

A world premiere by Pulitzer Prize  
winning playwright James Ijames,  
*Abandon* is sometimes violent,  
sometimes healing and has a  
gossamer veil that separates the  
worlds of the living and the dead,  
and shame and acceptance.

theatre exile  
WORLD PREMIERE

# abandon

by **JAMES IJAMES**

**DIRECTED BY BRETT ASHLEY ROBINSON**

**APRIL 27 - MAY 21, 2023**

**THE WILLIAM PENN FOUNDATION PROVIDES LEAD SUPPORT**

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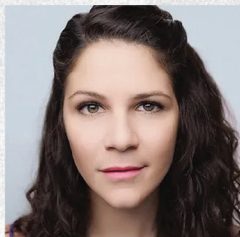
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**FEATURING: CARLO CAMPBELL, JARED CHICHESTER, MELANYE FINISTER, BRENSON THOMAS**

# STUDIO X-HIBITION

Three Readings of  
Three New Plays of  
Three Exciting Stories by  
Three Local Playwrights



*Trying*  
by **Alison Scaramella**  
Monday April 10th, 2023

Maggie and Jamie have been trying to have a baby for... a while. After a recent loss, they are getting back on the not-so-sexy horse, navigating lots of peeing on sticks, friends with babies, and unsolicited advice on their path to building their family.



*Without Consent*  
by **David Robson**  
Monday May 8th, 2023

Carmen, the wife of an entertainment legend, is interviewing a nurse, Lisa, to supervise the care of her ailing husband, but the tables quickly turn as Carmen is confronted with sexual accusations against her husband and with her complicity in the alleged incidents.



*Honey Bee Baby*  
by **Erlina Ortiz**  
Monday June 12th, 2023

Kind Melisa desperately wants a child. If only she could pass the government mandated test that will allow her to do it. The honey bees are gone, the resources are scarce, and every one must earn their place in this world where the lines between right and wrong are blurred with blood.

All readings in person at 7pm

Pay what you can:



# abandon

by **JAMES I JAMES**  
DIRECTED BY BRETT ASHLEY ROBINSON

PRODUCED BY **theatre exile**

THE WILLIAM PENN FOUNDATION PROVIDES LEAD SUPPORT



ADDITIONAL SUPPORT NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS

HONORARY PRODUCERS LINDA & DAVID GLICKSTEIN and SUSAN & EDWARD HOFFMAN

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## CAST

**Melanye Finister\*** ..... Luella  
**Jared Chichester** ..... Joshua  
**Carlo Campbell\*** ..... Chris  
**Brenson Thomas\*** ..... Gabriel

## CREW

### Director

Brett Ashley Robinson

### Dramaturg

Dr. Kimmika Williams-Witherspoon

### Set Designer

Sara Outing

### Sound Designer

Elizabeth Atkinson

### Production Manager

Janet Embree

### Technical Director

Nick Schwasman

### Scenic Charge

Brian McCann

### Costume Designer

Jill Keys

### Props Designer

Miranda Thompson

### Stage Manager

Melody Wong

### Audio Engineer

Natali Merrill

### Assistant Lighting Designer

Tydell Williams

### Lighting Designer

Amanda Jensen+

### Fight Choreographer

J. Alex Cordaro

### ASM/COVID Safety Manager

Allison Donahue

### Master Electrician

Sophie Smyczek

### Board Op

Casie Weaver



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



## NOTE FROM DEBORAH

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Thank you for joining us for our final show of our 26th season; a year filled with hope, humor and Exile's signature grit. As in life, most of our characters this season *intend* to do the right thing. But as witnesses, we can feel the harm that is caused when their blinders hide the impact that their selfish actions can have on others. Their stories illuminate our failings and our strengths; helping us find our own pathway to redemption and hope.

COVID caused a two-year delay in bringing this script to life. Finally, last year *Abandon* was part of Studio X-hibition, our new play development program. And now we are so proud produce the latest world premiere by Pulitzer Prize winning playwright, and South Philadelphia resident, James Ijames. James has created an Exile show filled with grit and passion. Continuing with the season's theme, the characters in *Abandon* are trying to survive and create family. Even with the best of intentions, no one quite figures out how to do it right the first time. And when a light does shine, it shows us that the path to a peace is often a rocky road.

Thank you for choosing live theater. Nothing touches me more than sitting in a room with you, feeling the humanity that only live theater can evoke. I truly believe that no other art form helps facilitate empathy better than theater; and empathy is the healing balm to the divisiveness in this tenuous time. I hope that you will encourage others to experience the transformative power of live performance.

Thank you for joining us as we all emerge from Exile.

Sincerely,



Deborah Block, Producing Artistic Director

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## THEATRE EXILE'S 2022-2023 SEASON IS BROUGHT TO YOU BY

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## CAST & CREW

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**Carlo Campbell** (he/him, Chris) is a Philadelphia native. He is a founding member and Artistic Director of Theatre In The X as well as a member of SAG-AFTRA, he has been in a number of films and commercials. He has also worked with theatre companies all throughout the Delaware Valley including Go Kash On Stage, Ego Po, Simpatico, Pennsylvania Shakespeare, Delaware Shakespeare and First World. Theatre, Curio Theatre: *Death of A Salesman*, *Piano Lesson*, *Othello*, *Richard 2*, *While the Getting's Good*, *Topdog Underdog*, *The Nigga Files*, *12 Angry Men*, *Delaware Young Playwrights*, *Moon Man Walk*, *V to X*, *The Meeting*, *King John*, *Richard 2*, *All My Sons*. He has worked with children and young adults of all ages, from kindergarten to the university level as a teaching artist and director. Also a Poet and an MC (AFLOE), Carlo has published a book of poetry entitled *Afloematic*.



**Jared Chichester** (he/him, Joshua) is a 22-year old artist from Beaumont, Texas. Fresh out of high school, Jared moved to Philadelphia and spent one year as an Acting major at The University of the Arts. He began his acting career with credits such as *Passing Strange* (City Theater Company) and *Pass Over* (Theatre Exile). Beyond acting, Jared is also a rapper and producer under the name “chiche” (pronounced “cheech”). You can find his 2021 EP “Hi, My Name is Jared” on all streaming platforms, and look out for his newest release, “Where The Sky Meets Heaven” coming to all platforms on May 12th. When Jared isn’t creating something, he enjoys long walks, listening to Italian film scores, and scrolling on Instagram (@chichemusic).



**Melanye Finister** (she/her, Luella) is happy to be making her Theatre Exile debut with James Ijames’ play *Abandon*. She was seen most recently in 1812’s production of *Broads, Fairview* at Wilma Theater and *Backing Track* at Arden Theatre. She is a member of the resident acting company at People’s Light & Theatre where she appeared in over 30 productions. Some recent favorites include *Shakespeare In Love*, *Skeleton Crew* (2018 Barrymore Outstanding Lead Performance), *All My Sons* and *Fences*. In 2018 Melanye joined the Hothouse company at Wilma Theater where she appeared in *Don Juan Comes Home From Iraq*, *When the Rain Stops Falling*, *Dionysus Was Such A Nice Man*, *There*, and *Is God Is*. Melanye has also worked at PlayPenn, Philadelphia Theater Company, Interact Theater, and Flashpoint. She holds a BFA from Carnegie Mellon University. She is a 2018 Lunt-Fontanne Fellow and a Board Member at People’s Light & Theatre.

## CAST & CREW

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**Brenson Thomas** (he/him, Gabriel) is a Black and queer writer, actor, and theatre-maker. As a performer, Brenson has collaborated with Tony Award Winner Stew, Raja Feather Kelly, Lightning Rod Special in *The Appointment* (FringeArts/Next Door at NYTW; Barrymore Nominee for Outstanding Ensemble in a Musical), Arden Theatre Company in the world premiere of R. Eric Thomas' *Backing Track*, and *Into the Woods*, 1812 Productions for *This is the Week That Is: 2020 and 2022*, and the Wilma Theater. When he's not hunched over his laptop crying about blank Google docs, Brenson enjoys long walks around his beloved Philly, doing bad accents, smashing patriarchal white supremacist structures, and Beyoncé. MFA in Theatre, Sarah Lawrence College.



**Brett Ashley Robinson** (she/her, Director) is a 2021 Pew Fellow as well as a Barrymore Award-winning deviser, director, theatre maker and educator based in Philadelphia. She is the 2021 winner of the PEN America / Jean Stein Oral History Grant for her original work *Re-Enactment*. She was a collaborator and performer in Lightning Rod Specials *The Appointment* at New York Theatre Workshop, which was a 2019 and 2023 New York Times Critics Pick and voted best play of 2019 in *The New York Times*, *Vulture Magazine*, *Time Out New York*, and *New York Magazine*. As an actor and deviser she has worked at, The Public, Ars Nova Ant Fest, Actors Theatre of Louisville, The Wilma, Lightning Rod Special, Pig Iron Theater Company, The Arden Theatre Company, InterAct Theatre Company, The Flea Theatre, Theatre Horizon, and Geva Theatre. She has taught acting at the University of the Arts, Desales University, Drexel University, and is a company member of Applied Mechanics and a member of the HotHouse-the Wilma Theater's resident acting company. She loves buck a shuck oysters and Vino Verde.



**James Ijames** (he/him, Playwright) is a Pulitzer Prize winning playwright, a director and educator. James' plays have been produced by Flashpoint Theater Company, Orbiter 3, Theatre Horizon, Wilma Theatre, Theatre Exile, Azuka Theatre (Philadelphia, PA), The National Black Theatre, JACK, The Public Theater (NYC), Hudson Valley Shakespeare Theater, Steppenwolf Theatre, Definition Theatre, Timeline Theater (Chicago IL) Shotgun Players (Berkeley, CA) and have received development with PlayPenn New Play Conference, The Lark, Playwright's Horizon, Clubbed Thumb, Villanova Theater, Wilma Theater, Azuka Theatre and Victory Garden. James is the 2011 F. Otto Haas Award for an Emerging Artist recipient, and two Barrymore Awards for

Theatre Exile's in-school  
playwriting residency.

PAPER WINGS

WHAT THE LIGHT SEES

Theatre Exile's Annual  
10-Minute Play Fest

Friday, June 9th at 7PM Online

**ON SALE NOW**

Student Artwork by  
Zakeer Clark-Burnett, Grade 5

## CAST & CREW

**James Ijames, cont.** Outstanding Direction of a *Play for The Brothers Size* with Simpatico Theatre Company and *Gem of the Ocean* with Arden Theatre. James is a 2015 Pew Fellow for Playwriting, the 2015 winner of the Terrence McNally New Play Award for *WHITE*, the 2015 Kesselring Honorable Mention Prize winner for *....Miz Martha*, a 2017 recipient of the Whiting Award, a 2019 Kesselring Prize for *Kill Move Paradise*, a 2020 and 2022 Steinberg Prize and the 2022 Pulitzer Prize in Drama recipient. James was a founding member of Orbiter 3, Philadelphia's first playwright producing collective. He received a B.A. in Drama from Morehouse College in Atlanta, GA and a M.F.A. in Acting from Temple University in Philadelphia, PA. James is an Associate Professor of Theatre at Villanova University. He resides in South Philadelphia.

**Kimmika Williams-Witherspoon** (Dramaturg) PhD (Cultural Anthropology), M.A. (Anthropology), MFA (Theater), Graduate Certificate) Women's Studies, B.A. (Journalism); is an Associate Professor of Urban Theater and Community Engagement and President of the Faculty Senate at Temple University. Author of *Through Smiles and Tears: The History of African American Theater* (From Kemet to the Americas) (Lambert Academic Publishing, 2011); *The Secret Messages in African American Theater: Hidden Meaning Embedded in Public Discourse*

## CAST & CREW

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**Dr. Kimmika L. H. Williams-Witherspoon, cont.** (Edwin Mellen Publishing, 2006), she has had over 34 productions of her plays, her stage credits include over 20 productions, 8 one-woman shows and she has performed poetry in over 120 national and international venues. A contributing poet to 44 anthologies, 11 books of poetry, 9 book chapters, 10 journal articles and 2 books on African American Theater.

**Sara Outing** (she/her, Set Designer) is a designer and fabricator with a background in illustration, music, and radical puppetry. Her work is influenced by personal mythologies, afrofuturist inquiry, and a delight in second-hand materials. Recent projects include prop and scenic designs with Theatre in the X / Drexel University, theBlackBestFriend, 1812 Productions, UArts, and parcel designs for *A BREATH FOR US* (Tiny Dynamite) co-created with Jarrett McCreary, which was named The Billies' Socially Distanced Showstopper of 2021. Original works include her shadow project *DOORS*, developed through the Black Puppeteer Empowerment Grant (Puppet Showplace Theatre), *Puppetopia 2022* (HERE Arts NYC), and supported by Tiny Dynamite with a Workshop Grant from the Jim Henson Foundation. Sara is an Artistic Associate of Tiny Dynamite and a student performing arts advisor at the University of Pennsylvania. [www.saraouting.com](http://www.saraouting.com)

**Jill Keys** (she/her, Costume Designer) is stoked to be back at Exile with this stellar *Abandon* team! She is a UArts graduate (2011), and a three time Barrymore Award Nominee for her whimsical childrens' theater costumes at The Arden. She is a maker of all sorts and not only has designed over 50 shows for many companies in town, but also designs spaces and installs like the summer beer garden at Eakins Oval, and holiday bars 'Blitzen' (Wilmington DE/Scranton PA) and 'Tinsel'. For other fun facts please visit: [www.jilliankeys.com](http://www.jilliankeys.com)

**Amanda Jensen** (she/her, Lighting Designer) is a Philadelphia based lighting designer. She is delighted to be designing for Theatre Exile this season. Her previous works with the company have been *D-Pad* and *Really*. Amanda has also designed for 1812 Productions (*This Is The Week That Is*), The Arden (*No Child, So Far, Treasure Island, Snow White*), The Lantern (*Lifespan of a Fact, The Heir Apparent*), Inis Nua (*A Holy Show, A Hundred Words for Snow, The Monster in the Hall, Love Lies and Taxidermy, The Swallowing Dark, Radiant Vermin, Spine*), Almanac Dance Circus Theatre (*The Edge, Communitas Five Years Later, Jeanne/Jean/John/Jawn, XOXO Moongirl*), Missing Bolts Theatre Co. (*Rail*), Delaware Shakespeare Co. (*The Tempest, Midsummer Night's Dream*) and Gunnar Montana Productions (*Kink Haus, Wroughtland*). Her work for the 2017 production of *Kink Haus* was exhibited at the 2019 Prague Quadrennial as part of the USITT/USA exhibition of professional designers.



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## CAST & CREW

**Elizabeth Atkinson** (she/her, Sound Designer) is delighted to be working with Theatre Exile again. Liz is currently based in Philadelphia, after many years in Pittsburgh where she was Resident Sound Designer at the City Theatre Company. Her freelance career includes regional theatre credits at The Wilma, Arden Theatre Company, Inis Nua Theatre, Walnut Street Theatre, Yale Repertory Theatre, and Hartford Stage. She is a faculty member at Swarthmore College, and previously at Point Park University and Carnegie Mellon University. Liz has also had the honor of exhibiting at the 2007, 2011 and 2015 Prague Quadrennials.

**Miranda Thompson** (she/her, Props Designer) is excited to be a part of the *Abandon* family! A native of Philadelphia, Miranda has Choreographed for the Department of Recreations Theatre Camp (2005-2017). Was a recipient of the Leeway Foundation's 2011 Art & Change grant. *A Room for Waiting*, produced at the Community Education Center. Directed for the Young Playwrights 2021 Virtual Theatre Festival. *The Itraveler*, written by Amara Ali. *Day/Month/Year*, written by Sophia Kaiserman. This past fall she was the 22/23 Production/ Stage Management fellow at Kitchen Theatre Company.(Ithaca, NY.) Props Run Crew (2022) for *There is Always the Hudson*, at Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company. (Washington, DC) Wardrobe Run Crew (2022) for *MY Life On A Diet*, at Delaware Theatre Company. This summer Miss Thompson will join Goodspeed Opera House as their Props Run Crew Head for the remainder of the season. You can also catch MT on *Tubi* this summer in an independent film entitled *End Of The Line*, as Nurse Linda.

## CAST & CREW

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**J. Alex Cordaro** (he/him, Fight Choreographer) is a Philadelphia-based Fight Director and Educator with over 30 years of training, practice, and experience creating stage violence. Alex has Fight Directed well over a hundred professional productions with Equity and AGMA, (Opera Philadelphia, The Wilma, Arden, Philadelphia Theatre Company, Theatre Exile, The Lantern, etc) including seven World Premieres and numerous Philadelphia and U.S. Premieres. In addition, his choreography has been sailing across Europe with twenty-eight different casts for Royal Caribbean Cruise Line. Since 2018 he has been the Stage Combat Instructor and Fight Director for the University of the Arts in Philadelphia, offering five semesters of training for the Brind School of Theatre. Alex is also a core instructor for the annual Philadelphia Stage Combat Workshop which is going into its 25th year. Alex is a Certified Fight Director, Certified Teacher, and Theatrical Firearms Instructor with the Society of American Fight Directors. He is a three-time Barrymore Award Nominee for Outstanding Movement/Choreography, and he was featured on the Discovery Channel's "Project Discovery" series: *Careers in the Arts; Fight Director*.

**Janet Embree** (she/her, Production Manager) is thrilled to be joining the team at Theatre Exile. She has managed productions at Lantern Theater Company, Opera Philadelphia, the Pennsylvania Ballet and Philadelphia Artists' Collective, among others. She spent several years at the University of the Arts where she taught and managed productions in theater, dance and music. She also does professional upholstery for the stage and screen; one of her favorite projects can be seen in the 2018 Grammy Awards.

**Melody Wong** (Stage Manager) is thrilled to be working with Theater Exile. Recent credits include *Dreamgirls* with Theater in the X, *Di Hati Ku* with Fleisher Art Memorial and Modero & Co, *In Search of the Kitchen Gods* with 1812, Group!, *Janet Wide Awake and Ok* Trenton with Passage Theatre. *The Ongoing Plight of the Ferryman* at Plays and Players. Additional credits: SM for; *TURN! Polly Mope, Lashed but not Leashed, Black Light, The Outer Space, The Kinetic Tree*, PIFA 2016 at the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts, *Minorityland* with PowerStreet Theater, *The Wiz* with Theater in the X, *Tiger Style* with Philadelphia Asian Performing Artists, *Master Harold and the Boys*, with EgoPo Classic Theater, Barrymore Awards 2018/2019, *ASM Whitman! Contradict this!* with Bearded Ladies Cabaret, Assistant to the Director for the live capture of *La Traviata, Turandot, The Marriage of Figaro* with Opera Philadelphia. "

**Allison Donahue** (she/her, Assistant Stage Manager/COVID Safety Manager) is a freelance stage manager, production assistant, graphic designer, and multidisciplinary artist based in Philadelphia. Allison grew up in South Jersey and went on to study Stage Management at Point Park and Boston University. Some favorite recent production credits include Dick Clark's

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THEATRE  
PHILADELPHIA

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Activate Progress for administrative, developmental & production teams **With LaNeshe Miller-White**

Learn how to create inclusive marketing, outreach, and PR plans and create meaningful partnerships to connect with new audiences



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## CAST & CREW

**Allison Donahue, cont.** *New Year's Rockin' Eve* in Times Square, *Lincoln Mill Haunted House*, and *Fever's Candlelight Concert Series*. Alongside pursuing her passion working in theatre and live events, Allison owns and operates her own custom art & wares small business Alamander Art.

**Nick Schwzman** (he/him, Technical Director) is theater artist and technician based in Philadelphia, PA. He has a BFA in Musical Theater from The University of the Arts, and a graduate certificate in devised performance from UArts / Pig Iron School. He was a co-founder/co-director of Drip Symphony, a local experimental performance company from 2017-2020. He has worked with Pig Iron Theater Company, Lighting Rod Special, Brian Sanders JUNK, David Gordon, The Renegade Company / Mike Durkin, Arden Theater Company, Lantern Theater Company, Plays & Players, and Philadelphia Scenic Works.

**Natali Merrill** (she/her, Audio Engineer) is a sound and technology designer and engineer excited to return to Theatre Exile! Based in Philadelphia, she has been the sound designer for productions including *Broads* (1812 Productions), *Spring Awakening* (Bryn Mawr College), *High Noon* (Ninth Planet), *Shakespeare's R&J* (New Light Theatre Company), *Fucking A*

## CAST & CREW

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**Natali Merrill cont.** New Century Theatre Company in Seattle, and the Williamstown Theatre Festival. A graduate of Haverford College with a major in physics, she researched and wrote a thesis on acoustics in performance halls with RWTH Aachen University in Aachen, Germany. She is also a singer and composer. [www.nmerrill.com](http://www.nmerrill.com)

**Sophie Smyczek** (Assistant Lighting Designer/Master Electrician) is a Philly-based freelance electrician, excited to be back at Exile for her second show. Thanks to Bella and Matt!  
[www.sophiesmyczek.com](http://www.sophiesmyczek.com)

**Deborah Block** (Producing Artistic Director) has been a consistent figure in the Philadelphia arts community for over 30 years as a director, dramaturg, producer, curator, choreographer and educator. Deborah has been with Theatre Exile since 2006 and assumed the position of Producing Artistic Director in 2013. Prior to that she was one of the founding organizers of the Philadelphia Live Arts Festival and Philly Fringe (now FringeArts) and was the program director for ten years. She received her MFA at Temple University where she taught for nine years. Prior to that she taught at Rowan University, University of the Arts, and was a teaching artist in many K-12 programs. She has received much recognition for her professional and educational work including receiving the Independence Fellowship in the Arts and the Albert Benzwie Award for playwriting. She has sat on many local and national panels including Theatre Philadelphia. A sampling of her previous affiliations include Brat Productions, Theatre Ariel, Philadelphia Young Playwrights Festival, The Wilma Theater and the CEC. She has worked on over 60 professional productions. For Theatre Exile she has directed *Wolf Play*, *Extreme Home Makeover*, *Babel*, *Among the Dead*, *Sing the Body Electric*, *Guards at the Taj*, *Smoke*, *Red Speedo*, *Cock*, *The English Bride*, *Gruesome Playground Injuries*, *Iron*, *Hunter Gatherers*, *dark play or stories for boys*, *Roosters* and collaborated on *Hearts & Soles* and *Motherfu\*\*er with the Hat*.

**Theatre Exile** is dedicated to enhancing the cultural experiences of Philadelphians and committed to creating community by sparking dialogue through the development and staging of artistically excellent and provocative contemporary plays that engage the imagination. Founded in 1996 by Joe Canuso and Trish Kelly, Theatre Exile was created by a group of artists who wanted to rattle the gates of the mainstream. In July, 2013 Deborah Block took on the role of Producing Artistic Director. Under her leadership Exile continues to produce plays that explore the complexities of the human condition packed with Philadelphia grit and passion. Exile is the first Philadelphia organization to produce such powerhouse playwrights as Tracy Letts, Lucas Hnath, Annie Baker, Rajiv Joseph, Rona Munro, and Hansol Jung among others. In 2016 Exile was named most fearless theatre by Philly Currents and Best Theater Company by Philadelphia Magazine. Exile received the Time Out Recommended Award 2017. For excellence in producing theatre, Exile has received 92 Barrymore nominations, with 19 awards. In 2017 Theatre Exile left their home to begin a new phase in Exile's life. Following her idea to create a new home in their

## CAST & CREW

old location in South Philadelphia, Deborah with the Board of Directors collaborated with Center City Development and Cecil Baker + Partners, and created a vision for a new theater that honors the art and maintains Exile's goals of working in an intimate and flexible environment. They moved into the new facility and produced their first play in 2019. In 2022 Theatre Exile won Best of Philly for Best Theatre Subscription and Best Local Theater Company by Metro Philly.

**Actors Equity Association** (AEA) was founded in 1913 as the first of the American actor unions. Equity's mission is to advance, promote and foster the art of live theatre as an essential component of our society. Today, Equity represents more than 40,000 actors, singers, dancers, and stage managers working in hundreds of theaters across the United States. Equity members are dedicated to working in theatre as a profession, upholding the highest artistic standards. Equity negotiates wages and working conditions and provides a wide range of benefits including health and pension plans for its members. Through its agreement with Equity, this theatre has committed to the fair treatment of actors and stage managers employed in this production. AEA is a member of the AFL-CIO and is affiliated with FIA, an international organization of performing arts unions. For more information, visit [www.actorsequity.org](http://www.actorsequity.org).

## theatre exile VENMO TO GIVE!

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**Gifts of every size make a difference!**





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