminine adjustment' (a life of only marriage and housework) are simply refusing to grow up, to face the question of their own identity?"

Questions to Consider:

- What are the marriages like in this play?
- What is life like for Diana, Marge, and Evelyn? Are they happy? Why or why not?
- How does this play reflect feminist arguments for fulfillment and self-actualization (see Friedan's quote)?

## About the Playwright: Sir Alan Ayckbourn



Themes in his Plays:

- Middle-class materialism
- Women enduring marriages to insensitive husbands
- Dark Comedy
- Satirizing the absurdity of social conventions and expectations

British Slang:

- Boot: Trunk of the car
- Fortnight: A period of fourteen nights; two weeks
- Lavatory: Bathroom
- Pram: A carriage for a baby or young child, designed to be pushed by a person on foot
- Tart: Slang for a female of immoral character
- Twenty p: Short for twenty pence, British coinage.

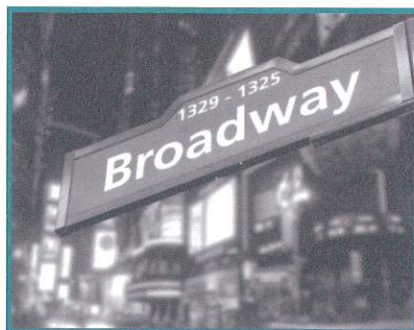


## Ayckbourn and America

What are the difficulties presented when Cultural Translation is an issue?

England and America share many social and cultural similarities, including a language. However, common ground in many areas does not always equate to common ground in all areas. In the world of entertainment, sometimes pieces of artistic expression must undergo a cultural translation before it can be understood in the new environment. Consider the variances between British and American versions of *The Office* or publications of Harry Potter.

Despite finding great success on European stages, Ayckbourn's work struggles in America. After its London debut, *Absent Friends* avoided NYC's stages for 30 years. In 1991, when the Manhattan Club Theatre produced the show, it received high praise. However, even then it faced complaints stemming from the same source that usually generates great praise—Ayckbourn's script itself.



Possible Explanations for the discrepancy:

- Ayckbourn's nuances of class
- His nicer characters are passive or helpless, and his nastier ones full of pep and energy.
- He does not normally deal in moral blacks and whites, but he has a decided antipathy to the successful and satisfied, and seems to prefer businessmen when they fail.
- Such attitudes are not merely un-American but seem almost anti-American.

## British Customs: Tea Party

Afternoon Tea:

A light meal typically eaten between 3 pm and 5 pm. It originated in the United Kingdom, though various places that used to be part of the former British Empire also have such a meal. However, changes in social customs and working hours mean that most Britons only take afternoon tea on special or formal occasions. Traditionally, loose tea would be served in a teapot with milk and sugar. This would be accompanied by various sandwiches, scones, and usually cakes and pastries.



Tea Sets Include:

Tea Pot: a vessel used for steeping tea leaves or an herbal mix in near-boiling water adding flavor to water

Coffee Pot: a container for brewing coffee

Hot Water Jug: jug that contains hot water to dilute tea when it is made too strong

Creamer: small pitcher or jug designed for holding cream or milk to be served with tea or coffee

Sugar Bowl: holds sugar cubes to be placed in coffee or tea

Cups and Saucers: generally matching the rest of the tea set.





## Dark Comedy

*Absent Friends* is a wonderful example of Dark Comedy. Sometimes referred to as Black Comedy, Dark Comedy is a sub-genre of comedy and satire in which topics and events that are usually regarded as taboo are treated in a satirical or humorous manner while retaining its seriousness.

**Method:** Make light of serious and often taboo subject matter. This includes topics like murder, suicide, war, terminal illness, abuse, insanity, disease, and crime.



**Purpose:** It is a tool for exploring important issues, provoking discomfort and serious thought, as well as amusement, in the audience.

### Contrasting Similar Genre Types

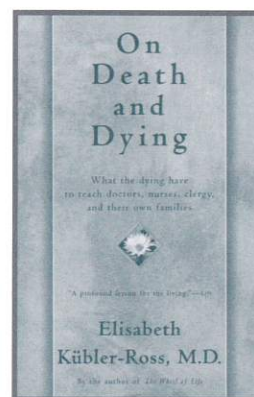
**Blue Comedy:**  
Focus is on crude topics

**Obscene Comedy:**  
Humor comes from shock and revulsion

**Dark Comedy:**  
Humor comes from discomfort of taboo and it includes an element of irony or fatalism

## Kubler-Ross Model of the Grief Cycle

First introduced by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross in her 1969 book *On Death and Dying*, the Kubler-Ross model describes a process by which people allegedly deal with grief and tragedy in five discrete stages. These stages are known as the Five Stages of Grief and are experienced especially when either a loved or one personally is diagnosed with a terminal illness or catastrophic loss.



The Handbook of Psychiatry defined grief as “the normal response to the loss of a loved one by death.”

The stages are:

1. Denial: Example—“I feel fine.” “This can’t be happening, not to me.”
2. Anger: Example—“Why me? It’s not fair!” “How can this be happening to me!”
3. Bargaining: Example—“Just let me live to see my children graduate.” “I’ll do anything for a few more years.”
4. Depression: Example—“Why bother with anything?” “I miss my loved one. What’s the point? Why go on?”
5. Acceptance: Example—“It’s going to be okay.” “I can handle it with change.” “I can’t fight it, I may as well prepare for it.”





## Dramaturg's Note

I wanted to include material on Kubler-Ross's grief cycle since it is hallmark of popular psychology. We might not all know it perfectly, but most of us have heard about it. It has come to influence the way we think reactions to death, anticipating our loved ones and ourselves to experience some part of this cycle when facing the reality of death. For me, this is where a lot of the humor of Colin's character comes from. Kubler-Ross wrote her book four years before Ayckbourn wrote this play. Diana and her party attendants are expecting Colin to be in some stage of the grief cycle and he's not.

As a member of a Christian community, my perspective of death fits within a peculiar yet logical paradigm. I mourn when death occurs, but I also find solace in a faith that there is a purpose to death. That belief brings comfort and sometimes circumvents the grief cycle. In that, I think many of us might be tempted to see Colin's reaction to his fiancé's death not only as appropriate but also commendable. Ayckbourn's

intentions are a little more sinister. To me, Colin's reaction is not indicative of his enlightenment but rather of his insensitivity. Colin is oblivious to the pain of others right in front of him. As a consequence, he ignorantly inflicts pain. He does not take the time to evaluate emotions—his own or those of others.

Right now, you're sitting in a box theatre. There is no proscenium arch. You're a lot closer to the actors here. Ayckbourn opens all of his plays in a setting like this one. There is an intimacy in the proximity. While it may be discomfiting at times, the pain, tension, and passion of the characters can come more immediately to us. But it's in the threat of unsettling intimacy that we are invited to confront the humanity, the personality of others. We see the pain of others. We feel our own pain and inadequacies. Then, we know where healing and improvement can occur. We avoid becoming ignorant inflictors of pain and instead act as conscientious spouses, siblings, and children. In short, we become present, not absent, friends.

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# Artistic Staff

**Jesse Baldridge**  
Lighting Designer

From Murray, Utah. Senior in theatre with an emphasis in design and technology with a ballroom dance minor. Previously assistant lighting designer for BYU's *Thoroughly Modern Millie* and lighting designer for Murray Arts in the *Park Beauty and the Beast*. He is a makeup supervisor for *Les contes d'Hoffmann*.

**Kate Cannon**  
Props Designer/Set Dresser

From Wichita, Kansas. Senior in industrial design. Recent credits include prop design for *Baptism of Fire*, and *Go, Dog, Go!*, and set dressing for *Bérénice* and *Don Giovanni*. She is currently working on the props design for *Tartuffe*.

**Chelsea Cordell**  
Production Stage Manager

From Greensboro, North Carolina. Senior in theatre education. Recent BYU stage manger credits include *Don Giovanni*, *Aida*, and the BFA New York Showcase. Some of her favorite shows to stage manage have been *Peter Pan*, *Thriller*, *Trojan Women*, *Sleepy Hollow*, *Seussical*, *The Music Man*, *Oklahoma!* and *Into the Woods*. Chelsea has stage managed at Tuacahn, Scera, Murray City, and UVU.

**Joseph Craven**  
Sound Designer

From Ardmore, Oklahoma. Junior in theatre arts studies with an emphasis in sound design. Recent credits include sound for *Stuck on the Edge*, *Angles Unaware*, *Two Gentleman of Verona*, and *Handing Down the Names*. Lighting design for Signor Deluso all productions at BYU.

**Sara Hardman**  
Costume, Hair and Makeup Designer.

From Molalla, Oregon. Senior in theatre arts studies with an emphasis in costume design. Recent credits include being a dresser for *Berlin* and an assistant designer for *Macbeth*, both at BYU.

**Barta Lee Heiner**  
Director

Barta Lee Heiner received her BA in theatre from BYU, and later attended the American Conservatory Theatre where she earned her master of fine arts in acting. She later acted professionally with Denver Centre Theatre and taught acting and directed conservatory projects for the National Theatre Conservatory in Denver. Eventually Barta was asked to return to BYU to strengthen the acting program in TMA. She has performed in numerous theatrical and film productions: Lettice in *Lettice and Lovage*, Abby Brewster in *Arsenic and Old Lace*, the title role in *King Lear* and Clara in *Brigham City* and Mary Whitmer in *The Fourth Witness*. She was also the acting and dialogue coach for *The Testaments of One Fold and One Shepherd* and a consultant and dialogue coach for *Emma Smith, My Story*. She recently was involved with a student mentoring film project called *Diantha's Crossing* for the BYU broadcast system.

**Heather Starr**  
Scenic Designer

From Simsbury, Connecticut. Senior in theatre arts studies with emphases in set and lighting design. Recent credits include *Go, Dog, Go!* and *Taffetas*. She will be designing both set and lights for *Blood Wedding*.



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# Producing Staff

## Producer

Rodger D. Sorensen

## Artistic Director

George Nelson

## Division of Design & Production Director

Rory Scanlon

## Production Manager

Russell D. Richins

## Stage Events Coordinator

Jennifer Reed

## Production Assistants

Chelsea Cordell

Mandy Leal

## Technical Director

Travis Coyne

## Expediter

Chris Witham

## Scenic Artists

Heather Starr

Adrienne Eror

Anne Shakespeare

Chelsea Osborne

Barbara Simmons

Alicia Garrett

## Scenic Crew

Preston Matthews

Peter Ehlen

David Thompson

Michael Qualls

Alex Benedict

## Properties Designer

Kate Cannon

## Prop Shop Crew

Justine Trotter

Laura Nelson

Kate Cannon

## Set Dresser

Kate Cannon

## Lighting Advisor

Michael G. Handley

## Asst. Lighting Advisor

Marianne Ohran

## Master Electrician

Jason Lund

## Electrics Crew

Anna Kron

Graham Whipple

Nichole Clement

Matthew Wyman

Jesse Baldrige

Jim Puida

McKell Crandall

Paul McGrew

Jason Lund

David Meyer

Jon George

Mike Howard

## Costume Shop Manager

Donette Perkins

## Asst. Costume Shop Manager

Deanne DeWitt

## Cutter/Draper

Deanne DeWitt

Mary Jane Wadley

## First Hands

Martha Ostergar

Adeline Pichot

## Costume Crafts Supervisor

Rachel Haab

## Wardrobe Supervisor

Shelby Luke

## Stitchers

Landen Gates

Melanie Kowallis

Diane Ogden

Gloria Pendlebury

Maria Schulte

## Hair & Makeup Supervisor

Haleh Risdana

## Hair & Makeup Asst.

Allison Dredge

## Hair & Makeup Crew

TMA 367 Students

## House Audio Engineer

Troy Streeter

## Audio Crew

Mat Goebel

Kt Harrel

Jake Peery

Christina Tibbetts

Sarah Nasson

## Arts Manager

Jeffrey Martin

## Ticket Office

## Accountant

Rachel Lindsey

## Ticket Office Supervisors

Julie Bonifay

Natalie Johansen

Katie Martin

Kylie Marquis

Melinda Miller

## Cashiers

Kathryn Bagley

Allison Barnes

Meagan Carr

Kimberly Holm

Brooke McEwen

Clarissa Oliphant

Hellen Rodriguez

Megan Sparks

## House Managers

Janey Butler

Anna Cluff

Brandon Doyle

Cory Scott

Lindsey Sommercorn

## Ushers

Alyssa Barker

Alex Hutchings

Benjamin Isaacs

Clarissa Lindsay

AmiCheri Mason

Laura Metzger

Coulsen Phillips

Ben Roeling

Kurt Schneider

Kelsey Snow

Andrew Stevens

Bronwyn Tarboton

Ashley Werner

## Business Manager

Kyle Nielsen

## Asst. Business Manager

Thaylene Rogers

## Accountants

Brady Sanders

Daniel Scow

## Photography

Mark Philbrick

HandleyCraft

Photography

## Poster Design

Leslie Duke

## Program Design

Danielle Hale

## Marketing Assistants

Anna Dapper

Maria Dickson

Leslie Duke

Steve Durtschi

Chris Neilson

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Aaron Shurtleff

## Scheduling Coordinator

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