



MERRIMACK REPERTORY THEATRE



THE RISE AND FALL OF HOLLY FUDGE

NOVEMBER 26 – DECEMBER 19

VIDEO ON DEMAND DECEMBER 20-JANUARY 4

COURTNEY SALE

NANCY L. DONAHUE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



We are delighted to welcome you back to Liberty Hall with *The Rise and Fall of Holly Fudge* by Trista Baldwin, a MRT commission and world premiere. We elected to reopen MRT with a comedic holiday treat. After the long COVID months, the opportunity to gather, laugh, and experience story is such a gift. **Thank you for being with us.**

In the spring of 2020, I approached Trista to write for us a new play centered at the holidays. One challenge of curating for MRT's season of new plays is the deficit of holiday fare in the new work canon. I had the great fortune of working with Trista on two commissions in Seattle in a producorial role but was eager to partner with her as a director. The first draft of *Holly* she sent was brimming with humor and zest. I immediately fell in love with these women and found myself rooting for them in different ways. Trista's craftsmanship has shone in several rounds of development with the piece becoming funnier and deeper in each iteration. It is an absolute honor to share her work with MRT audiences.

This collaboration sparkles with the extraordinary talent of our acting company: Eliza, Karen, Kristian, and Milicent. I've had a glorious few weeks in the rehearsal room with this team who have made me laugh and feel grateful every day. We've assembled a design team from all different parts of the country, both new and old to MRT. They've put together an elegant, fun, and thoughtful world that truly lifts Trista's vision. I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the rest of our incredible company: the stage management team, the MRT staff, trustees, and volunteers. It takes a village to make a meaningful night in the theatre—thank you!

And to you, our beloved audience—we are bursting with gratitude to usher you back to MRT. We have missed you; your laughs, your gasps, your sighs. The joy of human experience in the theatre comes because of a key ingredient: the audience. **Welcome back.**

In Service,
Courtney

BONNIE J. BUTKAS

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



When Covid began, the phrase I heard most was an “abundance of caution” as theatres across the country shut their doors. These are words we continue to think about as we carefully reopen our beloved Liberty Hall and welcome you back. We’ve added layers of protection with masks and tests, extra cleaning, and a new check-in process. We’re also offering a socially distanced performance and video on demand. Thank you for showing up and applauding our efforts!

It’s the season of abundance, and I want to thank you for your generosity, your kind notes, your assurances, and your gifts—all of which lifted our spirits. You

made it possible for us to keep the theatre running, and you made it possible for us to create theatre in new ways with performances on Zoom, in backyards, in our theatre without an audience, and across the region in parks, community centers, artist spaces, and more.

We’re bringing you an abundance of joy in the 2021-22 season beginning with this newly commissioned holiday show, *The Rise and Fall of Holly Fudge*. I can’t wait to keep laughing and singing with you as we bring the words and music of Erma Bombeck, Woody Guthrie, Roberta Flack, Donny Hathaway, and Kevin Kling to you.

Many thanks and best wishes for holiday treats in abundance,
Bonnie

Welcome.

This is a diverse, inclusive,
accepting, and safe space.

I love *wbur* because...

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to the truth.”**

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Photo credit: Daniel Mathieu



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HOLIDAY CANDY

What's your favorite holiday candy? Candy canes, peppermint bark, chocolate gelt, mint humbugs, or dare we suggest, Holly Fudge?!



Candy canes far outshine other holiday candies in the marketplace, but they are closely followed by varieties of fondant, or its stiffer “fudge” variation, including the beloved holiday sweet, peppermint bark. An American creation, fudge is first mentioned in a letter from Vassar College student Emelyn B. Hartridge in 1888. She had tasted this new confection in Baltimore in 1886. She perfected a simple recipe of sugar, cream, unsweetened chocolate, and butter for her fellow students. The women at Wellesley College added marshmallows, while the students at Smith College added brown sugar and molasses. And then there was no stopping America's love of fudge.

As for those candy canes, they are not an American creation; however, they were first introduced to our country at an expo here in Massachusetts in 1837. The first records of the candy cane go back to 1670 when the choirmaster at the Cologne Cathedral in Germany introduced the mint sticks to his singers with sore throats, according to legend. When church elders objected to the consumption of candy on sacred ground, he added the hook to resemble a shepherd's staff, a religious reference to assuage the elders' concerns.

Today 1.76 billion candy canes are produced in the US annually, and Americans each year consume 1.8 billion pounds of chocolate, including fudge. That's 11 pounds per person!







The “Original” Fudge Recipe

From Emelyn B. Hartridge of Vassar College



INGREDIENTS NEEDED

-  **2** Cups granulated white sugar
-  **1** Cup cream
-  **2** Ounces unsweetened chocolate, chopped
-  **1** tablespoon butter

DIRECTIONS

Combine sugar and cream and cook over moderate heat. When this becomes very hot, add the chocolate. Stir constantly. Cook until mixture reaches soft-ball stage (234°-238°F). Remove from heat and add butter. Cool slightly, then mix until fudge starts to thicken. Transfer to a buttered tin. Cut into diamond-shaped pieces before fudge hardens completely.



MRT's COVID-19 PROTOCOLS

“The health of our patrons, staff, artists and volunteers is our foremost concern as we prepare to reopen our doors,” said Bonnie J. Butkas, Executive Director. “Our decision to require proof of vaccine or negative test results and masking came from feedback from our patrons and the latest public health recommendations. It underscores our commitment to public health and safety.”

The new policies go into effect immediately and will remain in effect at least through January, after which they will be re-examined on a regular basis through the winter and spring.

Merrimack Repertory Theatre banded with 18 other Greater Boston theaters in adopting the new policy which applies to audiences, theater staffs and actors, although actors won't wear masks while performing.



Bonnie J. Butkas (left) and Courtney Sale in the lobby at MRT's Nancy L. Donahue Theatre — next to the poster for the first two shows cancelled due to the pandemic.

Photo by Lowell Sun.

COVID-19 POLICY

Proof of vaccination/negative test and mask required.

Full details at www.mrt.org/covid.

PROOF REQUIRED FOR ADMITTANCE

FULLY VACCINATED

Two shots at least two weeks prior to today.

DIAGNOSTIC NEGATIVE COVID TEST

Administered within 72 hours of today. PCR and antigen tests acceptable.

RAPID (SELF-TEST) NEGATIVE COVID TEST

Administered within the last 24 hours.

FORMS OF PROOF

Paper or electronic documentation. A photo will suffice.

EXEMPTIONS

Persons with a medical or religious exemption must show proof of a negative test result.

If you forgot your proof of vaccination or negative test, there will be no admittance, and we will work with you to arrange a future visit or video viewing, or we will refund your payment.

MASK POLICY

MRT requires guests to **wear a mask covering your nose and mouth at all times** while on theatre property.

If you choose not to wear a mask, we will work with you to arrange a future visit or video viewing, or we will refund your payment. If you're already in the building and choose not to wear a mask or are not wearing your mask properly, you will be asked to leave.

DO NOT ATTEND IF YOU ARE SICK.

STOP THE SPREAD!

Know the signs and symptoms of Covid-19:

- Cough
- Shortness of Breath
- Fever/Chills
- Muscle Pain
- Headache
- Sore Throat

Symptoms may be mild or severe and may appear two to 14 days after exposure to the virus.

www.mrt.org/covid

SAFETY IN THE LOBBY

Please help yourself to masks, gloves, hand sanitizer, and napkins. Please ask for a House Manager or Usher if you have any concerns. Thank You.

We will update this information as the pandemic changes. For further information, please feel free to email either box_office@mrt.org or marketing@mrt.org.

INTERVIEW: PLAYWRIGHT TRISTA BALDWIN



HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THIS BRAND NEW STORY YOU HAVE CREATED FOR MRT?



TRISTA BALDWIN, PLAYWRIGHT

I like to call it a queer, Covid Christmas play. It is a coming home story, a mother-daughter reunion, during the time of Christmas 2020. We've been in the pandemic a few months, but it's not about the pandemic; it just happens to be a Christmas that's really different. We have protests going on across the street . . . we have Carol, who is a blue-ribbon fudge winner, who just really wants Christmas to be like Christmas has always been. It's her favorite time of the year with her daughter, who lives on the West Coast now and is flying home with a surprise visitor. And not to be forgotten in this story, and one of the things that kind of snuck up on me as a writer, is this beautiful friendship between these two women (Carol and her neighbor, Chris)—(it) has a competitive edge, a little bit of competition between these ladies – but they are such good friends, and that is really a core of the story, too. So, friendship between these two women; a mother and daughter; and a growing relationship that the daughter has had tucked away on the west coast during Covid.

IS CAROL THE ULTIMATE CHRISTMAS MOM?

Carol's relationship with Christmas is intense. It's not only her favorite holiday, but it is the time of year that she is a blue-ribbon winner. This is her time of year to shine. She is a giver; she is a doer; she likes to decorate; all of those things come into play fiercely during Christmas. She's very generous with this fudge, but she also really needs to be the winner of Christmas.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MOTHER AND DAUGHTER IS AT THE CORE OF THE STORY. WHAT MAKES THEM TICK?

Carol has raised Holly by herself. Holly is in her late 20s. This is a really close relationship, and it's also a really distant relationship. Her daughter is coming home with a new gendered relationship that her mom has not encountered. Her daughter being gay . . . is not something she really knew about at all, so it's really . . . the mom just really wants to have her daughter, and to feel that love that holds her identity up as a mother. She thinks she knows who her daughter is, and her daughter's coming how to say, 'you don't know all of me. There's more to know, and I need you to accept me.' So the daughter has this strong need for the mom to see who she is, and not prop herself up to please her mother, so that conflicts in the play. That's the source of the friction. And the source of the love.

TELL US ABOUT THE COMMISSION AND HOW THE PLAY CAME TO BE SET IN MASSACHUSETTS.

Holly Fudge is set in Massachusetts because I was really writing for the community here. I'm a former East Coaster, from the West Coast, and live there (now), so when Courtney commissioned me to write this, I thought about the two coasts, and it just felt natural to try to bring it together. It's set in Massachusetts, a working class neighborhood, a hard-working single mom, and her daughter, who's a struggling journalist.

HOW IS HOLLY DIFFERENT FROM THE USUAL HOLIDAY PLAY-GOING FARE?

In your holiday play shopping, I think you should see this one because it's going to provide you the most release from all of the built-up, pent-up feelings we've had. That's (the feeling) I wrote it with, for us to come together and release and laugh about where we've been, what we're going through still, and come together around a story that's about us now.

WATCH THE INTERVIEW!



CLICK HERE

TO WATCH THE INTERVIEW AND CHECK OUT
OUR OTHER CONTENT AT [MERRIMACK
REPERTORY THEATRE ON YOUTUBE](#)



(L-R) Eliza Martin Simpson, Kristian Espiritu. Karen MacDonald, Milicent Wright. Rehearsals for *The Rise And Fall Of Holly Fudge*. Photos courtesy of Megpix/Meghan Moore.

COURTNEY SALE
NANCY L. DONAHUE
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



BONNIE J. BUTKAS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

PRESENTS

THE RISE AND FALL OF HOLLY FUDGE

BY
TRISTA BALDWIN

FEATURING
KRISTIAN ESMIRITU* KAREN MACDONALD*
ELIZA MARTIN SIMPSON* MILICENT WRIGHT*

SCENIC DESIGNER
TRAMAINE BERRYHILL

COSTUME DESIGNER
YAO CHEN^

LIGHTING DESIGNER
CONNIE YUN

SOUND DESIGNER
DAVID REMEDIOS^

FILMMAKER
KATHY WITTMAN

STAGE MANAGER
MAEGAN A. CONROY*

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER
SUSAN L. HUDSPETH*

DIRECTED BY
COURTNEY SALE+

DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF KIRK CZELEWICZ

NOVEMBER 26–DECEMBER 19 | VIDEO DECEMBER 20–JANUARY 4

*Actors and Stage Managers appear courtesy of Actors' Equity Association | +Member of Stage Directors and Choreographers Society
^Member of United Scenic Artists

CAST

in order of appearance

Karen MacDonald	Carol
Milicent Wright	Chris
Kristian Espiritu	Holly
Eliza Martin Simpson	Jordan

TIME AND PLACE – DECEMBER 2020

Brockton, Massachusetts

Mostly in Carol's house, and just outside.

ADDITIONAL PRODUCTION CREDITS

Steven Velasquez.....	Assistant Scenic Designer
Emily Irene Peck	Assistant Costume Designer
Kate Dyson	Wardrobe Crew
Gage Baker, Sam Bliss, Celeste Delgadillo, Angela He, Grant Powicki	Protesters

THANK YOU

The Center for Hope and Healing, Inc.

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



The Director is a member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society, 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).

WHO'S WHO



KRISTIAN ESPIRITU

(Holly) Pronouns: She / they / siya.

Kristian is a storyteller and multi-hyphenated Filipinx creative, whose most recent Zoom credits include

readings of *Called* (DGF) and *KWEEN* (MRT). Selected theater: *School of Rock* (first national tour); *Once on This Island* (Pioneer Theater Co.), and *Here Lies Love* (The Public). TV: "Love Life," "Ray Donovan," "Hunters," and "Younger." Kristian is also a fiber artist and owner of How Bout Knot, creating sustainable macramé art and goods. Love to Spencer, my Ates, and Mom. RISE. kristianespiritu.com. IG: @kriscendo @howboutknot



KAREN MACDONALD

(Carol) Pronouns: She / her / hers.

Karen has been an actor, director and teacher in the Boston area for many years. She

has appeared many times at MRT, most recently in *Home of the Brave* and *The Blonde, The Brunette and the Vengeful Redhead*. In the New England area, she has performed at Speakeasy Stage, Hartford Stage, Trinity Rep, Gamm Theatre, Huntington Theatre Company, Lyric Stage, Boston Theatre Company, Greater Boston Stage Company, Gloucester Stage, Israeli Stage, New Repertory Theatre, Commonwealth Shakespeare Company, The Boston Pops, and

the Boston Symphony Orchestra. A Founding Company Member of the American Repertory Theatre, she appeared in 73 productions. On Broadway, she understudied and performed the role of Amanda Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie*, directed by John Tiffany. Ms. MacDonald has worked nationally, from The Wilma Theatre to Berkeley Rep. She received the Robert Brustein Prize for Sustained Achievement in the Theatre and the Eliot Norton Prize for Sustained Excellence. She is a graduate of Boston University and teaches Acting in the TDM Concentration at Harvard University.



ELIZA MARTIN SIMPSON (Jordan)

Pronouns: She/her/hers. Eliza is a NYC-based performer and director. After graduating from Rutgers University, she

collaborated with Playwrights Horizons, Hudson Valley Shakespeare, New Georges Theatre, The Lark, The Flea Theater, and New Plays for Young Audiences through NYU. In 2015, she joined the cast of the Off-Broadway hit *The Woodsman* and continued to collaborate and perform in the role of Nimme for three years at 59E59 Theaters and New World Stages. She is also the founder of the international feminist storytelling collective Mother Line Story Project Inc., which has produced seven original shows, featuring over

WHO'S WHO

100 performers regionally and internationally. [@motherlinestory](http://www.elizasimpson.com)



MILICENT WRIGHT

(Chris) Pronouns: She/her/hers. Milicent is thrilled to be working with CourtneySale again! She was directed by Courtney in the

Indiana Repertory Theatre's (IRT) production of *A Christmas Carol* and Indianapolis Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. Milicent also worked for Courtney in the IRT's education department and Summer Conservatory for Youth. The two also share a common connection of working for Bryan Fonseca of the Phoenix Theatre and the Fonseca Theatre Company (FTC) in Indianapolis, who recently passed of complications related to the coronavirus. Her work in *The Rise and Fall of Holly Fudge* is dedicated to the memory and legacy of Mr. Bryan Fonseca. Milicent was in *Fairfield*, the closing production of the Phoenix Theatre on Park Street and in *Building the Wall*, the inaugural production of FTC. Other recent productions include *The Watsons Go to Birmingham 1963*, *You Can't Take It with You*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Bridge and Tunnel* at the IRT. This summer, as a new company member of Indianapolis Shakespeare Company, she participated in their two summer virtual projects, *A MidZoomer Night's Dream* and *Past Words Present Times*.

COURTNEY SALE (Director, Nancy L. Donahue Artistic Director of MRT) Pronouns: She/her/hers. Courtney joined MRT in March 2020. At MRT, she has directed *A Woman of the World* and *Wild Horses*. Courtney served as Artistic Director of Seattle Children's Theatre (SCT), the nation's leading generator of new work for young audiences. At SCT, she directed *Black Beauty*, *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane*, and *The Little Prince*. Commissioned writers under her tenure include Idris Goodwin, Cheryl West, Allison Gregory, Karen Hartman, Trista Baldwin, Ramon Esquivel, and James Still. Recent directing projects: *Tiny Beautiful Things* at Seattle Rep; the world premiere of Steven Dietz's *The Ghost of Splinter Cove* at Children's Theatre of Charlotte; and Ellen Fairey's *Support Group for Men* at Contemporary American Theatre Festival (CATF). Other credits include *The Cake*; *Wild Horses*; *Not Medea* (CATF); *Mr. Burns*, *A Post Electric Play*; *On Clover Road* (The Phoenix Theater); *Twelfth Night* and *The Tempest* (Indy Shakes). Prior to SCT, she spent three years as Associate Artistic Director at Indiana Repertory Theatre, where directing credits include the world premiere of *April 4, 1968: Before We Forgot How to Dream*, *The Mountaintop*, *The Mousetrap*, *Jackie & Me*, *And Then They Came for Me*, *The Giver*, and two iterations of *A Christmas Carol*. With the Duplicates, she co-created *The Fictional Life of Historical Oddities*, *September Play*, *The Man with the*

WHO'S WHO

Dancing Eyes, and *The Poison Squad* (Austin Critics Award). She has developed new work at Denver Center Theatre Company's Summit New Play Festival, The New Harmony Project, Write Now, Dorset Theatre Festival, TheatreWorks (Palo Alto), New Plays for Young Audiences at NYU/Provincetown Playhouse, and The Orchard Project. Other distinctions included Indianapolis Business Journal's Forty Under Forty designation, Cornish College of the Arts Distinguished Alumni Award, and the keynote speaker at the 2017 International Council of Fine Arts Deans. She has taught at Summer at Cornish College of the Arts, Seattle Children's Museum, Temple College, and the University of Texas at Austin. Ms. Sale is a proud member of the National Theatre Conference and the theatrical union the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society. She is represented by A3 Artists NYC. BFA, Cornish College of the Arts. MFA, The University of Texas at Austin.

TRISTA BALDWIN (Playwright)
Pronouns: She/her/hers.
Recipient of Jerome Fellowships, a McKnight Advancement Grant, a Saison Foundation residency, a Japan Foundation Grant, and an alum of the Core Writer program at the Playwrights' Center of Minneapolis, Trista's work has been developed and produced around the country and internationally in the UK, Australia, Chile and Japan. Producers of

Trista's work includes Women's Project and Productions, The Flea Theatre, The Guthrie, Bricolage Production Co., New Georges, Circle X, Bloomington Playwrights', Red Eye, Live Girls!, Saison Foundation of Japan, and Santiago a Mil Festival of Chile. Trista is also the Co-Founder of Workhaus Playwrights' Collective, producing 25 new play productions over 10 years together.

TRAMAINE BERRYHILL (Scenic Design)
Pronouns: He/him/his.
Tramaine is a Miami native with 15 years experience creating live events. For the last five years, his design work has been in the meetings and corporate events industry. Recent professional theatre design credits include *A Raisin in the Sun*, *Godspell*, and *Looped* at the Garden Theatre, in addition *Camp Omigosh* and *A Teddy Bears' Picnic* at the Orlando Repertory Theatre. He is very excited to be working for the first time at Merrimack Repertory Theatre.

YAO CHEN (Costume Design)
Pronouns: She/her/hers. Merrimack Repertory Theatre: *Until the Flood*, *The Rise and Fall of Holly Fudge*; Trinity Repertory Company: *Radio Golf*; Indiana Repertory Theatre: *The House That Jack Built*, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *The Paper Dream of Harry Chin*; Seattle Children's Theatre: *Little Prince*; Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey: *Titus Andronicus*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*; Orlando Shakespeare Theatre: *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*; Contemporary American Theatre Festival: *Ushuaia Blue*, *Babel*; Orlando

WHO'S WHO

Repertory Theatre: *Diary of a Worm*, *Nancy Drew and Her Biggest Case*, *Pete the Cat*, *Skippyjon Jones*. International: Dong Gong Theatre in Beijing, China: I Am Tai Ping Goat; Theatre Espressivo, San Jose, Costa Rica: *Amadeus*. <https://www.yao-chen.com>, member of USA 829

CONNIE YUN (Lighting Design)
Pronouns: She/her/hers. Connie is a freelance lighting designer for the stage and is based out of Seattle, WA. In the Pacific Northwest, her designs have been seen at Seattle Opera, Portland Opera, Tacoma Opera, Seattle Children's Theatre, ACT Theatre, Seattle Rep, On the Boards, Langston, Empty Space Theatre, Cornish College of the Arts, Bellevue College, and University of Puget Sound. Nationally and internationally, she has also designed for Madison Opera, Kentucky Opera, Minnesota Opera, Dallas Opera, Arizona Opera, San Francisco Conservatory of Music, Academy of the West, Palm Beach Opera, and Canadian Opera Company. Most recent projects include designs of *Lucia di Lammermoor* for Madison Opera and *Tosca* for Portland Opera. Upcoming designs include *Disney's Beauty and the Beast* for 5th Avenue Theatre, *Red Riding Hood* for Seattle Children's Theatre, *The Elixir of Love* for Palm Beach Opera, and *The Thin Place* for ACT Theatre. She is excited to make her MRT debut with this holiday treat.

DAVID REMEDIOS (Sound Designer)
MRT: *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* (original music and sound); *Two Jews Walk into a War*; *The Blonde, the Brunette, and the Vengeful Redhead*. Recent: *The Sound Inside* and *The Children* (SpeakEasy Stage); *Berta, Berta* (Everyman Theatre). Regional: American Repertory Theatre (50 productions); Contemporary American Theater Festival; Huntington Theatre Company; Portland Stage; City Theatre Company; Alley Theatre; Trinity Rep; Geva Theatre Center; The Studio Theatre; 59E59; Theatre for a New Audience; La Jolla Playhouse; Berkeley Rep; CENTERSTAGE Baltimore; and Cincinnati Playhouse. International: Prominent arts festivals in Bogotá, Paris, Hong Kong, and Edinburgh. Awards: IRNE, Connecticut Critics Circle, Elliot Norton. www.remudiossound.com

KATHY WITTMAN (Filmmaker) is a Boston-based photographer, video designer and documentary filmmaker. She is the principal artist at Ball Square Films, a video production company specializing in documentary photo and video for the performing arts. Recent projects include the video design for *Our Time*, a theatrical time capsule at Suffolk University, and director of photography for *Dialogues of the Carmelites* at New England Conservatory. She also produces virtual performances and maintains video archives for many Boston organizations, including Blue Heron, Boston Baroque, The Huntington Theatre Company, and the Boston

Early Music Festival.

MAEGAN A. CONROY (Stage Manager)

Pronouns: she/her/hers. Maegan is thrilled to return to MRT for *The Rise and Fall of Holly Fudge*. Selected previous stage management credits include *Wild Horses*, *Until the Flood*, *Nina Simone: Four Women*, *The Wickhams: Christmas at Pemberley*, *Tiny Beautiful Things*, *Cry It Out*, *The Heath*, *Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*, *Native Gardens*, *The Royale* (Merrimack Repertory Theatre); *Creditors*, *Ugly Lies the Bone*, *DibbleDance: Shoes On*, *Shoes Off*, *Private Lives*, *Julius Caesar* (Shakespeare & Company); *The Legend of Georgia McBride* (Greater Boston Stage Company); *Guards at the Taj* (Central Square Theatre); *The Effect*, *A Measure of Normalcy* (Gloucester Stage Company). Maegan received her BFA in Stage Management from Millikin University in Decatur, Illinois. She and her husband live with their dog in Lowell, MA. Maegan is a proud member of Actors' Equity Association.

SUSAN L. HUDSPETH (Assistant

Stage Manager) has been a proud member of Actors' Equity Association since 1998. Susan is so pleased to be working with Courtney Sale and the amazing staff here at MRT. She has worked in amazing institutions like New York City Opera, NYC; Brooklyn Academy of Music, Brooklyn NY; and The Joseph Papp Public Theatre, NYC; working with legends like Liza Minelli and The Radio City Rockettes, Anna Deavere Smith, Blue Man Group, musical powerhouses Elvis Costello, Roy Nathanson and Debbie Harry, as well as former U.S. Presidents. She is grateful to have had the privilege of working with Directors Lloyd Richards, Reggie Life, and Lee Brewer. She attended the SUNY Purchase Conservatory Program

for Theatre, Concentration in Stage Management, Class of 1998. And as always this is for you Mom.

BONNIE J. BUTKAS (Executive Director)

Pronouns: she/her/hers. Bonnie has served in senior leadership roles at Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), Geva Theatre Center, the York Theatre Company, TADA! Youth Theatre, and Bristol Valley Theatre. She co-founded Lexington Dance Collective and served as a directing assistant on *The Lion King*. Achievements include a \$10 million capital campaign at Geva, and at RIT, pivotal vaccine funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and \$1 million from Howard Hughes Medical Institute for inclusive science education. She joined MRT in fall 2017. During her tenure the company broke all previous event records with its 40th Anniversary Gala; successfully completed a yearlong artistic director search and transition; posted three of the top 10 bestselling shows; received a prestigious Barr Klarman Massachusetts Arts Initiative grant; weathered the first 18 months of the pandemic; and posted sustained growth in contributed income. She previously volunteered with Girl Scouts of Western New York, YWCA of Monroe County, and Action Together, a progressive coalition of volunteers. She is on the Board of the League of Resident Theatres (LORT) and is currently part of LEADS 3.0: Leaders Engaged and Activated to Drive System-wide change. Raised in the Finger Lakes region of Western New York, she lived in NYC for almost a decade and now makes her home in Westford on the lands of the Pawtucket and Pennacook tribes. She and her dog Zeus are smitten by the extraordinary public parks and conservation land of MA. She extends deep gratitude to her family and the Trustees, staff, artists, patrons, and

volunteers of MRT.

MERRIMACK REPERTORY THEATRE (MRT) celebrates 43 years this season as the Merrimack Valley's professional theatre. With a steadfast commitment to new plays, MRT normally produces seven works, including several premieres, in the 279-seat Nancy L. Donahue Theatre at Liberty Hall.

Under the leadership of the **Nancy L. Donahue Artistic Director Courtney Sale** and **Executive Director Bonnie J. Butkas**, MRT strives to fulfill its mission to "create remarkable new and contemporary plays that bring joy to our art form while engaging, entertaining and enriching our community." The non-profit company guarantees that shows are accessible to audiences of all incomes; partners with businesses and other non-profits to fully engage the community; and contributes to the economic vitality of Lowell by attracting diverse audiences from throughout the region.

Recent acclaimed productions include *The Wickhams: Christmas at Pemberley* and *Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*, the two bestselling productions in MRT's history; *The White Chip* (Off-Broadway transfer); *I and You* (Off-Broadway transfer) and *Silent Sky* by Lauren Gunderson; *Women in Jeopardy!* and the world premiere of *Slow Food* by Wendy MacLeod; *KNYUM* by Cambodian-American playwright and actor Vichet Chum; and *The Lion*, singer-songwriter Benjamin Scheuer's award-winning musical memoir, which launched its national tour from MRT in 2015, following critically acclaimed runs in New York and London.

CRITICS PICKS

Popular Holiday Films with Gay Themes

MAKE THE YULETIDE GAY (2009)

A LGBTQ community classic – and similar in theme to *The Rise and Fall of Holly Fudge* – a gay student college, who is out at college but not to his family – receives an unexpected visit from his boyfriend while at home for the holidays.

HOLIDAY HEART (2000)

Ving Rhames and Alfre Woodard star in the heartwarming film version of the acclaimed play by Cheryl L. West (*Fannie Lou Hamer: Speak On It!* here at MRT last year). A drag queen helps a drug-addicted single mom and her daughter find hope in the holidays.

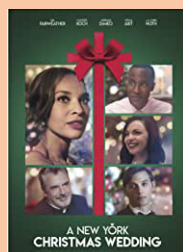


THE FAMILY STONE (2005)

Sarah Jessica Parker and Diane Keaton star in a funny, warm, and sometimes heartbreaking depiction of a large family, including a deaf, gay son and his partner, who gather for what might be a final holiday celebration.

A NEW YORK CHRISTMAS WEDDING (2020)

A rarity – a queer Christmas story with a woman of color in the lead – it takes a beautiful and romantic page from the classic *It's a Wonderful Life*.



TANGERINE (2015)

Dark, hilarious, and rowdy, this critically acclaimed favorite of international film circles features a transgender prostitute on a mission to kill her pimp on a Christmas day in Los Angeles.

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WOODY SEZ: THE LIFE AND MUSIC OF WOODY GUTHRIE

Joyous, toe-tapping, and inspirational, *Woody Sez* brings to life the stories and songs of America's great troubadour. The four performers, playing more than 20 instruments, transport the audience through the riveting and often controversial life of Woody Guthrie. Musical numbers include "This Land Is Your Land," "Pastures of Plenty," "Bound for Glory," "Hard Travelin'," and "So Long, It's Been Good To Know Yuh." Recommended for ages 12 and older.

HOOTENANNIES! An informal hootenanny, or folk music jam session, will follow the Sunday matinees on February 27 and March 6 and 13. Local musicians and audience members are encouraged to perform along with the cast.

www.mrt.org/woody



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Denise Cormier in *A Woman of the World* this past spring.

Photo by Kathy Wittman.



Maiesha McQueen in *Until the Flood* this past spring in our first video on demand production and the first show of the 2021-22 Season.

Photo by Kathy Wittman.

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Leenya Rideout in *Wild Horses* at Stevens-Coolidge House and Gardens.

Photo courtesy of Megpix/
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