

## **City Theatre's 2021 VIRTUAL SHORT CUTS Middle School Tour**

### About the 2021 SHORT CUTS Tour:

City Theatre leverages its theatrical expertise with the short play genre to engage and educate our community in a variety of programming, including the outreach of its long-time SHORT CUTS Tour. For 20+ years SHORT CUTS has been a live and in-person presentation touring into Miami-Dade County middle schools. But a global pandemic created the opportunity for City Theatre to do the digital pivot from stages to screens inaugurating the 2021 VIRTUAL SHORT CUTS Middle School Tour.

Short plays translate easily to short films, with artfully accessible storytelling that has a beginning, middle, and end. The fast and furious brevity of a ten-minute play lends itself to powerful and effective messaging. A 45-50 minute program of curated and age-appropriate shorts engages and entertains young audiences as they absorb messaging on topics impacting their age group; bullying and values, managing relationships, experiencing difference and tolerance, and the timeliness of loneliness and isolation.

Planning a SHORT CUTS Tour allows City Theatre to identify a talented cohort of playwrights whose scripts offer interesting characters and intriguing storytelling. This season, there is a dedicated emphasis on language and communication throughout the program, experienced and executed differently in each play. In complicated and unusual times such as these, the plays also touch on problem solving, strategies and solutions, and listening to hear what might also be learned between the lines.

### Director's Notes from City Theatre Artistic Director Margaret M. Ledford:

Being a teenager in 21<sup>st</sup> century America is unlike anything adults have experienced. These students have the world at their fingers tips through technology, yet have spent the past year in and out of the classroom, making connections with peers even more difficult. The 4 short plays we have curated for this year's 2021 Virtual SHORT CUTS tour have human connection at the center of their stories. And THAT is what theatre is about. Connecting to each other in the common experience of being a human being, and learning to embrace whatever difference may manifest. Each of these plays connects viscerally to each viewer and allows them to see the world through another person's viewpoint. It is from here that connection can happen and will happen. This year is unique, as traditionally we would experience these plays all together in the same room with a robust talk back. And though, I believe, this is a vital component, these stories can have an equivalent impact on the viewer. It was an exciting challenge to direct these short plays for film, and I hope you enjoy!

### The 2021 SHORT CUTS Acting Ensemble:

Abby Kimball, Ace Anderson, Alexis Robinson, Carey Hart, Griffin Welti, Kyle Hendricks, Morgan Parker, Sheik Muhtade, Stephon Duncan, Thiana Berrick, and Zye Reid.

SHORT CUTS is performed by a diverse professional cast who mirror their young school audiences, often coming from similar cultures, neighborhoods, and experiences. The impact of SHORT CUTS on students is revealed following the show during lively talk-backs among students and company exploring themes and issues raised by the plays, strategies and problem solving relating to themselves, the importance of communications, and the art of dramatic writing and theatre performance.

The 2021 SHORT CUTS Acting Ensemble typically comprises a cohort of professionals some of whom are from South Florida. But with the plays filmed and provided digitally, City Theatre also cast two national performers to fulfill certain roles and needs. Ace Anderson, originally from Miami and now based in Dallas, Texas, is an award-winning spoken word performer who was commissioned to write, produce, film and perform his own material for EVERYTHING I AM. Abby Kimball is an actor based in Maine who is trained in American Sign Language, and performed and filmed herself for DEAF DAY by Leslie Ayvazian.

About the 2021 Plays and Playwrights:

THE STORY: EVERYTHING I AM by Ace Anderson

**Playwright's Synopsis - *Everything I Am*** is the *Self-Fulfilling Prophecy* fully articulated through spoken word poetry. Tony Award Winning Dallas Theater Center actor and writer, Ace Anderson uses hypnotic lyricism to engage audiences with a rhapsodic first-person account of his adolescent discovery of life's purpose. Anderson's profoundly poetic soliloquy is guaranteed to reignite the creative flames of even the least passionate of listeners.

**City Theatre Notes - *Everything I Am*** is City Theatre's first commissioned work from Ace Anderson, and the first piece for the company written, filmed, and performed by the artist. City Theatre has wanted to explore a "short" written and performed as spoken word because of the form's original and authentic story-telling, and its affinity with young people. The artform itself emphasizes language, and Ace's mastery of spoken word, with the text of his words provided in the film, invite audiences to watch, listen, read and learn. The power of Ace's commission is his warm direct address to his audience, that reaches beyond the Pandemic's isolation. Ace's performance is so open, enthusiastic, and theatrical, he capably renders to his audience a message of encouragement and self-confidence.

**Playwright ACE ANDERSON** is a member of Dallas Theater Center's Brierly Resident Acting Company, where his credits include *Hair*, *Inherit the Wind*, *All The Way*, and *King Lear*. Ace is a Dallas-Based actor and photographer, and is also the owner of The Striped Heart, a full-service graphic design company. As a multidisciplinary artist and alum of Southern Methodist University (Acting BFA '13), he has traveled the country as a spoken word poet and is most inspired by his work with Bill T. Jones in Masterclass on HBO. Other theater credits include *The Shipment* (Undermain Theatre), *Radio Golf* (AART), *Blues for Mister Charlie* (SMU), and *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (Jubilee Theatre) as Levee Green, for which he won Best Actor 2014 (BroadwayWorld.com). To see his work follow him on instagram @AceShotThat.

THE STORY: DEAF DAY by Leslie Ayvazian.

**Playwright's Synopsis** - *Deaf Day* is a bilingual monologue in English and American Sign Language. A mother prepares her deaf son to play with other children at the park, but the audience discovers the experience didn't go well. Helping her son overcome his fear of other kids and their teasing and bullying becomes a lesson for them both in having courage to turn differences into understanding.

*"...a gentle, enchanting one-woman show...it's endearing throughout."* NY Times

**City Theatre Notes** - *Deaf Day* was the second play City Theatre produced by Leslie Ayvazian for SUMMER SHORTS 2000, also touring afterwards for SHORT CUTS into high schools. Among City Theatre's goals for the 2021 Virtual Short Cuts Tour is the exploration of language and communication, and the opportunity to revive this play performed for a short film allows audiences to appreciate the use of the American sign language close-up. Ayvazian is a gifted playwright with a very specific rhythm in her writing, which is literary "heard twice" with the actor's voice and hands. The actor, Abby Kimball, is herself trained in American Sign Language, and a mother. Abby, who performs **Deaf Day** from her home in Maine, is fascinating to watch, focused as she is on talking to her offscreen son. It's a deft and personal performance Abby provides, as much about the words spoken, unspoken, and signed.

**Playwright Leslie Ayvazian** is an award-winning playwright and actor whose work has been seen on Broadway and theatres around the country. She is the author of 8 full-length plays and seven one-act plays, published variously by Samuel French and Dramatists Play Service. Her play *Nine Armenians* won the John Gassner/Outer Critics Circle Award for best new American play, The Roger L. Stevens Award, and second place for the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize. *Rosemary and I* received an honorable mention from the Susan Smith Blackburn jury. *Make Me* was produced in New York by the Atlantic Theatre Company. *High Dive* was produced at the Long Wharf Theatre, the Manhattan Class Company, City Theatre and went on to be produced in Poland and Slovakia. Her short film *Every Three Minutes* starring Olympia Dukakis was produced by Showtime and won a Telly Award. Her play **Deaf Day** has been produced twice before this third revival by City Theatre, was produced as a short film in Syria by Rana Kaz Kaz and included in the 2012 Palm Springs International Short Film Festival. Her latest short film, *The Favor*, stars Olympia Dukakis, Margaret Colin, and John Pankow. A theatrical version of *The Favor* was produced at City Theatre, and The Ensemble Studio Theatre's Spring festival of one-act plays. *Out of the City* has had readings in New York and was produced at the Merrimack Repertory Theatre in Lowell, Massachusetts. Her latest play, *100 Aprils*, received a workshop at the Atlantic Theatre in NYC and was produced in Los Angeles. She is currently developing a new play, *Lovely Day*. Leslie's productions at City Theatre also include *Plan Day*, *Rosemary and Elizabeth*, *Above it All*, *Twenty-Four Years* and *The Click*. Leslie is an Adjunct Professor of dramaturgy at the Columbia University Graduate School of the Arts. Her credits as an actress include a recurring role on Law & Order – SVU and roles on Broadway in *Lost in Yonkers* and *Naked Girl on the Apian Way*.

THE STORY: DOUBLE PLIÉ by Chris O'Connor.

**Playwright's Synopsis - Double Plié** is about Sisters Patrice and Jeannie who have grown up together loving dance. But their sisterly bond is challenged when Jeannie hangs up her ballet shoes for baseball cleats, angering Patrice who refuses to believe her little sister has found sports more her style. Growing up is hard, but siblings find themselves going in separate directions doesn't mean they're growing apart.

**City Theatre Notes - Double Plié** is a personal story drawn from the playwright's family, which is another theme of this season's collection of SHORT CUTS. Bullying is not only experienced with strangers, but can also happen in families, particularly among siblings. The language of sisters is often a code only they understand, but which becomes important as they try communicating about the changes they see happening in each other. This play also deals with gender conformity and cliches as girls seek their role in a changing world.

**Playwright Chris O'Connor** is Founding Artistic Director of Mile Square Theatre(MST) in Hoboken, NJ. In 2017 he received an Award of Excellence from the New Jersey Theatre Alliance for his stewardship of MST. He conceived and produces MST's annual 10-minute play festival 7th Inning Stretch. He has directed over 20 productions at MST and has directed at theatres and universities all over America. His recent work at MST includes *Betrayal*, *Circle Mirror Transformation* and the world premiere of *Long Gone Daddy* by Joseph Gallo. As an actor, Chris has performed in such theatres as Maltz Jupiter Theatre, Franklin Stage Company, Seattle's A Contemporary Theatre, The Culture Project, Soho Rep, Center Theatre Group, Gloucester Stage, Provisional Theatre of Los Angeles, The Bathhouse Theatre, Seattle Children's Theatre, and City Theatre in Pittsburgh, where he originated the role of Peter in Craig Wright's *The Pavilion*. Recent TV/film credits include *Magic City*, *Burn Notice*, and the upcoming indie thriller *Depraved*. His plays for young people have been produced at Seattle Children's Theatre, his short baseball play *The Mascots* is published in Smith & Kraus's 2011 Best 10-Minute Plays. Chris has been a finalist in City Theatre's National Short Play Contest for his plays *Miss Ring Has Lost Her Phone* (2016), his play *The Gentleman from Philly* has had two Virtual readings in 2021, and his play *Double Plié* (lightly based on his real daughters) was previously produced at MST and selected for the 2021 SHORT CUTS Virtual tour. B.F.A., Carnegie-Mellon University and MFA, Rutgers University.

**THE STORY: JUMP ROPE by Phanésia Pharel.**

**Jump Rope** is the about new girl Nadia who walks in on the *Jump Club*, a secret group of kids refusing to let a pandemic stop their play. Sugar, the school Queen B wants none of it. With the help of a loving spirit guide, and a new friend, will Nadia develop the confidence to jump in? Or will she let Sugar call the shots?

**City Theatre Notes - Jump Rope** is City Theatre's opportunity to highlight a talented young playwright with ties to the company and to the South Florida community. A young woman herself, Phanésia captures the difficulty kids have fitting in, and especially during a pandemic.

The themes of bullying, difference and tolerance of this play is also realized theatrically in the activity and competition of jump roping itself, as the metaphor for choosing between being afraid of getting tripped up or finding the confidence to jump into new challenges.

**Playwright Phanésia Pharel** is a Haitian-American playwright who addresses the divine metaphysical dilemma of Black and Latinx girlhood. Her plays span revolutions, islands, and Afro-Futurism. She is currently an Artist in Residence for New York Stage and Film, a National Young Playwright in Residence for the Echo Theater Company of Los Angeles, and a proud member of the Dramatist Guild of America. Phanésia's ties to City Theatre include her selection as a high school playwright in its NextGen program, as a literary intern, as a Finalist in City Theatre's 2020 National Short Playwriting Contest with *And Other Dreams We Had*, and as a commissioned playwright for the 2021 Short Cuts Virtual Tour. She is a recent graduate of Barnard College.

### **About City Theatre**

City Theatre is an award-winning professional theater company founded in Miami, FL in 1996, that is dedicated to the development and production of new works and programming that entertains, informs, and resonates with its diverse audiences. Now among the oldest theatres in South Florida, City Theatre is also distinguished nationally for being the only theatre in the country producing ten-minute plays and musicals year-round and for all ages. City Theatre has made its Main Stage home at the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts Carnival Studio Theatre since 2007, where its Signature SUMMER SHORTS FESTIVAL will enjoy its postponed 25<sup>th</sup> Silver Anniversary Season in 2022. City Theatre has also produced holiday seasons of WINTER SHORTS and full-length plays as part of the Arsht's Theatre Up Close Series, including JACOB MARLEY'S CHRISTMAS CAROL by Tom Mula in 2021 and Bekah Brunstetter's THE CAKE in 2019.

City Theatre has produced hundreds of shorts for its various programming by well-known and exciting new writers through submissions of its City Theatre National Award for Short Playwriting Contests. It has commissioned many more specifically from South Florida connected playwrights for its SHORT CUTS middle school tours. City Shorts, She Shorts, City Reads, CityWrights and Industry Weekend are additional City Theatre productions, programs and outreach efforts that showcase the multi-faceted versatility of short works, and visibility to the talented artists who write them from South Florida and around the country. City Theatre is an Associate Member of the National New Play Network (NNPN) and participated in the Rolling World Premiere production of Robert Schenkkan's BUILDING THE WALL produced at the Arsht in 2018; the Theatre League of South Florida; the Florida Professional Theatre Association. In 2016 City Theatre was honored by the Carbonell Committee with the prestigious Bill Von Maurer Award, which recognizes significant contributions to South Florida theater development by an individual or group, for the company's dedication to the short form play and fostering new play development. For more information visit [www.citytheatre.com](http://www.citytheatre.com)