Dear Friends:

It’s hard to believe that it’s been eight months since we were working in the WT office and theatre spaces, since we last saw many of you at Stick Fly or events around town. We hope that you and yours have been staying safe and healthy. While most of our team has been continuing to work remotely, we have also been developing new and creative ways to keep you engaged and entertained from afar. Without trying to compete with film or TV, our online digital programming aims to retain the thrill of live theatre while being produced in a way that is safe for all involved.

This special edition of The Brief Chronicle will give you an overview of some of the digital offerings we’ve brought you so far, and a glimpse of what’s to come. If you’ve attended one of our exclusive Wednesday evening interview sessions, The Green Room, or enjoyed our Something Wicked: Stories for Halloween, you already know that we are still committed to bringing you top-notch talent and sophisticated, entertaining programming – even digitally.

After we bring you Two Scrooges: A Christmas Carol, Two Ways this holiday season, consisting of Michael’s one-man adaptation of the Charles Dickens’ classic paired with the world premiere of Manual Cinema’s Christmas Carol, from the celebrated performance group behind our planned production of Mementos Mori, we will also get you ready for Ride Share, another digital production specifically written, directed and designed for streaming. Written by Black Lives Black Words International Project co-founder Reginald Edmund, this compelling thriller will keep you on the edge of your seat and guessing until the very end.

We also have exciting news to share about a favorite annual event, the Behind the Scenes Brunch, plus we’ll highlight some of your favorite WT memories that keep us all going. WT Education will provide an update on their exciting new WRITE ON! residency this season, and we’ll dive deeper into our reopening protocols as we look ahead to the day when it is safe for all of us—artists, audiences and staff—to come together once again to enjoy live, in-person theatre.

Until that day comes, we again extend our deepest gratitude to you.

With thanks,

Michael

Kate

Michael Halberstam
Artistic Director

Kathryn M. Lipuma
Executive Director

PHOTO BY JOE MAZZA, BRAVE LUX.
I think at this point in the year most of us can say we are very much looking forward to bidding a not-so-fond farewell to 2020. Between the pandemic, civil unrest and a highly contentious election, it’s just so challenging to us all at Writers Theatre that we can’t gather to try and make sense of the world through the collective guided meditation that is the live theatre experience.

However, human beings have a remarkable capacity for adaptation.

As I write, a vaccine might be on its way, possibly even by the end of December (according to NPR). And although we know it’s going to be a while before such a thing is in wide circulation, it’s still amazing that so many brilliant people have managed to come so quickly to the table with viable options. We are certainly starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel. That said, we all still need to be vigilant and responsible for each other—keep wearing those masks and try not to take unnecessary social risks please. You are really an amazing audience and I very much want to shake your hands and invite you to lean forward and engage at Writers Theatre in the near future.

Until we can safely gather collectively, we have been hard at work creating work in a new medium—for streaming.

We just completed filming my one-actor reading of *A Christmas Carol* and Manual Cinema is putting the finishing touches on their live stream version of the same story but from a fresh, original and contemporary perspective. When I first started performing my one-man read of the timeless Dickens holiday story, I was tempted to memorize it and turn it into a performance—but I had a very revealing conversation with actor Jeff Still (*The Price, Rough Crossing, The Chosen*) who urged me not to do so. He stated that I should not underestimate the power of reading, of being read to. That advice resonated with me and I have kept the piece as a reading for that reason. So when Manual Cinema came to us earlier this summer with a proposal to be a co-commissioner and producer of their own rendition of *A Christmas Carol*, I immediately thought that because their vocabulary is brilliantly creative but primarily visual, that it would pair beautifully with the reading which is all about the text and that together the two pieces would be perfectly Writers Theatre.
So the challenge at hand then became how to film a reading and keep it visually interesting and dynamic, and at that point Stanton Long entered into the conversation. I’m truly excited to introduce you to the directorial stylings of Stanton Long. Stanton is a filmmaker, moonlighting in our marketing department until he makes his career-changing feature. If you want to get a preview of his artistry, you should check out his work on our TREVOR the musical Glencoe cast reunion video (Stanton took around 16 hours of raw footage and crafted it into a beautifully balanced narrative that gives you insight into how the piece came together, and offers plenty of lovely anecdotes from inside the process. It’s also so wonderful to see how all those amazing young artists are maintaining their enthusiasm for the production and for the world into which they will soon emerge as adults). Stanton has spent the past few weeks preparing his shooting process for A Christmas Carol and is now hard at work editing the piece for a December release. We can’t wait to share it with you. It was electrifying and thrilling to be back in the theatre this past week making a holiday present for you all. We hope that you will find the pairing a good match and that you will enjoy the ingenuity of Manual Cinema as much as you will enjoy delving into the original Dickens text.

We’re also quite far along in the preparation stages to bring you more digital programming and in the meantime, we have our The Green Room interviews which continue to generate much enthusiasm from audiences. Furthermore we enjoyed much positive feedback for Associate Artistic Director Geoff Button’s beautifully curated and directed series of spooky Halloween stories which are still available for your listening pleasure. Based on how successfully they were received, there could be more projects like this in the time to come.

We are also now daring to start looking forward to the possibilities surrounding the 2021/22 season. Normally I’d be teasing the upcoming slate at this point. But as we are still in extraordinarily uncertain territory we are trying to remain flexible while making sure that we can be ready to start producing live events as soon as it is possible. We are, in fact, still at this point hoping to produce two live events this season. We do have our eyes and ears on the news, of course, and will keep you posted should our plans change.

If there’s a unifying factor in all the streaming work we’re compiling for you, it’s this: we are not trying to replace the live performance. We know we can’t ever come close to emulating the experience of sitting in a darkened room with a crowd of strangers, breathing the same air and sharing the same narrative. But neither can we compete with Netflix. We’re striving to create a hybrid that pays homage to the foundations of a live production while taking advantage of the tools that working with a camera provides. I can’t wait to hear what you think of the results.

Thank you again and again for your continued loyalty and for all of you who have provided us with generous donations, purchased tickets or just sent words of encouragement our way. Writers Theatre wants to be your conduit to the live theatrical experience for decades to come. Your loyalty, love and support makes that want into a reality.

Happy Holidays to all.
In October, Writers Theatre announced changes to the company’s 2020/21 Season, including additional digital programming and updates to previously announced productions.

Of the changes to the season’s programming, Michael Halberstam, Artistic Director, said:

“Extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures, and this pivotal moment in our history is no exception. The realities of producing a season of theatre during a pandemic present unprecedented challenges, but our artists are demonstrating incredible ingenuity and resourcefulness.

“We are so excited to share our plans to deliver a hybrid season of digital productions, plus in-person plays once it is safe, to showcase our artistic community and bring our audiences an entertaining and provocative slate of programming. With our streaming productions, we know that we can’t and indeed shouldn’t try to compete with film or television; our digital productions instead will aim to retain the essence of the live experience but allow you to enjoy the art from the comfort of your own homes.

“It is our hope that we will be back at the theatre together by the end of the season, and we can only do so with your support. We hope you join us on this journey!”

Season Package Holders and Director’s Society Members have exclusive or advanced access to all expanded 2020/21 Season digital programming and live productions.

All newly announced programming will be included in the cost of a Classic Subscription (Premiere, Standard and Preview packages). *The Green Room*, *Something Wicked* and *Two Scrooges* are all included for no additional cost to Members, while *Ride Share* and *Pearl’s Rollin’ with the Blues* will be eligible for booking with a Member’s $35 ticket.

Read on to look back on *Something Wicked* and *The Green Room* episodes so far, and for a glimpse at digital content ahead!
Pictured: Changes to Tudor Court, including newly installed seating along the sidewalk and park, adjacent to the Theatre Center.
THE GREEN ROOM
The Green Room
Brought to you by Writers Theatre

Behind-the-scenes insight.
Backstage candor.
Welcome to The Green Room.

These in-depth sessions are streamed online on select Wednesday evenings at 7pm, live for season package holders, and offer audiences unprecedented access to leaders in the theatre industry. Named for the backstage lounge where cast and crew relax during their downtime, these candid interviews offer an unfiltered glimpse into the minds behind your favorite theatre experiences.

OVERHEARD IN THE GREEN ROOM:

LYDIA R. DIAMOND: I don’t want to teach the audience anything; I want to entertain the audience.

DAVID CROMER: Looking back, I realized that everything I’d ever done...my preoccupations fed into those of someone who directs theatre.

SANDRA DELGADO: All of a sudden I felt like I found this family that I didn’t know I had lost, or missed...it was this instant chemistry, I instantly felt at home.
SOMETHING WICKED: STORIES FOR HALLOWEEN
Something Wicked: Stories for Halloween
Brought to you by Writers Theatre

Curated by Associate Artistic Director Geoff Button
Sound Design by Joseph V. Calarco
Featuring stories and adaptations by Chesya Burke, Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Edgar Allen Poe

Featuring WT Favorites: Chaon Cross, Allen Gilmore, Emma Ladji and Larry Yando

FROM THE ARTISTS:

CHAON CROSS: I think that we like to feel fear because it lives right next to its opposite. Just like laughter and tears, they are almost one.

ALLEN GILMORE: I love the horror genre; it’s my favorite. I think it’s for the same reason that we like roller coasters: for the thrill of the experience.

EMMA LADJI: Creating a role with just your voice is a fun challenge! It pushes you to be very specific since you can't communicate physically. You realize how much you can convey with body language and facial expressions.

LARRY YANDO: To do the recording, I found myself asking the same questions I would ask if I was performing on stage: Who am I? What do I want? WHY do I need to tell this story?
TWO SCROOGES

A CHRISTMAS CAROL, TWO WAYS
Two Scrooges: A Christmas Carol Two Ways

One-Man A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens, adapted by and featuring Michael Halberstam, directed by Stanton Long

Manual Cinema’s Christmas Carol by Manual Cinema, adapted from Charles Dickens

Tickets now on sale! Performances begin December 3.

Three Christmas spirits. Two versions of the Dickens classic. A one-of-a-kind holiday entertainment event.

Artistic Director Michael Halberstam’s acclaimed one-man adaptation of Charles Dickens’ holiday ghost story, directed by Stanton Long and featuring Halberstam in his tour-de-force solo performance, will be paired with the world premiere of Manual Cinema’s Christmas Carol by renowned Chicago performance group Manual Cinema, reinventing Scrooge’s tale for today’s world with their trademark shadow puppetry, expert storytelling and music.

These two unique, complementary interpretations of A Christmas Carol epitomize WT’s mission of highlighting the word and the artist. With one highly text-based, recognizing WT tradition, and the other boldly visual by some of this generation’s most innovative artists, Two Scrooges is the perfect holiday entertainment event for the whole family to enjoy from the comfort of your own home.
Ride Share
Written by Reginald Edmund

Early 2021

The driver listens. The night darkens. The mystery deepens.

Marcus has a new wife, a comfortable job and everything seems to be falling into place – until his honeymoon is interrupted by an email from work, laying him off. To make ends meet, he becomes a ride share driver, shuttling passengers from all walks of life to and from parties, brunches and meetings. The passengers range from silly, to seductive – to downright scary. But as long as Marcus keeps his radio on and his wits about him, there’s nothing he can’t handle…right?

Written by Black Lives Black Words International Project co-founder Reginald Edmund, Ride Share steps on the gas and takes you along for the dangerous, thrilling ride. Hop in.

FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT:

“I am beyond thrilled about the upcoming partnership between Writers Theatre and Black Lives Black Words to remount my play Ride Share. I have always admired the artistic programming at Writers Theatre and look forward to Ride Share being a part of the 2020/21 season and receiving a full production run for the first time.”
Manual Cinema is arguably the biggest Chicago theatrical success story of the past ten years.

Founded in 2010, the performance collective—led by artistic directors Drew Dir, Sarah Fornace, Ben Kauffman, Julia Miller and Kyle Vegter—pioneered the use of “overhead projectors, multiple screens, puppets, actors, live feed cameras, multi-channel sound design and a live music ensemble”¹ to create a groundbreaking experience of cinematic and theatrical storytelling that has dazzled audiences around the world. Even with all those descriptors, it’s still a difficult art form to describe with words. Kauffman described their work as “kind of like watching an animated film but all of the elements are performed live” in an intricately choreographed performance that The New York Times affectionally called “organized chaos.”² The group’s name itself is perhaps the best description of their work, one which Fornace said they started using “because sometimes when you say puppet show people are like, ‘Oh, you mean like hand puppets? Like at a library? My parents are like: ‘What do you do?’”³

The beginnings of the collective date back to 2009 when Julia Miller and Sarah Fornace met while working on a collaboration between the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Redmoon Theatre. The organizations were creating a new production of Swan Lake, with the Redmoon company performing a puppet version of the story while the CSO played the Tchaikovsky score. Soon afterward, Miller found an old overhead projector in her landlord’s garage and started experimenting with its possibilities. When she was invited to develop and perform an original piece as part of Rough House Theatre’s Experimental Puppetry Festival in 2010, Miller invited Fornace to collaborate on the project, and Fornace suggested they add Dir to the team as well. Wanting to add sound and music to accompany the visuals, Ben Kauffman and Kyle Vegter—two musician/composers who performed as part of Oh+Ah, a Chicago-based ambient sound collective—were added to complete the line-up. The 20-minute play, telling the story of a lonely teen girl named Lula who becomes obsessed with a country music
duo she hears on the radio, was performed with one projector and a pre-recorded soundtrack. The show and the group’s groundbreaking approach were a hit, and the group continued to stage the show in venues and bars around the city to growing acclaim. “We were like, ‘Oh! People are into this!’” said Miller. “‘Maybe we could make another thing! Maybe we should come up with a name!’

The freshly named Manual Cinema started working on a new piece and performed an early version of it at a Halloween party at Dir and Fornace’s apartment in 2010. Guests were ushered outside to the sidewalk to watch the puppet show projected on the apartment’s window shade. By the following summer, the project had grown and developed into Manual Cinema’s first full-length production, which premiered in a Logan Square bar. Ada/Ava is the story of twin septuagenarian sisters living in a gothic New England home. After Ava passes away, Ada struggles to navigate her new solitary life as her grief plunges her into fantastical and supernatural delusions. Dir described the play as “a psychological thriller along the lines of Hitchcock’s Vertigo, but it was inspired by the personal experience of witnessing my grandfather’s mourning process after my grandmother’s death, and seeing how his grief was expressed in small acts of daily routine.”

Although it is now an inseparable part of the company’s DNA, these early performances were not staged in a way that allowed audiences to watch the film be constructed. Only the final product on a screen was visible. It wasn’t until during a residency at the Logan Center for the Arts in 2012 that the group made a breakthrough. They were expanding their inaugural 20-minute piece into a full-length production, in collaboration with video designer Rasean Davonte Johnson (who created the projections on WT’s production of Vietgone). The new Lula Del Ray was performed by the collective in a black box theatre while the video was projected onto various surfaces in the lobby along with an immersive sound installation. Audiences could wander back and forth from the lobby to the theatre to see both the process and product. When the company was invited to perform the show as part of Theatre on the Lake’s summer 2013 season, the group’s need to fill a larger theatre space led to them devising their signature style: puppeteers and musicians performing the piece live on stage while the resulting film was projected onto a screen hanging above them. A Manual Cinema show, as we now know and understand it to be, was born.

Commissions and invitations to perform were flowing in for the acclaimed group as their profile grew. Manual Cinema became the first American company in 17 years to perform at the Tehran Mobarak Puppet Festival in Iran when they performed Ada/Ava there in 2014. It was the group’s first
international performance, and they were so nervous about damage to their fragile overhead projectors that they carried the lenses in their arms on the plane. “We did two shows to a packed audience, and it was the first time they flew the American flag in Tehran since the revolution,” said Miller. “They didn’t have gaffer’s tape in the theater because they had been under the trade embargoes. It was so emotional to be invited, and I [felt] fortunate to be able to share our work.”

The group’s popularity exploded from there, as did their touring schedule, and as a result the group began performing more outside of Chicago than in their home city. The New York Times theatre critic Ben Brantley published a glowing review of the off-Broadway run of Ada/Ava in 2015. “The common wisdom is that once magicians reveal the secrets of their trade, the magic disappears,” wrote Brantley. “But that’s hardly the case with the uncanny coven of young sorcerers who operate under the name Manual Cinema.”


Manual Cinema’s newest full-length pieces show an ever-increasing ambition and complexity, making each one an instant contender for theatrical event of the year. The End of TV explores the death of the manufacturing industry and America’s growing obsession with TV and celebrity. “We started working on the piece right before the 2016 election and finished it after,” said Vegter. “I think we were kind of searching for how we got here—how did the country get to this place of rampant consumerism and a place where a reality TV star can be elected president?” The piece—which used live camera feeds and green screens to recreate QVC informercials from the 1990s—debuted in 2017 in New Haven and then had a multi-week run in Chicago at the Chopin Theatre in 2018. A few months later, the group debuted another new show in Chicago: an adaptation of Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, commissioned and premiered by Court Theatre. Featuring the largest cast of puppeteers and musicians ever assembled for a Manual Cinema production, the show became a hit at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2019.

It was at this point that Writers Theatre began a conversation with the collective, having seen and been wowed by both The End of TV and Frankenstein. Although ideas for a new piece continue to be explored, both MC and WT liked the idea of bringing more of Manual Cinema’s existing work to Chicago stages. The piece that stood out the most was Mementos Mori, which had originally premiered at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago in 2015 as part of the Chicago International Puppet Festival. Since then, the collective had continued to develop the play as it toured to New York for a run at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in 2017 and elsewhere. “Every show changes and goes through several iterations,” explained Miller. “When we’re creating a show we’re so involved with the tech stuff that we don’t see all the elements until the production is fully formed, and then we can see how well the story is working.” WT offered space and support for Manual Cinema to finish work on the new version of Mementos Mori—which
follows the character of Death, having traded in her scythe for a smartphone app named “reapr,” as she has a life-changing encounter with three people while dutifully going about her business one day in Hollywood.

The Covid-19 pandemic upended plans to premiere *Mementos Mori* in spring 2020, but both Writers Theatre and Manual Cinema enthusiastically look forward to staging the new and improved version of the show in the future when it is safe to return to live performance. The pandemic also impacted Manual Cinema’s plans for a summer festival to celebrate the group’s 10 years of existence. Instead, Manual Cinema shared archival recordings of four of their productions—*Lula Del Ray, No More Blue Memories, The End of TV,* and *Frankenstein*—to stream for free on their website. And now the collective brings another new production to life, envisioned and created for a time of socially distancing for both performers and audiences. *Manual Cinema’s Christmas Carol* will be performed and streamed live from the collective’s Chicago studio straight to homes around the world. The adaptation reflects the times as well, introducing us to a family attempting to keep their holiday traditions—including an annual puppet show—alive over Zoom while a pandemic keeps them isolated in their homes.

Ten years removed from that infamous Halloween party, *Manual Cinema’s Christmas Carol* shows the collective is as creative and innovative as ever. “I don’t think any of us expected to be in this line of work or saw ourselves making this kind of art when we started out,” said Dir. “All of us fell into it, and we’re grateful that we found it and each other—or the work found us. For the first couple years it was just experimentation of the medium, trying to figure out what this is, Manual Cinema. What makes it really creatively alive is that we’re still trying to answer that question, and the work is continuing to give us new and exciting answers to that question. The answers keep changing, so that’s what makes it a worthwhile project to continue.”

7. Hsiao.
10. Coleman.
12. Hsiao.
Writers Theatre’s Behind the Scenes Brunch is one of the most anticipated Director’s Society events, and this year, we are lifting the curtain for ALL donors.
We are thrilled to invite all donors to join us on a virtual tour with Manual Cinema’s creative team, straight from your living room! Experience a one-of-a-kind ‘Puppet Time,’ a Q&A with a conversation led by WT's artistic staff which will enhance your viewing of the holiday streaming show Manual Cinema’s Christmas Carol.

Give a gift today to experience this exclusive virtual event and mark your calendars for DECEMBER 6, 2020.
The Artists Council is a select group of our most devoted supporters, whose extraordinary annual contributions sustain the Theatre and enable it to realize ambitious artistic and institutional goals. Members of the Artists Council are granted unparalleled access to the creative process as well as the unique opportunity to forge a personal connection with our art. We gratefully acknowledge our Writers Theatre Artists Council members who made commitments in the period between August 1, 2019 and November 12, 2020.

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# WordPlay Gala 2020

The annual WordPlay Gala is Writers Theatre’s most important fundraising event of the year. This year’s gala could not take place as planned; however, we would like to recognize and thank the following patrons who provided extraordinary support to the Gala effort.

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Writers Theatre is thrilled to have support from ComEd as Corporate Education Sponsor for the 2020/21 Season. ComEd is a longtime supporter of the arts in Chicagoland, and Writers Theatre is honored to partner with a company that acknowledges the power of theatre education, as it emphasizes collaboration, cultivates self-expression, encourages imaginative inquiry and promotes civic responsibility and social justice. The 2020/21 Season marks ComEd’s sixth season as part of our family of supporters, and Writers Theatre is extremely grateful to once again have ComEd’s partnership.

CORPORATE EDUCATION SPONSOR

POWERING LIVES

A SPECIAL GIFT THIS SEASON

Writers Theatre offers you a special way to recognize your friends & family while supporting the theatre. Consider making a gift in honor of a loved one, and they will be listed in Writers Theatre program books for a year.

Examples:
In honor of “my best friend”
In memory of “my father”

Contact the Advancement Department at 847-786-3504 or advancement@writerstheatre.org to make your honorarium or memoriam gift.
I love Writers Theatre because: of the talented artists.
“WT TO ME:”
YOUR FAVORITE MEMORIES INSPIRE US

You are such an important part of Writers Theatre and we hope we play a special part in your life. Just like every live performance is unique, we know Writers Theatre means something different to everyone so earlier this year, we reached out to hear about your favorite moments at WT! Your funny stories, heartfelt memories and words of encouragement inspire us. Through the unexpected challenges of 2020, you have reminded us how impactful art is. Thank you for sharing what WT means to you—we are excited to bring you the theatre you know and love.
“I LOVE THAT WRITERS THEATRE HAS BEEN A PART OF OUR LIVES FROM THE VERY BEGINNING WHEN MICHAEL FIRST CAME TO GLENCOE. WE HOPE THAT BEFORE TOO LONG IT WILL BE BACK IN OUR LIVES.”

“IT HAS ENHANCED OUR LIVES IN SO MANY WONDERFUL YEARS OF ENTERTAINMENT. THE CREATIVITY, THE PROFESSIONALISM, THE PURE JOY OF THEATRE!”

“What’s my fave #WTTOME MEMORY? Seeing the dreams of so many realized when we took those first ceremonial shovelfuls of soil!”
“QUALITY THEATER WITHOUT THE MADDENING TRAFFIC DRIVING DOWNTOWN.”

“I USED TO SEE PLAYS THERE AS A KID AND NOW, 27 YEARS LATER, I BRING MY OWN KIDS!”

“THE AMAZING STORIES YOU ADD TO THE CHICAGO THEATRE SCENE!”

“I CAN ESCAPE INTO INCREDIBLE WORLDS AND NEW STORIES.”

I ♥ WRITERS THEATRE BECAUSE:
first rehearsals

THANK YOU

I ♥ WRITERS THEATRE BECAUSE:
OUR SUPPORTERS ARE AMAZING!
REIMAGINING A CHRISTMAS CAROL

Associate Artistic Director Geoff Button spoke with Michael Halberstam, adaptor and performer in One-Man A Christmas Carol, and Stanton Long, director of this year’s revival, to discuss how this version is unlike any other.

GEOFF BUTTON: Stanton, some of our patrons may not be aware, but you’ve been working at WT since 2016 and you’re currently our Design & Communications Manager, responsible for much of our email and video design. You’ve also been moonlighting in the film world for years. Can you talk a little bit about that? How did you get into it?

STANTON LONG: I started when I was in high school. CPS had a partnership with After School Matters and Gallery 37 that was an arts organization for high school students. Once I graduated, I was lucky enough to work with different theater companies that let me do promotional videos for them. Then I transitioned into doing my own work, to see if I could direct and how to run a set. And now I’m here doing it with you.

GB: Michael, how did you start performing A Christmas Carol, and how has your interpretation of the piece evolved over the years?

MICHAEL HALBERSTAM: I was commissioned to do a reading of it in the very early days of the theatre. Up until that point, my experience with the piece had been largely the goopy, sentimental stage productions or movie versions, and to actually read the story and get into Dickens’ narrative, I started to realize how much more complex and psychologically driven the story was. When I first performed it I was twenty-five, and now thirty years later, my own relationship to looking back on my life and the mistakes I have made, the opportunities to engage in charitable action that I have missed, starts to have a deeper resonance with me, especially as I start to think about the legacy that I want to leave behind.

GB: Stanton, this piece has historically been Michael simply reading from the book itself at a music stand. Can you talk a little bit about the unique experience of figuring out how to film something like this?

SL: Since this is a one-man show, I didn’t know at first how I was going to make this as dynamic as possible. But I saw Spike Lee’s A Huey P. Newton Story, which was also a one-man show. I learned how to use static imagery to show the characters and moments and the different events. I took that and just ran with it. At the same time, this is a theatre piece, so you need to incorporate that as well. It’s a four-camera production, so we get to have different
angles throughout and pace it a certain way. During the dialogue scenes, we get to play with how Michael’s angled to make it seem like he’s having an actual conversation.

**GB:** Michael, can you talk a little bit about how the process of filming this might affect how you perform it?

**MH:** For me, it’s going to be about releasing any expectation that I’ve had of how this was performed on a stage. When you allow a director to take the narrative, you’re inviting that director to have a point of view, so it was Stanton’s point of view that most interested me, in terms of translating this from a static medium into an organic streaming product. The other thing is that the scale of the performance has to come down. If I’m blasting it out on a stage, it’s going to be too big for the camera. And yet at the same time, we’re both trying to preserve the idea of a reading, partly because after one of the earliest performances, Jeff Still, a wonderful actor who has worked with us a number of times, said, “You will be tempted to memorize this. Please let me encourage you to fight that urge.” He said, “I cannot tell you the powerful impact of being read to, especially a story like this. I felt so childlike and yet adult at the same time.”

**GB:** This is obviously a story that people think they know well, and since you’ve both been working on it so intimately, is there anything about it that you find surprising or that strikes you as particularly meaningful this year?

**SL:** I think the last couple of years I really understood we have this evil label for Scrooge. But he’s gone through a fair amount of trauma and some heavy stuff, and when you’re not careful, you find yourself in a certain space. This year, in particular, if we’re not careful, we can all easily go to that space, too. I’ve been through similar stuff, like he lost his sister, and I lost my sister and two other people that are close to me this year. I can really empathize and understand that human aspect of Scrooge. And at the same time, at least for me, at the end of this year, a light has been shown to us and we’re able to move forward and really see a bird’s eye view of the entire picture.

**GB:** Michael, what about you?

**MH:** I think one of the things that’s very difficult when you’re in that certain psychological space is that most of us don’t have the ability to step outside ourselves, look at ourselves, look at our actions, and see how we might be interacting with other people. If we’ve been taught anything over the past few years, it’s that self-examination is actually crucial to not just our own personal evolution, but the evolution of the species. And I think what the ghosts give Scrooge is exactly that, an opportunity to self-reflect. He has a very defined view of how he engages his employee, of how he sees his business and how he sees his relationship to other people. And when the camera literally irises out and shows him his actions and his behavior are being interpreted by others, he is shaken to the core and foundation of his being. And I think that’s a wonderful sentiment for us all to have at this key moment. It’s a real reminder for us to open our eyes and look around and recognize, as Fred says, that we are not just fellow creatures bound towards the grave, but we’re all bound on the same journey. That we have to look after each other if we’re going to make it through. That is a very important conversation to be having right now. We’re so divided, and nobody’s listening to anybody, least of all themselves. And I think this this story really encourages us to look inside.
SAVE THE DATE FOR #GIVINGTUESDAY

Save The Date GIVINGTUESDAY

December 1, 2020

Spread Kindness in Your Community and WIN!

December 1st marks the BIGGEST day in global giving: #GivingTuesday! This year, support Writers Theatre with a donation of any size on December 1st and be entered to win a “Kindness in Community” prize featuring WT swag, tickets to a future production, and surprises from our local partners. Every dollar makes a difference so plan your gift today!
OUR HANDS

embrace

THE ARTS.

Allstate is a proud sponsor of Writers Theatre’s year-round Education Programs.

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Save the Date
April 10, 2021


Don't miss your favorite Writers Theatre Gala brought to you in a new way 4.10.2021.

*Details and formal invitation to follow
As 2020 draws to a close, we wanted to take a moment to thank you, our dedicated donors and patrons, for all your support this year. 2020 is unlike any year we’ve seen as it continually presented new challenges for Writers Theatre and for our industry.

Your generosity gave us a precious and vital commodity: time. Time to retool our season offerings to suit the current moment; time to refresh our theatre center with new features to ensure the safety of our artists, patrons, and staff when we can reopen; and time to reflect on our mission to bring you the art you love with the word and the artist at its core. We are truly grateful for this time and for all of you who have made it possible.

We hope you will continue to lean forward and engage with us throughout the 2020/21 Season and beyond. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts!
Charles Dickens had meteorically risen to fame in the 1830s with his debut work, *The Pickwick Papers*, and further cemented his status as one of Britain’s leading novelists with subsequent successes *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby*. Americans were equally enraptured by the young man’s writings and greeted him ecstatically when he visited the country for the first time in 1842. He spent several months traveling to the major cities of Boston, New York, Washington, and even as far inland as St. Louis, mobbed by fans wherever he went.

However, the novelist was soon to experience the first serious troubles of his writing career. Following his American trip, he published his impressions of the country in *American Notes for General Circulation* (1842), in which he praised the country for some things but voiced strong criticism for its obsession with money, its fondness for tobacco spitting, and worst of all its continuing practice of human slavery. The American response was unsurprisingly hostile, although sales of the book were strong. When his newest novel, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, began appearing in serialization in early 1843, it sold more poorly than any of his previous works. Talk of his new financial struggles became constant in a press eager to gossip about the now controversial figure. Dickens’s publishers even suggested he should take a cut to his £200 monthly salary to make up for their losses.

At the same time, Dickens was consumed with outrage at the conditions of the poor in England. He visited a mine in Cornwall that had a workforce of children, inspected a school in a rotting building in London, and spent hours walking the streets observing the lives of the less fortunate. While on one walk he conceived of a story that would entertain all classes and inspire a stronger spirit of generosity from those with means. He wrote it in six weeks from October to November 1843, a process in which he...
“wept, and laughed, and wept again, and excited himself in a most extraordinary manner,” as he wrote to a friend.

A Christmas Carol was an instant success with the public. Published on December 19, 1843, the first printing had sold out by Christmas Eve. A second and third edition were also gone by New Year’s Day, and by the end of 1844 the book was on its 11th printing. It was even popular with American readers and critics, who evidently had forgiven him for his remarks of two years earlier. Despite the immense demand, the book was not initially all that lucrative for Dickens. At odds with his publishers, he paid for the publishing himself in exchange for the entire profits of its sales. The book’s extravagant printing—gilt-edges, cloth binding with the title stamped in gold, and four wood engravings and four hand-colored etchings by illustrator John Leech—combined with the author’s insistence on an accessibly low selling price severely hindered the return on his investment. The author also saw no money from any foreign publications, since there was no international copyright law to protect his work. A year into the book’s publication, Dickens had only made £744. The book’s appeal endured, however, and it grew to become arguably his best known composition. Dickens wrote four more Christmas stories between 1844 and 1848: The Chimes, The Cricket on the Hearth, The Battle of Life, and The Haunted Man and the Ghost’s Bargain.

Dickens had always been interested in performing as a child and contemplated a career as an actor prior to finding success with his writing. He attended the theatre constantly and often arranged amateur entertainments where he could play a role. All of this worked to his advantage when he began to read his work publicly in the 1850s for charity. In December 1853 he was invited to Birmingham to read some of his Christmas writings. Dickens performed a reading of A Christmas Carol twice, requesting that the final performance be reserved for “two thousand working people—stipulating that they shall have that night entirely to themselves.” The readings went over extraordinarily well and Dickens continued to read for charity events for the next five years. In 1858, he began to professionally read his work for a fee. The demand for Dickens to read A Christmas Carol in particular was immense and he made a lot of money this way touring around Britain and Ireland. In 1867, he triumphantly returned to America for a four-month reading tour. Ill health prevented the author from keeping an engagement in Chicago; the Tribune called him “a Hypocrite of Literature” in retaliation.

Dickens read the story of Scrooge for the last time on March 15, 1870 as part of what he announced would be his farewell tour as a professional reader. At his final curtain call, he addressed the crowd by saying: “In this task, and in every other which I have ever undertaken, as a faithful servant of the public, always imbued with a sense of duty to them, and always striving to do his best, I have been uniformly cheered by the readiest response, the most generous sympathy, and the most stimulating report.” He died three months later at the age of fifty seven.

Further Reading


WT EDUCATION: WRITE ON! PUSHES ON

For the first time, WT Education partners with Family Service of Lake County and the Highland Park School district to deliver their unique Write On! program to K-5th Grade students.
Mirroring Family Service of Lake County’s commitment to social emotional development, and using North Shore School District 112 and Township High School District 113’s unit themes and experiences as a springboard, WT Education aims to infuse Nuestro Club’s after-school programming for K-5th grade students with an interdisciplinary blend of theatre, literary and visual arts. Over the course of the 2020/21 school year, WT teaching artists will guide students through these expressive modalities as they explore themes of identity, community, self-esteem and empathy, all through the lens of a few essential questions:

**Who or what makes up a community?**

**How do our choices affect the world around us?**

**In what ways do we grow when we experiment?**

**How do we tell our own story?**

In the winter and spring of 2021, WT Education will also work with students participating in Family Service of Lake County’s Youth Educational Support and Success (YESS) Program and Latino Youth Initiative (LYI) program. Through biweekly meetings between January - May 2021, students will engage with devised theatre, ensemble building and creative writing techniques to instill and emphasize:

**The power and inherent artistry of their own voices/perspectives**

**Confidence in expressing/sharing those voices/perspectives**

**Responsibility to self and to the community**

**Imaginative inquiry and risk-taking**
Even though we can’t gather together at our stunning theatre, our Front of House team is still hard at work developing ways to make your experience with our digital programming fulfilling and special. To that end, we’ve created these cocktails (and mocktail!) using ingredients that are easy to find or you may already have in your house, and we hope they bring you some holiday cheer while you watch TWO SCROOGES, comfortably at home.

We so look forward to welcoming you back. But for now, mix yourself one of these delicious drinks and lean forward and engage with our TWO SCROOGES performances!
Cratchit’s Compound

2 oz Bourbon
1 oz Fresh Lemon Juice
2-4 tsp Maple Syrup, to taste
Pinch of Ground Cinnamon

Fill a cocktail shaker about 2/3 full with ice. Pour in bourbon, lemon juice, maple syrup and ground cinnamon. Fasten lid and shake well. Pour into glass with ice.
Scrooge Driver

2 oz Vodka  
3 oz Orange Juice  
1 oz Amaretto  
1 oz Lime Juice  
1.5 oz Cinnamon Syrup*

In a tall glass with ice, combine vodka, amaretto and orange juice. Stir. Add lime and cinnamon syrup; top with more ice. Garnish with an orange wheel and cinnamon stick. Enjoy!

*Cinnamon simple syrup: In a small saucepan, add 2 cups of water and 4 cinnamon sticks and bring to a boil. Simmer for 10 minutes and strain out the cinnamon sticks. Bring water back to boil, add 1.5 cups of sugar and stir until dissolved. Cool
Signature Mocktail:

Tiny Tim’s Punch

4 cups Cranberry Juice
2 cups Strongly-brewed Black Tea (Bigelow Constant Comment works wonderfully!)
1 bottle Sparkling Red Grape Juice
1 Orange, sliced
1 cup Fresh Cranberries
5 Cinnamon Sticks

In a pitcher of ice, pour in cranberry juice, brewed tea and sparkling red grape juice and mix to combine. Add orange slices, cranberries and cinnamon sticks. Stir. Serve in glasses filled with ice. Garnish with an orange slice, cranberries and cinnamon stick.
WELCOME TO STREAMING!

How and Where to Access Your Digital Season Package Content

I AM A: **SUBSCRIBER**

INCLUDED AT NO ADDITIONAL COST

- The Green Room
- Something Wicked
- Two Scrooges: A Christmas Carol, Two Ways
- Ride Share
- The Last Match
- Pearl’s Rollin’ With the Blues
- Maurice

I AM A: **MEMBER**

INCLUDED AT NO ADDITIONAL COST

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As a Member, see what you want, when you want. Use your 4 Member tickets however you choose: one for each of the four subscription productions, all four for one show, or somewhere in-between. You will receive an email when it is time to book tickets for each production if you choose to.
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

We understand that for the time being how you access Writers Theatre has changed. We’re here to help you understand all the benefits that are included in your season package to help you make the most of your purchase!

What productions will be streamed for the 2020/21 Season?
The newly added remote programs include an exclusive online interview series The Green Room, Something Wicked: Storytelling for Halloween, and two unique, paired interpretations of A Christmas Carol. Ride Share is a uniquely exciting production that has been specifically written, designed and directed to be a streamed at-home digital experience. It is possible that The Last Match and other productions might become digital, pending updates to news surrounding the pandemic.

Does WT have any plans to announce production dates?
We will aim to announce production dates at least 8 weeks before performances begin for each production.

I’m having trouble accessing streaming content. Who can help me when I am stuck?
We encourage all Season Package Holders to call the Writers Theatre Box Office when experiencing technical difficulties. The Box Office is open Monday through Saturday, 12 – 5pm. If you are struggling outside of Box Office hours or you prefer not to make a phone call, you can visit writerstheatre.org/streaming for listed instructions, tutorials and general troubleshooting tips.
PREPARING TO RETURN

Our multipronged approach to reopening at Writers Theatre

At Writers Theatre, your health and safety is our first priority. Our responsive producing model for the 2020/21 Season allows us to wait and only reopen for live performances when it is safe to do so for our artists, staff and audiences.

Our facilities and audience services teams have been hard at work for months researching and planning for the best ways to maintain healthy practices at the theatre once the threat of COVID-19 is reduced enough to reopen.

To that end, we have developed a three-pronged strategy for reopening:
Preparation

• We have already been hard at work researching best practices for the industry
• We are in the process of stocking up on the necessary materials to enact safety procedures
• We are in the process of educating our staff, artists and audiences about how to stay safe and healthy at WT

Protection

• We are upgrading our equipment in our spaces to reduce risk, including updated air filtration technology and touchless appliances
• We are modifying our space by installing additional partitions at the Box Office and hand sanitizing stations throughout
• We are making plans to clean and disinfect all areas on an increased schedule

Protocol

• We will be implementing staggered schedules for all who use WT facilities to cut down on unnecessary crowding
• We will enforce practices that reduce risk such as mask-wearing, physical distancing and temperature checks
• We will be providing regular updates to you, the patron, when we are able to confirm additional specific steps that keep you safe

It is important to note that the plans outlined above will change and evolve as more information and guidelines become available through federal, state and local governments, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and public health organizations over the coming months. We will continue to update our plans appropriately and we will share more specific information with you as we get closer to first performances.