

A CASE FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

BY Samuel
D. Hunter



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FORWARD THEATER COMPANY

presents

A CASE FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

by **Samuel D. Hunter**
Directed by **Jen Uphoff Gray**

Scenic Designer
Noele Stollmack**

Lighting Designer
Noele Stollmack**

Costume Designer
Jason Orlenko**

Composer & Sound Designer
Joe Cerqua**

Props Designer
Kaya Sarajian

Stage Manager
Shawn Galligan*

A Case for the Existence of God is generously sponsored by:

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*This play was supported in part by a grant from the Wisconsin Arts Board
with funds from the State of Wisconsin and the National Endowment for the Arts.*

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** Member of United Scenic Artists Local 829

World Premiere produced by Signature Theatre, New York City Paige Evans,
Artistic Director; Tim McClimon Interim Executive Director

A Case for the Existence of God was additionally developed at the
2020 Ojai Playwrights Conference; Robert Egan, Artistic Director/Producer.

A workshop production of *A Case for the Existence of God*, directed by Paul Lazar, was presented in
Ketchum, Idaho by Field Daze, Sawtooth Productions, the Argyros, and Laughing Stock Theater.
A Case for the Existence of God was also developed through a residency at SPACE on Ryder Farm.

A Case for the Existence of God



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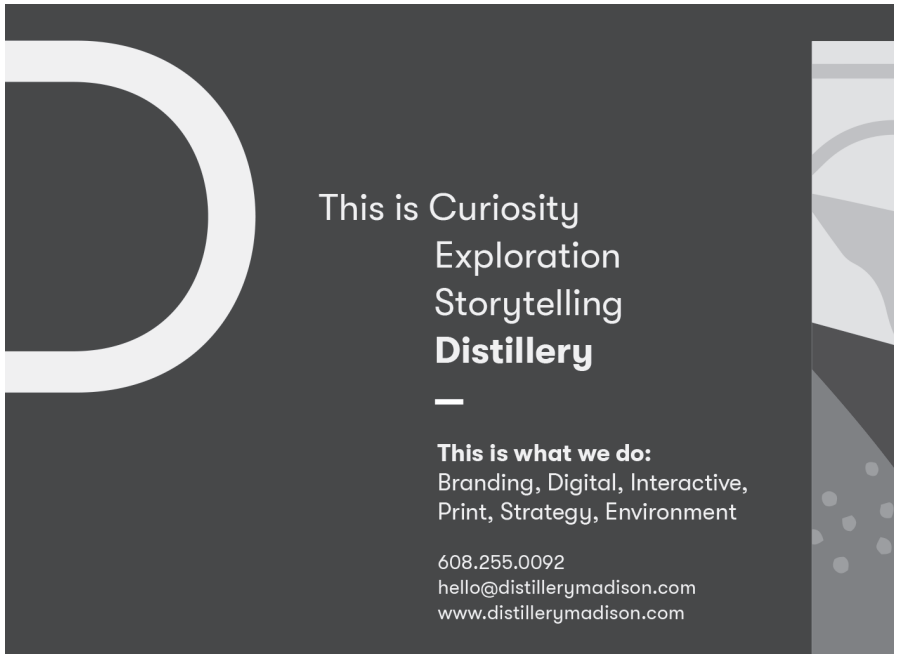
FROM THE DIRECTOR...JEN UPHOFF GRAY

Welcome to Forward Theater's production of *A Case for the Existence of God*, by Samuel D. Hunter. I first read this play in June 2022, when it was hot off the press from its New York premiere production. I am not sure I can fully articulate exactly why it was that this particular play leapt so strongly off the page for me – why I felt immediately that we must bring it to Forward. It's something to do with my admiration for Hunter's writing that is somehow both naturalistic and transcendent. It's something to do with the challenges the script presented for us as storytellers – to take a play that requires a bare minimum of movement and make it fill our thrust-staged theater.

But most of all, perhaps, it was the way this profoundly humanistic play spoke to me as a person who has no allegiance to any organized religion, but nonetheless was raised by my parents (one a secular Jew and the other an activist Quaker) to look for faith and morality in how we treat each other.

A Case for the Existence of God is the final piece in our "Through Thick and Thin" season, which has been all about friendships and the ties that bind us together. I look forward to hearing what you think of this play, particularly as it sits in conversation with the stories that preceded it. Midway through *A Case for the Existence of God*, Ryan says "It'll all be okay. I have faith...in things working out. I really do." I want to thank you – the Forward Theater audience – for the faith you instill in me and everyone who works here. Your belief in the value of live theater in our community, and in the empathy and compassion it can build, means the world to us.

Finally, I invite you to come back to the Playhouse for our 2025-2026 season: "Changing the Narrative." Four extraordinary plays about people who refuse to accept the status quo in their own lives, who challenge expectations, take control, and remind us that change is always possible. Subscriptions are on sale now!



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FROM THE ADVISORY COMPANY....JONO DE LEON, DEPUTY

We made it! Our last show of the season. We have been on a journey of friendship this season: New friends, old friends, work friends, acquaintances, reconnecting with friends we may have lost touch with along the way. Hopefully, you have made some new friends as well. Did you get a seat buddy for next season? It's time to get season tickets for our 17th Season and subscriptions are the best way to support Forward Theater.

A Case for the Existence of God is about unlikely friendships. The ones that start while you're in line at the bank or standing next to a stranger at a preshow lecture for a local theater company. The set design for this play is in a style called "in the round," where we seat the audience 360 degrees around the stage. The last time we did this was for *Every Brilliant Thing* and FTC is excited to try it out again. This is a strong play to end the season on, a show that brings people together from unlikely backgrounds in unlikely situations and reveals how the simple act of conversation - even if it is about loan documents - can lead to a deeper understanding of each other's background and possibly even a deeper connection.

Forward is exceptionally happy to welcome you into the Playhouse for one more show. We are ecstatic for next season's lineup and we cannot wait to share more human connections with you. We sincerely hope that you have been able to enjoy our preshow lectures and postshow talkbacks and even learned a little more through our podcasts and community outreach programs.

Enjoy your night at the theater, exchange phone numbers with your seat buddy, and please enjoy *A Case for the Existence of God* by Samuel D. Hunter.

FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS...DAVE CHAIMSON, CHAIR

Welcome back to the Playhouse for our final staged production of the season. This year's theme, *Through Thick & Thin*, has been a powerful exploration of relationships in all forms. We've witnessed how deeply relationships shape our sense of belonging and purpose. They're complex, sometimes challenging, but ultimately essential to who we are. *A Case for the Existence of God* is a perfect way to close out, as it continues this theme by focusing on the dynamics between Keith and Ryan, two men who seemingly have little in common and discover themselves through deep self-exploration. Within their interactions, they uncover not only their differences but also their surprising similarities. It's a poignant reminder of how much we often share with others when we allow ourselves to be vulnerable. The more we allow ourselves to reveal who we are, the more common ground we find.

Our relationship with you, our valued patrons, has been equally important and revealing this season. Over the past six months, we've asked you to join us on emotional and thought-provoking journeys. In return, we've promised to offer performances that stir thought, spark conversation, and connect us through shared experiences. We hope we've kept that promise, and as we look ahead, we're excited for what's to come. Our 17th season, recently announced, will challenge you further with productions that motivate and inspire. But don't forget, we still have more to offer this year! Join us for our eighth Monologue Festival from May 8-10, featuring powerful works by local and national playwrights who focus on the theme of *Guilty Pleasures*. Thank you again for your support; we look forward to seeing you again soon!

What If God Was All of Us?

Peace is the state of distinctness without domination, with the distinct participating in each other.

– T.W. Adorno, *Subject-Object* (1969)

Only connect! That was the whole of her sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer.

– E.M. Forster, *Howards End* (1910)

1.

Why did Samuel D. Hunter name the play you're about to see *A Case for the Existence of God*? Why is Forward Theater, for just the second time in its history, staging a play in the round? And why is this gorgeous exploration of how we might come together the play we most need right now, in a country that seems hopelessly divided? Speaking of divisions, why is this essay divided into twelve parts?

All in good time, below. But first, let me introduce you to Ryan and Keith, the two thirty-something characters living in Twin Falls, Idaho through whom Hunter makes his case.

2.

Ryan is a recently divorced straight white male working in a yogurt plant whose family's history (including both parents) is riddled with mental illness and substance abuse. He's suspicious of (and often unfamiliar with) fancy words. He likes guns. He's never been out of the United States. Poor in a country that reduces everything to money, he consequently feels that "I don't have permission to exist."

Keith is a single gay Black man working as a mortgage broker who has a dual degree in Early Music and English. He comes from a stable and wealthy family that has traveled all over the world. He gets excited by early antiphons and motets. He unconsciously uses big words, sometimes deliberately dumbs down to fit in, and nevertheless still struggles to relate. He owns no guns.

3.

This odd couple is brought together by two core components of the fading American Dream: a belief in the future featuring both the desire for a home of one's own and a commitment to raising kids within it.

4.

Against all odds given his poor credit history and dead-end job, Ryan comes to Keith looking for a mortgage; if he can't move out of his shabby apartment, he risks losing even partial custody of his 15-month-old daughter.

Against all odds, Keith hopes to find a bank that will lend Ryan money. Himself the foster parent of a 16-month-old daughter, Keith lives in fear that his foster daughter's birth family – which has recently learned Keith is gay and isn't happy about it – will take her back before he can legally adopt her.

5.

What else these men share, for all their differences:

A sense of displacement. The feeling that they're outsiders. A focus on history and legacy, including their own connection to the past. A hatred of the news as so much white noise. A fascination with the disconnect between the jargon that passes for speech and genuine communication, of a sort that isn't performative and doesn't follow prescribed rules. And, finally, what Ryan describes as "a specific kind of – sadness" involving lonely, middle-aged men searching for home.

6.

"Maybe there's something wrong with the world right now, something really bad," Ryan reflects at one point. "And maybe whatever's going on with me right now is just – me

finally being able to see that?"

"What world are we inviting them into?" Ryan asks Keith, as they watch their little girls play. "Are we raising them just so they can get, like, nuked out of existence?"

7.

Underscoring that sense of being lost, stuck, and doomed, Hunter's stage directions keep the men seated during most of the play, much of which unfolds within one of those claustrophobic office cubicles where so many of us have spent so many hours, feeling as though nothing will ever change. "I just feel like I'm on this treadmill, I keep running and running and I'm not even sure why," Ryan complains. "Play by the rules and pretend it all means something, or you don't get anything," Keith despairs.

8.

But rules get broken; time doesn't stand still. Among the reasons Forward's production will use both a rotating turntable and in-the-round seating: Both underscore that we evolve as the world revolves, giving us the chance to encounter new people and opening us to the possibility that we need not simply interpret and accept a given world. We can also change it and ourselves by seeing people, places, and things from a new perspective.

9.

"Maybe there's good left in the world," Ryan suggests. "We have to believe that, like, things still make sense."

Sometimes, we need to take each other and the world on faith, against the odds and all the evidence.

10.

In terms of the early music Keith loves, polyphony can lead to harmony; separate voices can come together to make new music – often, as in a specific example included in *Case*, through bending preexisting rules in actual performance regarding how sound is supposed to work. When both voices sing the same note, two previously distinct lines can converge.

11.

Writing this play at a point when he and his husband were struggling to simultaneously buy a home and adopt a child, Hunter has acknowledged that he was searching for "the places that I can find hope for me and my kid in this deeply complicated world." "I think," he continued, "that's what the concern of the play is."

"With this one," he has also said of *Case*, "I really hope the audience leaves with a sense of hope."

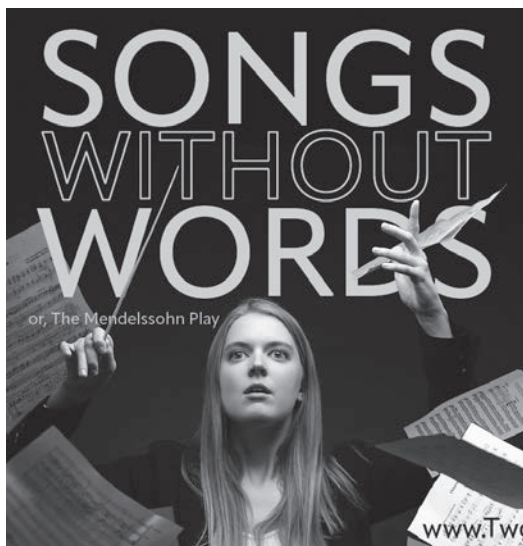
12.

A turntable conjures thoughts of a clock; it's no coincidence that Hunter divides his play into twelve distinct pieces. Time passes. Seasons change. And a seeming circle can become a spiral, moving upward and forward toward a utopian totality.

"Every second of the future," German philosopher Rolf Tiedemann once wrote, "bears within it that little door through which Messiah may enter."

The case for the existence of God? It lies all around us. Even as I write. Even as you read. All we must do – what theater made at Forward consistently urges us to do – is learn to see each other better.

In memory of E.M. Forster
– Milwaukee and Chicago, February 2025



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Forward Theater's mission is to expand the cultural life for Madison-area audiences, which means inviting *all* of our community in to access and enjoy live, professional theater. Forward is proud to provide:

- Assistive Listening Devices, which amplify sound through either a receiver and headphones, or a T-coil/Induction Loop (for those with compatible hearing aids or cochlear implants).
 - Tip: Come early to sit and test your device, and keep your phone away from the device to avoid interference.
- ASL-interpreted performances, offered on the third Saturday matinee of each production. Designated seating that offers an unobstructed view of the ASL interpreter is available as a ticket option.
- Audio Description – Audio Description is offered on the third Saturday matinee of each production.
- Tactile tours for blind or low-sighted patrons, available on request.
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We are continuing to add services to enhance the experience of live theater for guests with disabilities, through realistic action steps and authentic relationship building. Would you like to utilize or learn more about these services? Have feedback or suggestions? Contact us: Audience Services 608-234-5001 x1 | Email: bcollins@forwardtheater.com

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Acknowledging Ho-Chunk Nation's ancestral lands, Forward Theater and Overture Center for the Arts celebrate the rich traditions, heritage, and culture that thrived long before our arrival. We respectfully recognize this Ho-Chunk land and affirm that we are better when we stand together.

We encourage you to visit ho-chunknation.com to learn more.

FTC'S 2024-2025 SEASON BUDGET

Thank you for purchasing a ticket to this production!

We are grateful to everyone who supports our work through ticket sales and other financial gifts. Key among our founding values is transparency. To that end, we share with you our annual budget, as an organization's budget is its clearest expression of its priorities. Producing professional theater is not inexpensive, but we consider carefully how we spend each dollar. And we are proud that such a significant amount of our spending is done locally, in support of local artists and local businesses. Thank you for your part in making it all possible!

People

Artistic personnel & benefits <i>(72 actors, directors, designers)</i>	\$217,424
Production personnel <i>(55 crew and technical support)</i>	\$181,335
Staff, benefits, payroll taxes <i>(6 full-time, 1 part-time)</i>	\$564,657
Accounting staff & consultants	\$32,820
Community Connections <i>(La Follette HS teaching artists; Engagement & Accessibility; other Outreach Programming)</i>	\$32,820
Playwright Royalties	\$89,866

Productions

Sets	\$18,700
Costumes	\$9,200
Lighting	\$4,000
Props	\$10,600
Sound	\$2,050
Playbills	\$10,400
Construction/Storage space	\$9,396
Miscellaneous <i>(scripts, auditions, transportation)</i>	\$11,750

Venue

Theater rental	\$69,862
Rehearsal space rental	\$15,336
Venue equipment rental	\$8,350
Security fees	\$3,450
Box office fees <i>(includes sales taxes)</i>	\$144,872

Company Expenses

Artist housing	\$6,400
Hospitality	\$6,680
COVID-19 Safety expenses	\$1,250

Operations

Office space rental	\$54,458
Operational expenses <i>(copier, internet, phone, database, supplies)</i>	\$19,980
Insurance	\$15,600
Payroll & Audit services	\$21,525
Banking <i>(incl. credit card processing fees)</i>	\$17,575
Organizational memberships	\$3,660

Marketing/Development

Marketing <i>(advertising, graphic design, etc.)</i>	\$93,485
Development/Donor Engagement	\$44,500

Total 2024-2025 Operating Budget: \$1,722,001

A CASE FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

by Samuel D. Hunter

CAST

Keith..... Jamal James*
Ryan..... Josh Krause*

Understudies:

Ogunde Snelling (Keith) and Joseph Matyas (Ryan)

*Performers appear courtesy of Actors' Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers in the United States.

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ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES



Jamal James (Keith) is absolutely over the moon to be back at Forward! An actor who has performed all over the country, Jamal currently lives in sunny LA exploring

Hollywood and its vibrant community. Always willing to talk about God, Star Wars, and Superheroes at any given time, he has worked in voiceovers, television, features and short films, improv, and is currently working on writing his own projects. Some of his recent favorite productions include: *The Royale*, *Hamlet*, *Romeo & Juliet*, American Players Theatre; *Feeding Beatrice*, Forward Theater; *The Color Purple*, National Broadway Tour; *Guess Who's Coming To Dinner*, Lyceum Theatre; *Jedi Trials*, Walt Disney World; *Beauty and The Beast* and *Violet: The Musical*, Barter Theater; TV/Film Credits: *Blue Bloods*, *GOTHAM*, *City on a Hill*, *FBI: Most Wanted*, *Hit Me*, *Power Out*, *Lost Time*. All love to God, Mom, Dad, Jared, Alys, his family, his friends, the cast and crew and all who fight for a better world.



Josh Krause (Ryan) is grateful to be back with Forward. Forward credits: *Airness* (Shreddy Eddy), *The Amateurs* (Gregory/Playwright), and *Clarkston* (Chris). Recent regional

favorites include *The Virgin Queen Entertains Her Fool* (Ermo), *King Lear* (The Fool), *The Liar* (Cliton), *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (Sir High Evans), *The Rivals* (Bob Acres), *Rough Crossing* (Adam), and *She Stoops to Conquer* (Tony Lumpkin) with APT; *The Mousetrap* (Giles Ralston) with Next Act; *Indecent* (Avram/Asche) and *Jeeves at Sea* (Crumpet) for Milwaukee Chamber Theatre. Josh has performed Off-Broadway in *Boswell* (James Boswell), by Marie Kohler. He is a proud member of the Advisory Company at Forward, the Core Company at APT, and the Actors' Equity Association. When not acting, he's watching horror movies with his lovely wife or cleaning something. Josh lives in Menomonee Falls, WI with his wife, Rachel, their baby boy, Vincent, and their cat, Tweak.



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UNDERSTUDY BIOGRAPHIES



Ogunde Snelling (US/Keith) is a Gary, IN native by way of Ball State University class of '21. Ogunde is very grateful and excited to have his first, of many, venture with Forward

Theater! You may have previously seen him in *A Christmas Carol* as Ghost of Christmas Present or *The Wiz* as Scarecrow with Children's Theater of Madison. Ogunde is so grateful to have the opportunity to tell stories like these and would like to give his love and gratitude to his friends and family who constantly show him the existence and grace of God in themselves through their unconditional love and unwavering support.



Joseph Matyas (US/Ryan) is thrilled to be joining Forward Theater for this amazing play! Joseph is certified teacher of the Williamson Technique and has trained actors

at Northern Illinois University, Gately-Poole Conservatory, Actor's Movement Camp, Children's Theater of Madison and privately across the country. Joseph is a graduate of the University of the Arts and an Equity Membership Candidate. Favorite past credits include: *The Winter's Tale*, First Folio Theatre; *Romeo & Juliet*, Philadelphia Shakespeare Theater; *Future-Fest!*, Luna Theater Co.; *Household Spirits*, PlayPenn Festival; *Marriage*, The Idiopathic Ridiculopathy Consortium; *Amy's View*, Isis Productions; *Take Me Out*, Plays & Players. Love to my absolute favorites: Jack, Julie, Smokey & Sati.

PRODUCTION ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

Joe Cerqua (Composer & Sound Designer) is a freelance composer, producer, vocalist and sound designer. He is thrilled to be the Resident Composer and Sound Designer at Forward Theater where he has previously composed and designed sound for 33 productions, most recently *Clyde's*, *What The Constitution Means To Me*, *Murder Girl*, and *Summer, 1976*. He has composed music and/or designed sound for over 350 productions in Chicago, nationally, and internationally. Recent projects include original music and sound design for Two Crows Theatre, Next Act Theatre, American Players Theatre, The Clarence Brown Theater, and Milwaukee Rep. Joe is the Producing Director/Composer in residence for the Cerqua Rivera Dance Theatre, a critically acclaimed 13-piece jazz orchestra and 10-member dance company. He is the Creative Director and Producer for the Music Department at Columbia College Chicago.

Shawn Galligan (Stage Manager)
This is Shawn's third season with Forward Theater. With a background in performance, Shawn switched to stage management in 2011. But you can still find him onstage from time to time. He has worked for theaters in Ohio, Illinois, and Wisconsin, both onstage and backstage. Shawn has been a company member with Northern Sky Theater since 2014, starting as an intern and is now the Production Stage Manager. He has stage managed for Madison Ballet and was a company member with Interrobang Theatre Project in Chicago. Shawn is a recreational cyclist, bike mechanic, and a lover of board games and miniatures gaming.

Joseph Green (Assistant Director) is a Wisconsin native, a graduate from the UW - Madison's Theatre Dept, and is thrilled to be making his Forward debut behind the table! Joseph has trained at other

various institutions such as the Stella Adler Studio in NYC and Wright State University, both extensively as an actor, as well as a director. Behind the table, he's worked for various institutions, such as American Players Theatre, Kernel Productions, and Intermission Theatre. As an actor, some of his most recent credits include *It's a Wonderful Life*, Cap City Theatre; the animated series *A War on Christmas*, Kernel Productions; recurring roles in *The Saints*, *The Merry Beggars*; as well as an upcoming summer season with the Texas Shakespeare Festival. He is represented by Babes 'n Beaus Talent Agency in Chicago. "Endless love for the mentors, friends and family who've supported me thus far." Instagram: @Meanjoegreen31

Adam Hastings (Technical Director) is delighted to be working with Forward Theater this season! As the proud owner of *Spotlight Construction Co.* – collaborating with Next Act, Milwaukee Chamber, Forward, The Fireside, Black Arts Milwaukee, among others throughout theatre and entertainment industries – he would like to thank the highly talented production and creative team behind *A Case for the Existence of God* and hopes you enjoy the show.

Abbi Hess (Assistant Stage Manager) is grateful to be back for a fifth season with Forward Theater Company! Past favorite credits include: *Bare & The Amish Project*, Outskirts Theatre Co.; *Mamma Mia*, Lake Country Playhouse; *Next to Normal & Hamlet: A Cover*, Carroll University; *2 Pianos 4 Hands & The Legend of Georgia McBride*, Milwaukee Rep; *Every Brilliant Thing & Imbroglia*, Great River Shakespeare Festival; *Airness* and *Artemisia*, Forward Theater. Thank you to family, friends, and the supportive people at Forward Theater!

Jason Orlenko (Costume Designer) is delighted to return to Forward Theater where he has designed costumes for

Clyde's and *Mom, How Did You Meet The Beatles?* Favorite designs include *Xanadu*, *Mamma Mia*, *Kiss Me Kate* at Skylight Music Theatre; *The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity*, *The Mousetrap*, *Silent Sky* at Next Act; *The Moors*, *The Wolves*, *Violet Hour* at Renaissance Theaterworks; *My Way*, *Souvenir*, *Forever Plaid* at the Milwaukee Rep. Additional design work includes Utah Festival Opera & Musical Theatre, Northern Sky, First Stage, Rep of St. Louis, Milwaukee Chamber, Milwaukee Opera Theatre, In Tandem Theatre, Cardinal Stage. Other credits include the Illinois Shakespeare Festival, Florentine Opera, The Hangar Theatre, and 4 summers at American Players Theatre. Current and Upcoming: *Buyer & Cellar* at Renaissance Theaterworks and *Circle Mirror Transformation* at Next Act. Jason resides in Milwaukee with his husband Brick, where he is Assistant Professor of Costume Design at UW-Milwaukee. www.jasonorlenko.com.

Kaya Sarajian (Props Designer) is a recent graduate of UW Madison with various theater specializations. Recent credits include props design for *King James*, *Murder Girl*, and *Summer, 1976* Forward Theater; *The Wiz*, Children's Theater of Madison; costume design for *Peter and the Starcatcher*, University Theatre (UW-Madison); as well as lighting design for *Classroom Ain't Enough*, Broom Street Theater. Kaya is excited for their fourth production with Forward Theater and hopes that you enjoy the show.

Noele Stollmack (Scenic & Lighting Designer) Noele Stollmack's design work has appeared onstage at The Brooklyn Academy of Music, Sydney Opera House, Carnegie Hall, Verizon Hall, The Library of Congress Theatre, as well as the opera companies of Santa Fe, Ontario, Houston, Portland, Vancouver, New Orleans, Nashville, Madison and Milwaukee. Regional design for the theatre includes Jeff Daniels Purple Rose Theatre, Baltimore

PRODUCTION ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES CONT.

Center Stage, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, Houston's Alley Theatre, Wisconsin's Milwaukee Rep, Chamber Theatre, Renaissance Theaterworks, Skylight Music Theatre, American Players Theatre, Forward Theater and First Stage. As Lighting Director for Houston Grand Opera, she supervised the lighting and special effects for over 50 productions along with designing the lighting for such productions as Andrei Serban's *Elektra*, Dr. Jonathan Miller's *Der Rosenkavalier*, *Aida*, and the world premieres of *Harvey Milk*, *Desert of Roses*, and *Dracula Diary*. Her AIA award winning architectural and public space lighting is installed throughout the Midwest. Member: United Scenic Arts Local 829.

Jen Uphoff Gray (Director) is the artistic director of Forward Theater Company – this is the 31st show she has directed for FTC! Recent productions include *Murder Girl*, *What the Constitution Means to Me*, *The Garbologists*, and *Artemisia*. She mounted the National Tour of Michael Frayn's *Copenhagen*, and during twelve years working On- and Off-Broadway Jen served as Associate Director for *Copenhagen*, *Cabaret*, *The Blue Room*, and *The Life*. She is the founder of both World Premiere Wisconsin and FTC's new Wisconsin Directors Lab. Jen grew up in the Madison area and holds a degree in Dramatic Literature & Stage History from Harvard College. *Thank you to everyone who attends our productions for believing in the empathy-building power of live theater.*

FORWARD THEATER STAFF BIOGRAPHIES

Bri Collins (Audience & Donor Relations Manager) manages audience services and donor relations for Forward Theater. She has been born and raised mostly in the Madison area. She graduated from UW Stevens Point with a BFA in Theater Design and Technology in Stage Management. After graduation she moved to the Twin Cities to work in the Regional Theater scene. Bri is excited to experience her second season here at Forward. She is passionate about making theater accessible to everyone with the high quality of work that Forward Theater produces.

Scott Haden (Director of Marketing) has been Forward Theater's Director of Marketing since 2013. He previously served as Managing Director of the Rocky Mountain Repertory Theatre in Grand Lake, CO, and has enjoyed acting at various regional theaters across the country, including American Players Theatre, Utah

Shakespeare Festival, Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, Writers' Theatre, Madison Repertory Theatre, Milwaukee Chamber Theatre, and Theatre at the Center. For FTC, Scott appeared in the *Two Steps Forward Monologue Festival* and *Russian Troll Farm*. Scott is a proud member of Actors' Equity, and holds a BFA in Musical Theatre from the Webster University Conservatory of Theatre Arts.

Marcella Kearns (Artistic Associate) is a Milwaukee-based artist and administrator. A member of Actors' Equity Association and former Fulbright Fellow (Austria), she also serves on the faculty of First Stage's Young Company, Marquette University, and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Her directing credits include the world premieres of *Fighting For Home: Stories of Women Who Serve* and Alice Austen's *Girls in the Boat*. As an actor, she has most often split her time between Madison and Milwaukee; at Forward, she appeared

in *44 Plays for 44 Presidents*, *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike*, *Life Sucks*, and Forward's inaugural Monologue Festival, *The Love That Changed My Life*, where she originated one of a pair of Christopher Durang pieces. She holds an MFA in Acting from the University of South Carolina and a BA in English from Canisius University, and she completed a TCG Observership in approaches to Shakespeare training.

Celia Klehr (Company Manager) co-founded FTC by bringing together professional theater artists around her dining table when the Madison Repertory Theatre closed in 2009. Because she believes that theater is most relevant when it is for, by, and of a community, Celia has made Madison her home, both professionally and personally. She was a founding member of Madison Rep's Acting Company. During her 14 years with the Madison Rep she appeared in more than 20 productions, served as company manager for three years, and earned her Equity card. As the Company Manager for FTC, she hosts Advisory Company meetings, staff retreats, family picnics, and fundraising events at her home on Madison's east side. Along with finding homes for our visiting artists, Celia works to help all our artists feel at home and able to do their best work. You will find her in the lobby greeting our audience.

Sarah Milestone (Director of Development) joined the Forward staff in 2021. She holds a degree in Art History and Women's Studies from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Sarah previously led development, strategic planning and special events for several arts organizations including the Guggenheim Museum, Whitney Museum, American Ballet Theatre, Wisconsin Historical Foundation, and Taliesin Preservation. In addition, she serves on the Board of Visitors of the UW Madison Art Department and

Briarpatch Youth Services. Sarah grew up on Madison's west side, and now lives just steps from Overture Center with her sweet pup, Pearl.

Alex Moskoff (Business Manager) has been Forward's Business Manager since 2012. He started as a part time employee, then continued to work with Forward through an outside accounting firm, and more recently continued his work with Forward through his own small accounting business, Counting On the Arts, in order to focus on non-profit arts organizations. Alex serves several other arts organizations in the area. He has a Bachelor's degree in legal studies (and studied film and television) at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. After college Alex worked as a production accountant at Warner Bros. Television in Los Angeles. A native Madisonian, Alex lives on the east side with his wife (a professional chef/baker), and their daughter Olivia.

Julie Swenson (Managing Director) joined Forward as Managing Director after 17 seasons as Producing Director for Renaissance Theaterworks in Milwaukee. Julie received a BA in theater from Illinois Wesleyan University and became a member of Actors' Equity Association while living in New York City. Julie fell in love with the Forward family when she worked as an actor in Forward's production of *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* in the role of Masha. Outside of theater she served on the Village of Nashotah board serving as President for two terms and was the host of *New Home Building Today* on WTMJ-4 in Milwaukee. She is a member of the Downtown Rotary Madison and Co-chair of the Mentor/Scholar committee.

Jen Uphoff Gray (Artistic Director) See Production Artist bios



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As we celebrate our 16th Season we are so grateful to all who make Forward Theater possible. Our community partnerships, innovative programming and artistic quality would not happen without the support from our generous donors. Whether you have made a first-time gift or you have faithfully supported Forward Theater throughout the years, you are part of our theater community and Forward's history. Thank you.

We are pleased to recognize contributions to the annual fund received between February 1, 2024 – February 21, 2025. If you notice any errors in acknowledgement or have questions about donation options, please contact Sarah Milestone at 608-234-5001 or smilestone@forwardtheater.com. To make a tax-deductible donation to Forward Theater online or learn about donor benefits, visit our website at forwardtheater.com. To mail in a contribution, please use the following address: Forward Theater, P.O. Box 14574, Madison, WI 53708.

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Naming Forward Theater in your estate plans is a great way to provide lasting support beyond your lifetime. Your legacy will live on through the lives and stories touched by professional theater in Madison.

If you have named Forward Theater as a beneficiary in your will or estate plan, or if this is something you would like to consider, we would welcome the opportunity to talk with you about what you'd like to achieve with your gift – the legacy you'd like to leave for audiences, artists, and our community for generations to come. Please contact Sarah Milestone at 608-234-5001 or smilestone@forwardtheater.com for more information.

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SCOTT THORNTON

THURSDAY, JUNE 12, 2025 - 6PM RECEPTION | 7PM DINNER
THE ELKS LODGE | 711 JENIFER STREET, MADISON

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Collaen Madden, Ring Round the Moon, 2024. Photo by Liz Lauren.

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