

Oánh Nguyễn
Executive Artistic Director



PYRO: HOW TO BLOW UP A LIFE

A NEW PLAY BY
2018 CHANCE FOX FELLOW

KHANISHA FOSTER

APRIL 2, 2025

2025 OTR New Works Staged Reading

on the Cripe Stage @ Bette Aitken *theater arts* Center

CHANCE

(888) 455-4212
ChanceTheater.com
5522 E. LA PALMA AVE, ANAHEIM

SEASON **27**

Setting: A small American desert town centered around a fireworks factory

Running Time: 1 hour, 15 minutes with no intermission

CAST

Helen **Tristan Cunningham**

Pyro 1 **Kathleen Littlefield**

Pyro 2 **Josh Schell**

PRODUCTION TEAM

Director **Sasha Nicolle Smith**

Dramaturg **Zharia O'Neal**

Stage Manager..... **Cynthia C. Espinoza***

OTR Producing Associate **James Michael McHale***

Executive Artistic Director..... **Oánh Nguyễn***

OTR SEASON PRODUCERS

National Endowment for the Arts

The Elizabeth George Foundation

Capital Group Companies Charitable Foundation

Amanda Demaio

* Chance Theater Resident Artist

OTR NEW WORKS PROGRAM

Chance's On the Radar (OTR) New Works Program consists of a new script reading series, a playwright's residency, and a commissioning program all geared towards supporting the creation of diverse new stories by emerging U.S. playwrights. The goal of OTR is to create a deep and long-term commitment to playwrights by offering them access to a community of artists and audiences, a supportive environment, and the freedom to explore their own boundaries and interests.

2025 Resident Playwright: Benjamin Benne

Past Resident Playwrights: Dustin H. Chinn, Keiko Green, Exal Iraheta, B.J. Tindal, Krista Knight, Jessica Huang, Joanna Garner, Ted Malawer, Jenny Connell Davis, Lauren Yee, Nick Jones, Marshall Paillet, Zayd Dohrn, and Adam Szymkowicz

OTR is generously funded with additional support from:

David & Judy Joss, Diane Silber, Steven & Louise Koch, and Rachelle Menaker & Eddie Schuller

MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT

KHANISHA FOSTER



Khanisha's work and her outrageous family history landed her writing opportunities with K&L Productions (Kay Cannon & Laverne McKinnon), as well as Julie Hébert (*The Man in the High Castle*), and Electric Shepherd Productions (stewards for the adaptations of the Philip K. Dick library). She was also a Fox Fellow, and her series *Sancho* was a semifinalist at the Austin Film Festival and is being produced by Max Arciniega (*Breaking Bad / Better Call Saul*) and Alonso Alvarez (*Snowfall*). She's written video games for Probably Monsters (the company founded by the creators of *Halo* and *Destiny*), and for *Episodes*. Her solo show *Joy Rebel*, directed by Obie Award winner Lou Bellamy, received critical acclaim and was chosen as a DC Metro Staff favorite for 2019. Her plays have been commissioned by Penumbra Theatre, 1st Stage, and 2nd Story.

She was a featured storyteller on NPR's *The Dinner Party*. Along with Lena Waithe was named one of 18 Black Women We Think Are Phenomenal by *Mater Mea Magazine*. *American Theatre Magazine* named her in their Role Call series as one of the 6 Theatre Workers You Should Know. *Broadway World* named her Best Director for *The Bluest Eye*, which also won Best Production. Her production of *Yellowman* was nominated for 7 OC Theatre Guild Awards.

After playing 26 Characters in Anna Deavere Smith's *Fires in the Mirror*, *Broadway World* said about her, "Obviously, I can only speak of Foster. She is breathtakingly good. Every character she embodied, whatever the accent, age, race or gender, comes across as real and distinct." Her film acting debut, *Chicago Boricua*, was an official selection of the Tribeca Film Festival.

The Star Tribune called her writing "...risible and heartbreaking...", the *Compendium* said she "...oozes charisma and charm, blinking in an instant between tremendous sadness and effervescent joy." They added that her writing is "...lush and descriptive bearing hallmarks of Roxanne Gay, Lindy West, and Tracy K. Smith", and the *D.C. Metro* said her work "comes from the rebellious joy of making others laugh so their days are not so dark. So they and anyone can enjoy laughter."

If you'd like to enjoy a laugh, be sure to ask her about that time she broke onto the Queen of England's land and got shot at, or when her sister — who is a legit Nigerian princess — showed up in Lagos two days late for her crowning ceremony, or about how she almost became a professional clown.

CAST



TRISTAN CUNNINGHAM (HELEN) started her performing days in the Circus! From the Circus she went to SUNY Purchase Theater Arts and Film Conservatory. She has worked on numerous plays in NY, Bay Area & LA. She is beyond excited to collaborate with Khanisha again! Most recently she was in *All Rise* on CBS, *The Fugitive* starring Kiefer Sutherland, *CSI Vegas*, *SWAT*, *911*, *NCIS*, *Family Reunion*, *The Conners*, *American Auto*, and is Toni in *Reasonable Doubt* on Hulu.



KATHLEEN LITTLEFIELD (PYRO 1) is thrilled to work with Chance Theater and Khanisha Foster! LA Theatre: IAMA Theatre Company (Arrowhead), Center Theatre Group, and Native Voices. Broadway: *The Nap* (MTC), *The Glass Menagerie* (John Tiffany). Off-Broadway: *Love, Love, Love* (Roundabout), *Linda* (MTC). NY/Regional Theatre: *Twelfth Night* (Two River Theater), *Convention* (Brontosaurus Haircut). Film: *Tenured*, *Loserville*, *American Martyr*. TV: *Orange Is the New Black*, *The Blacklist*, *It's a Hit!* (pilot). All things SM: @kathleenslittle



JOSH SCHELL (PYRO 2) is thrilled to make his Chance Theater debut. He was last seen on stage in a reading of T. Tara Turk-Haynes' *Blue Paris Blues* directed by Khanisha Foster (CTG). His credits include *Heroes of the Fourth Turning* (San Francisco Playhouse), *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (Shotgun Players), *Fifth of July* (Aurora Theatre Company), and *In the Red and Brown Water* (Marin Theatre Company). Film/TV: *Other Side of the Box* (SXSW), *Freaky Tales* (Lionsgate), *Feed* (Sony Pictures), *Thirsty* (Gravitas Ventures), *For the Coyotes* (NoBudge), and *Poppet* (Hulu).

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PRODUCTION TEAM



SASHA NICOLLE SMITH (DIRECTOR) is thrilled to be working with Chance Theater! She is a Director and Intimacy Coordinator in Los Angeles. Theater credits include: Theater For One (Octopus Theatricals), The Lonely Few, Fat Ham, The Engagement Party, The Mountaintop and The First Deep Breath (Geffen Playhouse), The Notebook (Chicago Shakespeare Theater), Ms. Blakk For President (Steppenwolf Theatre), Familiar (Steppenwolf Theatre), How To Catch Creation (Goodman Theatre), A Raisin in the Sun (Guthrie Theater), The Bluest Eye (Virginia Stage Company), American Idiot (Deaf West and Center Theater Group), Trading Places (Alliance Theater), Top Dog Under Dog (Pasadena Playhouse). Film/Television: Beef (Netflix), Daisy Jones & The Six (Amazon), Swarm (Amazon), Tiny Beautiful Things (Hulu), Your Place or Mine (Netflix), That '90s Show (Netflix), How I Met Your Father (Hulu), Random Acts of Flyness (HBO), among others.



ZHARIA O'NEAL (DRAMATURG) is a playwright & dramaturg hailing from the British Virgin Islands. Her work includes: *ROOST* (NPC Semifinalist), *SEVEN STAGE CIRCLE* (Ashland New Plays Finalist), and more. Selected dramaturgy: *NAMBAM* (Center Theatre Group), *DERECHO* (La Jolla Playhouse), and *A RAISIN IN THE SUN* (South Coast Repertory).



CYNTHIA C. ESPINOZA (STAGE MANAGER) is honored to working with this team for this OTR! She is blessed to be working alongside such talented friends and found such joy. You may have caught Cynthia on stage in *Emma* and in the booth for *Sweeney Todd*, *Alma*, *Rent*, and reading stage directions for other OTR Readings such as *Lipstick Lobotomy* and *Such Small Hands*. Cynthia thanks her family for the love and sends love to friends who have become family.



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**HELP US WITH THE
10K FOLLOWER CHALLENGE**



JAMES MICHAEL MCHALE (OTR PRODUCING ASSOCIATE) recently directed *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* at Chance Theater (Orange Curtain Review Award for Best Musical). Other Chance directing credits include *American Idiot* (Winner of 6 Orange County Theater Guild Awards including Outstanding Direction of a Musical), *Edges*, *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, *A Wrinkle In*

Time, and *The Eight: Reindeer Monologues*. He has been commissioned to write and direct a number of storytelling concerts for Pacific Symphony, creating an original story and book to accompany a repertoire of music for their Family Series and Education Series. These productions include *Beethoven: Trials to Triumph*, *A Dream of Tchaikovsky*, *Intergalactic Adventures*, *Music from the Movies and More*, and *The Curious Case of the Vanishing Violin*, all presented at Segerstrom Concert Hall. Other directing credits include the World Premiere of *Comedy of ERROR* at American Coast Theater Company and *Two Rooms* at California State University Long Beach. James is proud to be a Resident Artist and the Literary Manager at Chance Theater. www.jamesmichaelmchale.com.



OÁNH NGUYỄN (EXECUTIVE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR) has been serving as Chance Theater's founding Artistic Director since 1999. Oánh is a recipient of TCG's New Generations Grant and the TCG Nathan Cummings Young Leaders of Color Fellowship. He was awarded the Outstanding Artist Award by Arts Orange County, profiled in *Orange County Register's* "Most Influential People" series and *OC Weekly's* People

Issue, inducted into Anaheim High School's Hall of Fame, and was a commencement speaker for Chapman University College of Performing Arts. Oánh was Producing Associate at South Coast Repertory where he initiated and programmed the first three seasons of alternative offerings under the banner of StudioSCR. He also served on the advisory board of the Anaheim High School Performing Arts Conservatory, the board of Network of Ensemble Theatres, LA's 99-seat Transitional Committee, and OC Theatre Guild, as well as panels and committees for Stage Directors and Choreographers Society, Alternative Theatre Los Angeles, National Endowment for the Arts, and Theatre Communications Group. His directing credits include productions at Chance Theater, East West Players, the J. Paul Getty Museum, Segerstrom Center for the Arts, South Coast Repertory, Ensemble Theater Company, Aurora Theatre Company, Oregon Contemporary Theatre, Chapman University, UC Riverside, Azusa Pacific University, AMDA, CSU Fullerton, and served as the Associate Director for the international tour of David Henry Hwang's *Chinglish* (Berkeley Repertory, South Coast Repertory, Hong Kong Arts Festival). His selected film credits include *Two Brothers*, *Rush Hour 3*, and *Lonely Boy*.

SEASON PRODUCERS



BETTE & WYLIE AITKEN

(EXECUTIVE SEASON PRODUCER) Bette is a community, civic, and arts leader, recently featured in the *Orange County Business Journal's* Giving Guide as one of the Top Philanthropists in Orange County and received the Inaugural Legacy Arts & Humanitarian Award from Chance Theater for her Visionary Leadership. Bette first happened upon Chance

Theater a few years ago and has been at the forefront of its growth and expansion ever since, and now is serving on its board. In January of 2014, Chance Theater became part of the Bette Aitken *theater arts* Center. Wylie, better known as Bette's husband, is a nationally recognized civil trial lawyer and founding partner of the firm Aitken Aitken Cohn in Santa Ana, representing individuals and companies harmed by the bad conduct of others. An avid supporter of the arts, he was a past chairman of the State of California's Arts Council and serves on various theater and film boards and chair emeritus of Chapman University's Board of Trustees. By supporting the 2024 Season, Anaheim residents Wylie and Bette, joined by their daughter Mayor Ashleigh Aitken, are excited to contribute to the growing impact Chance Theater makes in the community at large both in Anaheim and all over Southern California and beyond.



THE FAMILY OF MARY KAY FYDA-MAR

(ASSOCIATE SEASON PRODUCER) Mary Kay fell in love with Chance Theater after she attended *It's A Wonderful Life, The Musical* many years ago. She soon became a Chance Member and later joined the Board of Directors. After retiring from The Boeing Company, where she worked for 27 years, Mary Kay happily devoted as much time as she could to the

theater. Mary Kay was born in Pennsylvania, raised in Ohio, and moved to Orange County in 1977. She obtained Bachelor's and Master's degrees from Michigan State University and held a National Science Foundation Fellowship at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Mary Kay served as a senior examiner for the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Program and a judge for the California Awards for Performance Excellence. She was an active member of Altrusa International of Anaheim, where she served on the Board and was the chairperson of the literacy committee. She was also a proud quilter for Project Linus, an organization that provides handmade security blankets to children in trauma. Sadly, Mary Kay passed away in October of 2017. She is survived by her daughter Christina and two grandsons, as well as her siblings, nieces, and nephews. We at the Chance will always treasure the all-too-brief time we had with Mary Kay, and we proudly honor her memory and carry on her legacy.

ENCORE LEGACY CIRCLE DONORS

Thank you to the following individuals who have notified us that they have included Chance Theater in their estate planning. Please consider joining this generous group of supporters by contacting our General Manager, Erika C. Miller, at emiller@chancetheater.com or (657) 549-0499.

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ENDOWMENT FUNDS

We are deeply grateful to the visionary donors whose generous endowments ensure the longevity and vitality of our productions for generations to come.

The Mary Kay Fyda-Mar Artists Endowment

The Mary Kay Fyda-Mar Artists Endowment was established posthumously by her daughter, Christina Mar, to honor Mary Kay's enduring legacy as a dedicated supporter and former Board Chair of Chance Theater. This fund provides a permanent and lasting source of financial support for artists and artistic personnel at Chance Theater.

The Bette Aitken \$50,000 Endowment Challenge

We're proud to announce the Wylie & Bette Aitken \$50,000 Endowment Challenge, honoring Bette Aitken's enduring contributions and passion for the performing arts. Every donation will be matched dollar-for-dollar, up to \$50,000, creating a \$100,000 Chance General Endowment Fund. This fund will provide essential, lasting support for our artistic, education, and outreach programs.

Their support helps us create bold, inspiring theater. To learn more about contributing to our endowment or creating your own legacy of support, contact Erika Miller at erika@chancetheater.com or call (657) 549-0499.

PROGRAM FUND DONORS

We would like to thank the following generous individuals who help to provide dedicated programming support above \$600. Program Fund Donors receive additional benefits related to their support level. For more information on these benefits and programs, please contact Erika C. Miller at emiller@chancetheater.com.

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ANNUAL FUND DONORS

Thank you to the following supporters for generously donating to Chance Theater from March 17, 2024 through March 17, 2025. Please contact Erika C. Miller at emiller@chancetheater.com with any errors or omissions.

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APRIL 9

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WRITTEN BY

RAVI KAPOOR

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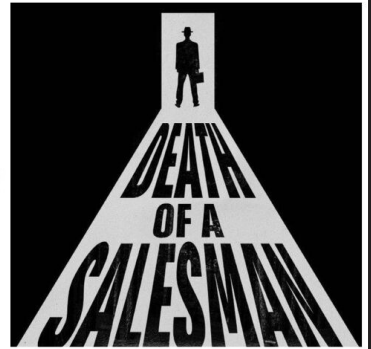
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LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We recognize that Chance Theater sits on the traditional lands of the Tongva, Kizh, and Acjachemen people. Although for over 200 years Native Nations have been forcibly removed from this territory, we must acknowledge that this land continues to be a site of gathering and healing for more than 30 Tribal Nations and remains home to over 300,000 tribal members in the state of California. Here is a website with more information: nativegov.org/a-guide-to-indigenous-land-acknowledgment

CHANCE

THEATER @ Bette Aitken theater arts Center

MISSION

Chance Theater is dedicated to the creation of exciting theatrical experiences, taking artistic risks, and collaborating with gifted and diverse artists on passionate and provocative plays and musicals.

Our mission is to contribute to a more connected, compassionate, and creative community.

We accomplish this by:

- producing powerful, socially-conscious, provocative, intimate theater experiences
- generating participation and dialogue between our diverse communities
- nurturing and supporting local artists
- inspiring and empowering creative young minds
- promoting anti-racist and anti-oppression practices to ensure equity, diversity, and inclusion

HONORS / AWARDS

Named official "Resident Theater of Anaheim" by Mayor and City Council

Recipient of American Theatre Wing's National Theatre Company Grant

Recipient of National Endowment of the Arts (NEA) Grant

Winner of 31 OCTG Theatre Awards, including Best Musical, and 59 nominations

Winner of 8 Ovation Awards, including 4 for Best Musical, and 40 nominations

Winner of 5 LADCC Awards, including Polly Warfield Award for Excellence for Outstanding Season

Winner of 7 Orange Curtain Review Awards, and 22 nominations

Two "Outstanding Arts Organization" Awards from Arts Orange County

15 LADCC Award nominations

STAFF

Oánh Nguyễn, *Executive Artistic Director*

Erika C. Miller, *General Manager*

Bebe Herrera, *Production Manager*

Masako Tobaru, *Technical Director*

Shinshin Yuder Tsai, *Producing Associate*

James Michael McHale, *Literary Manager*

Karen O'Hanlon, *Education & Community Programs Director*

Jocelyn A. Brown, *Associate Artistic Director*

Ben Green, *Marketing & Administrative Associate*

Gwen Sloan, *Box Office Associate*

Jeff Hellebrand, *Box Office Associate*

Nicole Schlitt, *Company Manager*

Marc Sanford, *Associate House Manager*

Kylie Baumbusch, *Production Assistant*

Hannah Jepsen, *Production Assistant*

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Bette Aitken

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Elizabeth Jones

Steven Koch

Molly Mahoney

Oánh Nguyễn

Terry Schomburg

Laurie Smits Staude

Julie St. John

Martin Benson, *legacy*

Mary Kay Fyda-Mar, *legacy*

RESIDENT ARTISTS

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Jocelyn A. Brown

Jocelyn L. Buckner

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Laura M. Hathaway

Bebe Herrera

Megan Hill

Darryl B. Hovis

Jenny Jacobs

Glenn Koppel

Robyn Manion

James Michael McHale

Karen O'Hanlon

Teodora Ramos-Fantone

Marc Sanford

Nicole Schlitt

Matt Takahashi

Masako Tobaru

James Tran

Shinshin Yuder Tsai

Robin Walton

Amanda Zarr

Alex Bueno, *emeritus*

Jennifer Ruckman, *emeritus*

Kelly Todd, *emeritus*

Courtney Greenough, *legacy*

David McCormick, *legacy*

Myrna Niles, *legacy*

Karen Webster, *legacy*

Wade Williamson, *legacy*

YOUR SUPPORT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

A donation to Chance Theater can be directed to any one of our many programs. Chance Theater is committed to producing diverse, high-quality live theater while keeping ticket prices affordable, and your support makes this possible. Scan any of the QR codes with your phone to learn more about a specific program or fund.



ANNUAL FUND

A contribution to our Annual Fund allows the Chance the flexibility to direct monies where they are most needed. Whether your gift is used to pay for dry cleaning costumes or paying Box Office Staff, for buying lumber to build the sets or ensuring that the lights stay on, your generosity will have an impact on all that we do.

ARTIST FUND

By increasing our artist compensation, we will better maintain and support our current artists and make it possible for us to work with the more than 7,000 union artists in our region (including past Chance artists). This will allow us to broaden our repertory and bring a greater dimension to our work.



OTR NEW WORKS FUND

Chance's On the Radar (OTR) New Works Program supports emerging U.S. playwrights through reading series, playwright residency, and commissioning program. OTRs aim to foster long-term relationships with playwrights, offering them a supportive community and the freedom to explore their creative boundaries.

EDUCATION & OUTREACH

We believe that engaging theatergoers at a young age will help to ensure a well-rounded life. We believe that there are people out there, like you, who want to see at-risk teens, people diagnosed with Autism, and local veterans find their voice and be heard. Education and Outreach helps us accomplish all this and so much more!



PRODUCER'S CIRCLE

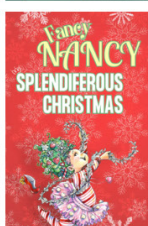
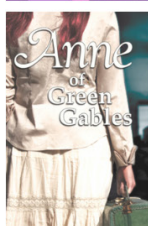
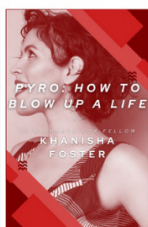
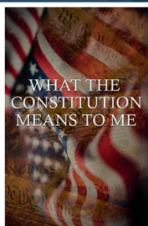
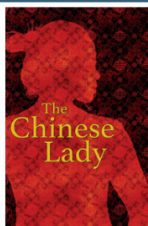
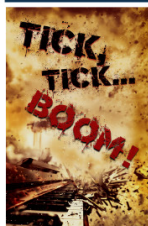
Your vital support will benefit our artists, productions, organization, and community. As a Producer, you'll enjoy exclusive benefits and gain unique insights into our creative process. Connect personally with our talented artists and witness the magic of theater up close. You can ensure our theater continues to thrive.

ADOPT A CHAIR

Adopt a Priority or Premium Chair on the Cripe Stage or Fyda-Mar Stage and a plaque with your name will be permanently displayed on that chair. To show our appreciation, we will also display your name in our lobby along with other donors and have recognition in our show programs for the current season.



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