

LADY DAY AT EMERSON'S BAR AND GRILL

BY
LANIE ROBERTSON

DIRECTED BY
CANDICE HANDY



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FEBRUARY 5-23, 2025



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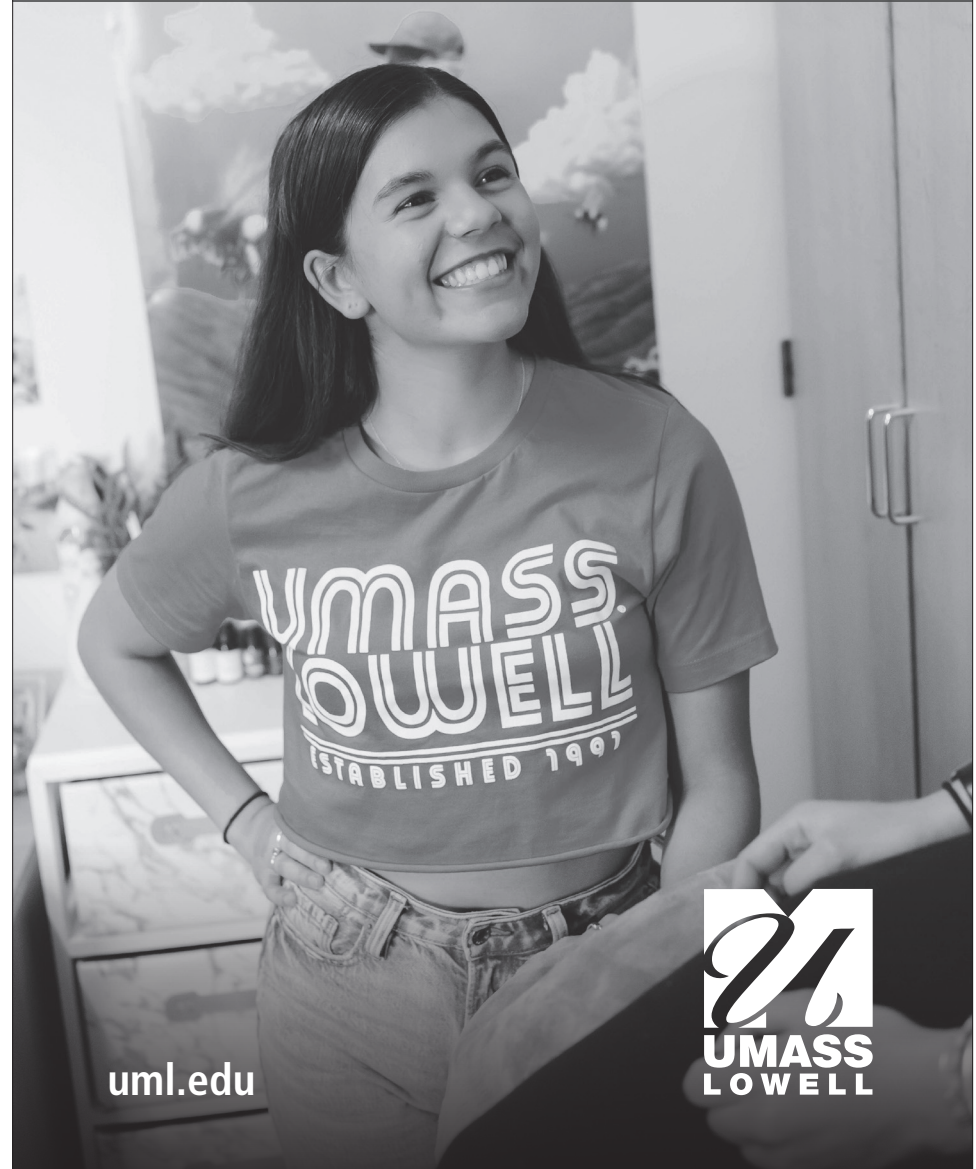
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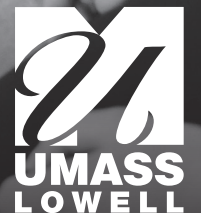
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COURTNEY SALE

NANCY L. DONAHUE EXECUTIVE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



Dear MRT Community,

Welcome to our production of *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar and Grill*. This production highlights one of the most venerable jazz artists of all time, Billie Holiday. Her distinctive voice and powerful delivery have influenced generations. We know her sound to carry depth, languor, sadness, and searing protest. Her story amplifies one of the subtlest promises of American culture: the freedom to make art.

Billie made her recording debut in 1932 at the age of eighteen with the Benny Goodman Orchestra. Even with accolades like this, the piece also dives under any shiny veneer. Billie's life was filled with hardship; the child of teenage parents, public struggles with addiction, and abusive relationships. We return to the play because it presents beguiling challenges to theatre artists today. Many of her songs speak to her towering, if not always manageable pain.

I am honored to welcome Jenece Upton to the MRT stage to play the titular role. In casting, we needed an artist who brought forth the song-making zeal of Billie, her monumental personality, and soulful sound. Jenece brings those

WELCOME!

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qualities in abundance. The virtuoso David Coleman on piano makes for a dynamic pairing. We are grateful to welcome David to the MRT stage and delighted to offer an opportunity for him to "complete" the run of *Lady Day* which he was slated to perform at another theatre in March of 2020 before Covid closures. Finally, the directing leadership of Candice Handy ensures you are in for a nuanced, character-cogent, visceral evening of theatre. You may remember Candice from MRT's production of *Gaslight* last year and we are honored to have her return in this capacity. She has brought extraordinary grit, tenacity, and clarity to this process. Special nod to the rest of the design team who have crafted this world with care and mindfulness.

As always, this work is done in full collaboration with MRT staff, board, and volunteers. I thank them for their tireless pursuit of bringing artistic excellence to our audiences. Enjoy the show.

In Community,
Courtney

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Cost of CSC. Production of *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*. Photo by Mikki Schaffner.

Manny Cavaleiro Michael Cavaleiro

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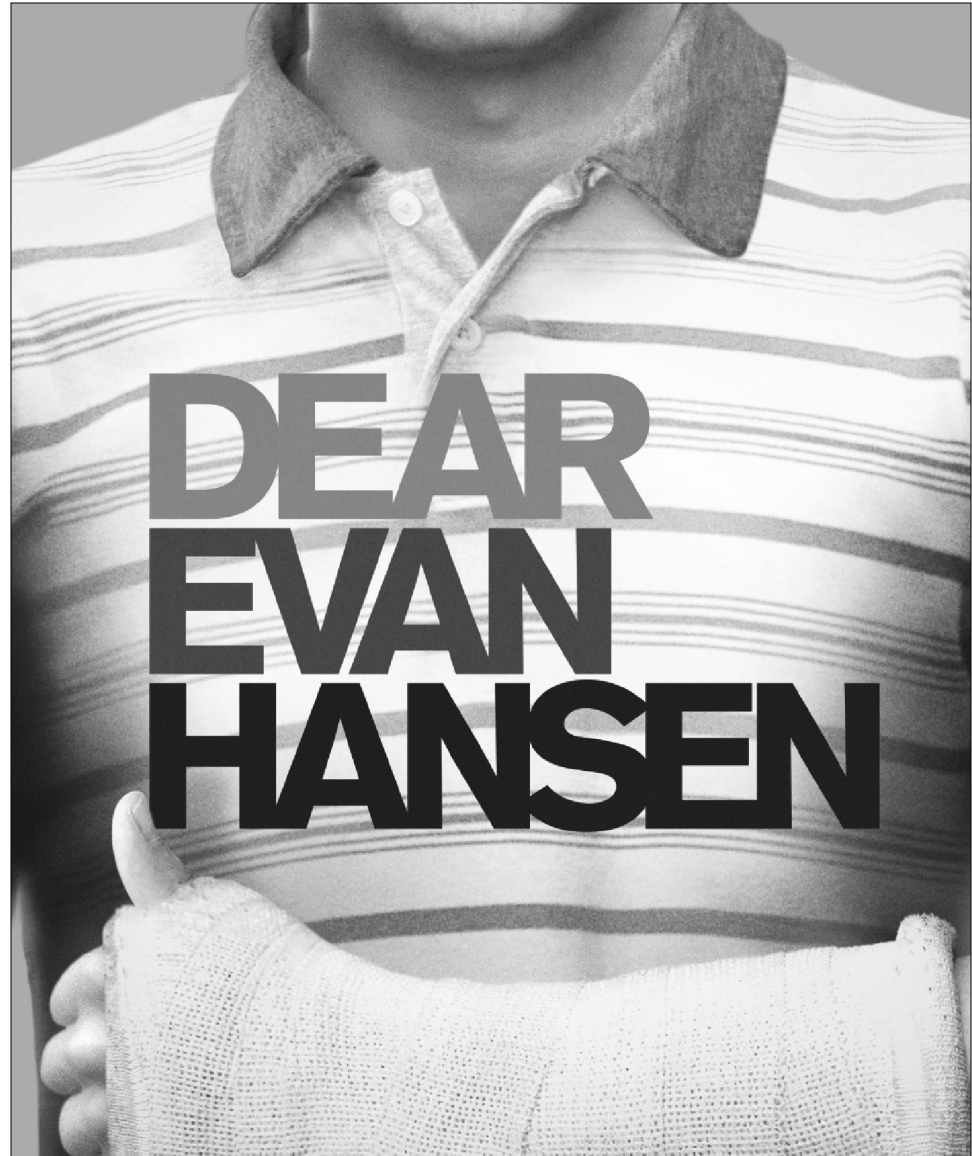


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THANK YOU FOR JOINING US IN 2023-24 SEASON!

PHOTOS BY MEGPIX/MEGHAN MOORE: (1) Alaudin Ullah in *Dishwasher Dreams*. | (2) Celena Lopes in *Red Riding Hood*. | (3) (L-R) David M. Lutken, EJ Zimmerman, and Rob Morrison in *The Porch on Windy Hill*. | (4) The Youth Cast in *A Christmas Carol*. | (5) (L-R) Kristin Yancy and Tom Coiner in *Gaslight*. | (6) Dael Orlandersmith in *Spiritus/Virgil's Dance*. PHOTO BY SETH FREEMAN. | (7) (L-R) Tom Coiner, Chris Thorn, Karen McDonald, Alexis Bronkovic, Kristin Yancy, and The Youth Cast in *A Christmas Carol*.





PRESENTS

LADY DAY AT EMERSON'S BAR AND GRILL

BY
LANIE ROBERTSON

MUSIC ARRANGEMENT BY
DANNY HOLGATE

FEATURING
DAVID FREEMAN COLEMAN
MICHAEL MATLOCK
JENECE UPTON

SCENIC DESIGNER
TONY HARDIN

COSTUME DESIGNER
YAO CHEN[^]

LIGHTING DESIGNER
BRIAN LILLIENTHAL[^]

MUSIC DIRECTOR
DAVID FREEMAN COLEMAN

SOUND DESIGNER
DAVID REMEDIOS[^]

STAGE MANAGER
ELIZABETH YVETTE RAMIREZ*

DIRECTED BY
CANDICE HANDY

FEBRUARY 5-23, 2025



LADY DAY AT EMERSON'S BAR & GRILL WAS FIRST PRODUCED IN NEW YORK BY THE VINEYARD THEATRE

*Appearing through an Agreement between this theatre, Merrimack Repertory Theatre, and Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States

[^]Member of United Scenic Artists

+Member of the Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers

CAST

David Freeman Coleman Jimmy
Michael Matlock Jimmy
Jenece Upton Billie Holiday

ADDITIONAL PRODUCTION CREDITS

Carolyn Abraham Production Assistant
Andrea McAdam Substitute Production Assistant
Samantha Perry Audio Engineer
Sean Doyle Audio Engineer
Gavan Pamer Transcriptions
Hannah Rioux Costume Assistant
Emily Allinson Props Artisan/Scenic Charge
Lee Vilieisis Draper

CASTING BY KATJA ZAROLINSKI, CSA.

LADY DAY AT EMERSON'S BAR AND GRILL is presented by arrangement with Concord Theatricals.
www.concordtheatricals.com



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



+Member of the Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers, a national theatrical labor union.



[^]The Scenic, Costume, Lighting, and Sound Designers in this production are represented by United Scenic Artists (USA) Local USA-829, IATSE.



Merrimack Repertory Theatre is a constituent of Theatre Communications Group (TCG), the national organization for the American theatre.



Merrimack Repertory Theatre operates under agreements between the League of Resident Theatres (LORT), a consortium of regional theatres throughout the nation, and AEA (Actors' Equity Association), SDC (Stage Directors and Choreographers Society), and USA (United Scenic Artists).

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WHO'S WHO



DAVID FREEMAN COLEMAN (Performer; Jimmy/Music Director) he/him/his. David is excited to make his debut Merrimack Repertory Theater performance in *Lady Day*. Associate Professor at Berklee College of Music, Lecturer of Music at Tufts University. **Recent Music Direction:** *South Pacific*, *The Little Mermaid* (Reagle Music Theatre), *A Year With Frog And Toad*, *The Addams Family*, and *Matilda* (Wheelock Family Theater), *Jesus Christ Superstar* (Boston Conservatory at Berklee), *The Boy Who Kissed The Sky* (Company One), *Sister Act* (Lyric Stage), *Jelly's Last Jam* (Long Wharf Theatre), *Ain't Misbehavin'* (Central Square Theater & Greater Boston Stage), *A Strange Loop*, *Once On This Island*, *Choir Boy* (SpeakEasy Stage), *The Bluest Eye* (Huntington Theater), *WILD: A Musical Becoming* (A.R.T.), *Passing Strange*, *Sister School* (Moonbox Productions). 4 Eliot Norton Award Nominations for Outstanding Music Direction and 1 win for 2023. Has worked with Idina Menzel, Audra McDonald, Mariah Carey, Bobby McFerrin, Ryan Gosling and the Boston Pops. Learn more at www.davidfcoleman.com.



MICHAEL MATLOCK (Performer; Jimmy) is a music director, performer, composer, and arranger in the

greater Seattle area. Selected writing credits: song cycle *The World is Too Big*; upcoming new musical *The Tender Fires*; video games *Love Always Runs Away* and *Rest in Fish*; and orchestrations for the Seattle Men's Chorus and Seattle Women's Chorus. Selected MD/performance credits: *Legally Blonde*, *Hello Dolly!*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *She Loves Me* (Village Theatre); *Something's Afoot*, *Holiday Inn* (5th Avenue), *Bruce* (Seattle Rep), *Ride the Cyclone* (ACT), *Spitfire Grill* (Taproot), *The Prom* (Tacoma Musical Playhouse). All my love to Sonja, M and D, and as always, thanks to Suzie and RJ. keyofw.bandcamp.com



JENECE UPTON (Performer; Billie Holiday) Jenece is thrilled to be making her Merrimack Repertory Theatre debut! As a Chicago-based actress and singer, she's enjoyed telling compelling and meaningful stories both onstage and onscreen. Recent Chicago and regional theater credits include *Notes From The Field* (TimeLine Theatre); *Passing Strange* (Theo Ubique); *Botticelli In The Fire* (First Floor Theater); *Shrek: The Musical* (Music Theater Works); *Last Stop On Market Street* (Young People's Theatre of Chicago); and *Lady Day At Emerson's Bar & Grill* (Temple Theatre). Jenece has also appeared on *Chicago Fire* (NBC). She would like to thank God for another opportunity to take the stage and honor Billie Holiday's legacy, and

WHO'S WHO

she extends a heart full of gratitude to her incredible family and the talented team behind this production. Jenece is represented by Gray Talent Group and can be found on Instagram @jenecejanice.

CANDICE HANDY (Director) she/ her/hers. Candice is the Associate Artistic Director at Cincinnati Shakespeare Company. She is a regional theatre actor, director, and educator. Ms. Handy is thrilled to be making her directorial debut at MRT! Some of her favorite projects include, *The Amen Corner* (CSC), *The Play That Goes Wrong* (CSC), *Hamlet* (CSC), *Trouble in Mind* (CSC), *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (CSC), *The Cake* (The Human Race Theatre), *The Twunny Fo'* (The Know Theatre Cincinnati), and *The Pirates of Penzance* (Theatre Monmouth). Ms. Handy will direct William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, opening April 11 at Cincinnati Shakespeare Company. Candice thanks God, her family, and friends for their unwavering support throughout the course of her career.

TONY HARDIN (Scenic Designer) Tony is excited to make his Merrimack Repertory Theatre debut as the Scenic Designer for *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar & Grill*. In his full-time position as the Executive Producer for Porthouse Theatre and Director of the School of Theatre & Dance at Kent State University, Tony relishes being able to flex his creativity with fellow artists.

Passionate about theatre design education since his very first undergraduate theatre class, Tony holds a B.F.A. in Design and Technology from the University of Kentucky and an M.F.A. in Scenic Design from the University of Virginia. Over the past 25 years, Hardin has taught courses in scenic design, lighting design, scenic painting, introduction to theatre and stage management at the University of Kentucky and Longwood University. As a freelance scenic and lighting designer, Hardin's work has appeared nationally and internationally at Cincinnati Shakespeare Company, Porthouse Theatre, Heritage Repertory Theatre, Mount Washington Valley Theatre, Greenbrier Valley Theatre, The Lexington Children's Theatre and Operafest Internationale in Italy. Some of his favorite designs include *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *Cabaret*, *Treasure Island*, *The Prom* and *The Neverending Story*. He recently ended his second three-year term on the Board of Directors for the United States Institute for Theatre Technology.

YAO CHEN (Costume Designer) **Merrimack Repertory Theatre:** *Until the Flood*, *Holly Fudge*, *Macbeth*, *Letters from Home*. **Regional:** Seattle Children's Theatre (*Little Prince*), Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey (*Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Mid Winter Nights Dream*), Berkshire Theatre Group (*The Music Man*) Trinity Repertory Company (*Radio Golf*), Indiana Repertory Theatre (*Paper*

WHO'S WHO

Dream of Harry Chin, Diary of Ann Frank, The House that Jack Built, The Folks at Home, The Glass Menageries), Merrimack Repertory Theatre (*Until the Flood, Holly Fudge, Macbeth, Letters from Home*), Contemporary American Theatre Festival (*Babel, Ushuaia Blue*), Orlando Repertory Theatre (*Skippy Jone, Diary of Worms, Nancy Drew and Her Biggest Case ever, Pete the Cat*), Orlando Shakespeare Theatre (*Antony and Cleopatra, Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde*), TheatreSquared (*Miss you like Hell*), Children's Theatre of Charlotte (*Elephant and Piggie: We are in a play*), First stage (*Emily Song and Queen of the Night*), Utah Opera and Musical Festival (*Cats*), Lyric Company of Boston, Boston Playwright Theatre, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park. **International:** Seven Ages, Ltd, Beijing China (*Mozart l'opera rock*) Espresso Theatre (*Amadeus*) in San Jose, Costa Rica. Education: UT Austin. **Personal Comment:** USA829, <https://www.yao-chen.com>

BRIAN LILLIENTHAL (Lighting Designer) **Merrimack Repertory Theatre:** 38 Productions including: *I and You, the realness: a break beat play, Silent Sky, 45 Plays....., A Christmas Carol* ('22, '23) **Regional:** Over 300 productions including: 60 productions at Actors Theatre of Louisville (including over 25 world premieres), Alley Theatre, Arden Theatre Company, Arizona Theatre Company, Capital Rep, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, Cleveland Playhouse, GEVA Theatre Center, Gloucester Stage, Hartford Stage,

The Huntington Theatre, The Kennedy Center, Milwaukee Rep, Pasadena Playhouse, Playmakers Repertory Theatre, South Coast Repertory, over 30 productions at Trinity Repertory Company, among others. **Education:** MFA: California Institute of the Arts. He has won the Los Angeles Ovation Award for lighting design, as well as the 2016 Artistic Achievement Award from Merrimack Rep, and has been nominated multiple times for Boston's IRNE and Norton Awards. MFA: California Institute of the Arts. Mr. Lillienthal teaches lighting design at Tufts University. He is an in demand drummer in the Metro Boston area working with country, indie-folk, jump blues, rockabilly, and americana bands both live and recording situations.

DAVID REMEDIOS (Sound Designer) **MRT:** *The 39 Steps; The Rise and Fall of Holly Fudge; A Woman of the World; The Wickhams and Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley; The Haunted Life; Slow Food; Murder for Two; The Villains' Supper Club; Knyum; The Royale; Women in Jeopardy!; The Making of a Great Moment; Abigail/1702; Home of the Brave; I and You; Out of the City; Oceanside; The Best Brothers; Year Zero; Two Jews Walk into a War; The Blonde, the Brunette, and the Vengeful Redhead. Recent: *The Winter's Tale* and *Macbeth* (Norton Award, Commonwealth Shakespeare); *Tornado Tastes Like Aluminum Sting* (Contemporary American Theater Festival); *The Hours Are Feminine**

WHO'S WHO

(INTAR); *Thirst* (Lyric Stage); *Machine Learning* (Central Square Theater); *A Christmas Carol* (Northern Stage); *We Had a Girl Before You* (Norton Award, Greater Boston Stage). **Regional:** Arizona Theatre Company; Everyman Theatre; Huntington Theatre; Portland Stage; City Theatre Company; Alley Theatre; Trinity Rep; Geva Theatre Center; The Studio Theatre; 59E59; American Repertory Theatre; Theatre for a New Audience; La Jolla Playhouse; Berkeley Rep; CENTERSTAGE Baltimore; Cincinnati Playhouse. **International:** Prominent arts festivals in Bogotá, Paris, Hong Kong and Edinburgh. Awards: Elliot Norton, IRNE, Connecticut Critics Circle. remedios-sound.com.

ELIZABETH YVETTE RAMIREZ (Stage Manager) she/they/hers. **Merrimack Repertory Theatre:** *The Search for Signs..., Macbeth. Regional:* *Titanic, Tootsie, Frozen* (North Shore Music Theater), *Evita, Twilight Los Angeles 1995, Macbeth in Stride* (American Repertory Theatre), *Syzygy, Optional Boss Battle* (Two River Theater), *Luchadora* (Seattle Children's Theatre), *South Pacific, The Music Man, Anything Goes* (Reagle Music Theatre), *A Strange Loop, Fairview* (Sub), *Songs for a New World* (Speakeasy Stage), *Diaspora, Raisin in the Sun, Keyring, Lonely Planet, Statements after an Arrest* (New Repertory Theatre). **Opera and Ballet:** *Don Quichotte* (Boston Early Music Festival), *Urban Nutcracker* (2022-2024, City Ballet of Boston).

COURTNEY SALE (Nancy L. Donahue Executive Artistic Director) she/her/hers. Courtney proudly serves as the MRT's Executive Artistic Director. She joined the company in March of 2020 and is honored to work for a remarkable organization with incredible people. At MRT she has directed *The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe, Gaslight, The 39 Steps, A Woman Of The World, and A Christmas Carol*. Playwrights commissioned under her tenure include Trista Baldwin, Vichet Chum, Kevin Kling, Melinda Lopez, Dael Orlandersmith, James Still, Kalean Ung, and launched the Sokhary Chau Playwriting Fellowship. Under her leadership, MRT has increased service to students, strengthened its partnership in community, and ensured artistic excellence. She serves on Lowell's Canal Cultural District Management Committee. Courtney's directing has been seen across the country: *Tiny Beautiful Things* (Seattle Rep), *The Overview Effect, Support Group For Men, The Cake, Wild Horses, Not Medea* (Contemporary American Theater Festival), *The Mountaintop, The Mousetrap, April 4 1968*, (Indiana Rep, also Associate Artistic Director 2013-2016), *Gaslight* (Cincinnati Shakes), *On Clover Road* (Phoenix Theatre), *Twelfth Night* (IndyShakes). She previously served as the Artistic Director at Seattle Children's Theatre (SCT), the nation's leading generator of new work for family audiences. She has developed new work with the Denver Center,

WHO'S WHO

New Harmony Project, Dorset Theatre Festival, Emerson Stage, TheatreWorks Silicon Valley, and the Orchard Project. Other distinctions include Cornish College Distinguished Alumni Award, IBJ's 40 under 40 designation, and the 2017 keynote at the International Council of Fine Arts Deans. Courtney is a member of the National Theatre Conference. BFA, Cornish College of the Arts. MFA, The University of Texas at Austin.

MERRIMACK REPERTORY THEATRE (www.mrt.org) Merrimack Repertory Theatre (MRT) builds community through theatre. Our shows celebrate new stories, new interpretations of classics, new voices on stage, new audiences, and new collaborations that help people feel, think, and connect.

As one of the leading performing arts organizations in the Merrimack Valley, we aim to enhance the quality of life in our region by creating space for joy, thought, conversation, and shared experiences. We are a hub for compassionate community, dynamic cultural expression, learning experiences, and economic vitality.

We lead with artistic excellence. We foster a culture of belonging and inclusion. We embrace lifelong learning and education. We practice sustainable stewardship of resources.

As a non-profit, we aim to provide a

welcoming and inclusive space for all. We partner with businesses and other non-profits to fully engage the community; and contribute to the economic and cultural vitality of Lowell.

Recent acclaimed productions include *Spiritus/Virgil's Dance*, *The Porch on Windy Hill*, *Letters from Home*, *The 39 Steps*, *Best Summer Ever*, *Erma Bombeck: At Wit's End*, *Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*, the bestselling production in MRT's history, and *The Wickhams: Christmas at Pemberley*, both by Lauren Gunderson and Margot Melcon; *Cambodian Rock Band* by Lauren Yee and *KNYUM* by Vichet Chum, works in celebration of Lowell's Cambodian community; *The Haunted Life*, a world premiere adaptation of Jack Kerouac's unfinished novel; the world premiere of *The Rise and Fall of Holly Fudge* by Trista Baldwin; and plays about the Black experience, including *Until the Flood* by Dael Orlandersmith, *Nina Simone: Four Women* by Christina Ham, and *Back Together Again: The Music of Roberta Flack and Donny Hathaway*.

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ABOUT US

The Sahel is a largely semi-arid belt of barren, sandy and rock-strewn land, the Sahel marks the physical and cultural transition between the continent's more fertile tropical regions to the south and its desert in the north. At Sahel Restaurant & Lounge "SAHEL", our leitmotiv is the quality of the food and service. Our menu represents the traditional culinary African and Caribbean cuisines with some Cameroonian-influenced alternatives. SAHEL is situated in the heart of downtown Lowell (City of Lowell, MA) in a 3,500 square feet of newly renovated space just about a mile away from the main campus of UMass Lowell. Sahel is open everyday from 11am to 10pm. SAHEL offers a 200 seats fine dining restaurant upstairs with 75 seats lounge area in the basement lower level.



WHY CHOOSE US?

We are committed to bringing an upscale and unique dining experience to the region. We have a highly qualified personnel and our facility offers an vibrant, unique and upscale place to dine in alone or with your love ones and/or to host your private or public events.



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SAHEL focus primarily on Afro-Caribbean menu with a touch of French and Cameroonian influence. The menu contains traditional favorites such as Ndole, Egusi Soup, Jerk Chicken, Mofongo, Fufu, Puff-Puff, Attieke, Eru, Manfe, Jollof Rice, Achu Soup, Okra Soup, Burgers, Pasta, Burritos, Riz Cole, Griot and Plantains amongst others. These traditional dishes are prepared by recognized chefs. The consistency in delivery the same quality of food and services is the pride of the management.

SAHEL'S front of the house staff members are hired to communicate the menu and specials and enhance your overall dining experience. Our staff goes through extensive training, ensuring high quality customer service.

In addition to in-house dining, the restaurant will offer a full and complete take-out and catering services as well.



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Kalean Ung in *Letters from Home* (2023).

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Alaudin Ullah in *Dishwasher Dreams* (2024).

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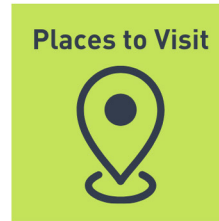
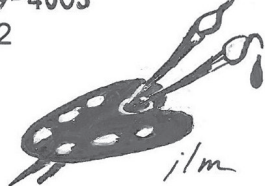
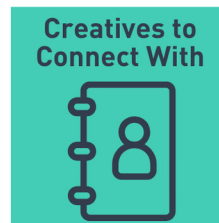


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