

2021/2022  
SEASON

ST. LOUIS' PREMIER THEATER  
FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

An illustration of a nun in a green habit and a young girl in a yellow shirt and orange pants. The girl is holding a flashlight that illuminates the title 'Digging Up Dessa' written in a cursive font on a yellow rectangular background. The nun is pointing towards the title.

*Digging  
Up  
Dessa*

BY  
**LAURA  
SCHELLHARDT**

PRODUCED BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT  
WITH DRAMATIC PUBLISHING

DIRECTED BY **JULIA FLOOD**

**OCTOBER 17 – NOVEMBER 7, 2021**

**LIVE AT THE  
GRANDEL THEATRE**

**VIRTUAL PRODUCTION  
STREAMING AT  
[metroplays.org](https://metroplays.org)**

# WELCOME TO METRO THEATER COMPANY'S PRODUCTION OF *DIGGING UP DESSA*

**What a delight to be back on the Grandel Theatre stage and to share this beautiful play with all of you!**

Laura Schellhardt's *Digging Up Dessa* is centered on a 12-year-old scientist. Dessa is much like many of the young people in our audience today - smart, strong, passionate, and struggling to find her way in a world that has shifted irrevocably away from what it once was.

Dessa uses the scientific method to embark on this journey mentored along the way by a paleontologist who died in 1847, Mary Anning, whose first scientific breakthrough also came at age 12. With Mary's help, Dessa uncovers an important truth, one that resonates with many of us during this time — that we must honor what came before, but that to survive and thrive, we must connect with and support each other. We must adapt.

A huge thank you to the *Digging Up Dessa* team. Theatre is a collaborative art form and collaborating during a pandemic is complicated. Your work is deeply appreciated.

*And heartfelt thanks to all of you for taking this journey with us.*



**JULIA FLOOD**  
Artistic Director,  
Metro Theater Company

**Whether you are reading this program before seeing *Digging Up Dessa* at the Grandel Theatre or streaming from home, please know how glad we are that you are here with us as we celebrate the start of our 49th season – and our return to indoor performances.** While the lasting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has changed so much about how our families come together to experience theater, know that one thing it has not changed is our commitment to you. Metro Theater Company will always be here to ensure that the young people in our region – and now, again through streaming, across the globe – can have access to stories that reflect their lives, inspire their future, and trust in their potential to make our world a better place. But none of that would be possible without you, our audiences and our supporters who share in the confidence that the right story at the right moment in a young person's life can be truly life-changing. We hope you enjoy today's performance.



**JOE GFALLER**  
Managing Director,  
Metro Theater Company



# Digging Up Dessa

## THE CAST

(in alphabetical order)

### DESSA

Rae Davis

### NILO

John Katz

### ESTHER

Alicia Revé Like

### MARY ANNING

Lizi Watt

## PRODUCTION TEAM

### DIRECTOR

Julia Flood

### SCENIC & COSTUME DESIGNER

Louis Bird

### LIGHTING DESIGNER

Catherine Adams

### SOUND DESIGNER

Rusty Wandall

### STAGE MANAGER

Sarah Rugo

### PRODUCTION STAGE MANAGER

Jimmy Bernatowicz

### TECHNICAL DIRECTOR

Erik Kuhn

### PROPERTIES MASTER

Katie Orr

### SCENIC PAINTER

Cristie Johnston

### COMPOSER

Deborah Wicks La Puma

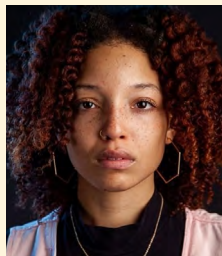
### ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER

Keating

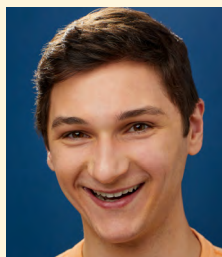
### HOUSE MANAGER

Cameron Tyler

# CAST BIOGRAPHIES



**RAE DAVIS (Dessa)** returns to Metro Theater Company after her debut as Patina in Idris Goodwin's *Ghost*. Some of Rae's past roles include Ermina in *Crumbs from the Table of Joy* (freeFall Theatre), Nessa in *District Merchants* (New Jewish Theatre), Kim in *Cold* (Tesseract Theatre Company), and multiple roles in Mustard Seed Theatre's *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*. Her film credits are *Guilty Wound* (Five Star Pictures) and *A Mother's Will* (Fortes Lopez Films). With more than 25 years of experience, the Kansas City native has been singing for much of her life. She has a Bachelor of Arts in theatre from the University of Missouri in Columbia.



**JOHN KATZ (Nilo)** is thrilled to make his Metro Theater Company debut! Other St. Louis credits include Tony Elliot in *Billy Elliot* (COCA), Neleus in Disney's *Mary Poppins* (Variety Theatre), and Moth in *Love's Labour's Lost: The Musical* (Webster Conservatory). John has also performed at Grandstreet Theatre in Montana, Stagedoor Manor in New York, and at the International Thespian Festival with Oscar and Tony award-winning songwriters Benj Pasek and Justin Paul. John recently graduated from the Conservatory of Theatre Arts at Webster University with a B.F.A. in musical theatre. He is currently a trainee at The Big Muddy Dance Company in St. Louis. Check out [john-katz.com](http://john-katz.com) for more content or follow John on Instagram: [@johnTkatz3](https://www.instagram.com/johnTkatz3)



# CAST BIOGRAPHIES



**ALICIA REVÉ LIKE (Esther)** returns to Metro Theater Company where she was last seen in *Ghost, It's a Wonderful Life, The Hundred Dresses, and Wonderland: Alice's Rock & Roll Adventure*. Like is a proud graduate of the University of Missouri in Columbia with a B.A. in music. Other regional credits include *Peter and the Wolf* (St. Louis Symphony Orchestra), *To Kill a Mockingbird, Puss in Boots* (The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis), *Billy Elliot* (COCA), *Miss Julie, Clarissa and John* (The Black Rep), *The Wiz* (Coterie Theatre, Kansas City, MO), and *The Gringo* (Fly North Theatricals). Like is currently the host of the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra's on-demand videos series SLSO SoundLab, discussing how music can be heard, felt, and seen. [aliciareve.com](http://aliciareve.com)



**LIZI WATT (Mary Anning)** returns to St. Louis after 17 years in Boulder and Los Angeles, where she studied contemporary performance (M.F.A., Naropa University) and worked as a director, educator, performer, and writer. Some performance credits include *Alarm* at Blue Roof Studios (LA), *Daedalus' Daughter* at REDCAT (LA), *Hamlet* with Prison Performing Arts (featured on *This American Life*), *Weetzie Bat* at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, two and a half years touring with Metro Theater Company (US and Taiwan), *The Lysistrata Project* (part of the Global Peace Initiative) and *Big Love* and *Midsummer Night's Dream* with Boulder/Denver-based theatre, Band of Toughs. She is the author of *House of Daughters, It's a Girl, and Mama*, a solo performance piece. She has also contributed to many devised works, including *Saltwater* with the International Theatre Collective, *The Blind Watchmaker* at the Bug Theatre, and *(Re)Production* at FoolsFURY. Lizi has taught at New York University's Experimental Theater Wing, Naropa University, Rhodes College, the William Inge Theatre Festival, the National Alliance of Acting Teachers: Teacher Development Program, Marlborough School, COCA, and has regional directing credits across the country.



# PRODUCTION BIOGRAPHIES

**LOUIS BIRD (Scenic & Costume Designer)** is pleased to return to Metro Theater Company to design *Digging Up Dessa*. Other designs for Metro Theater Company include *It's a Wonderful Life*, *The Hundred Dresses*, *Bud, Not Buddy*, *Hans Brinker and the Silver Skates*, *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane*, *And In This Corner: Cassius Clay*, *Afflicted: Daughters of Salem*, *Jackie & Me*, *Unsorted*, *Super Cowgirl and Mighty Miracle*, *Battledrum*, *Tomato Plant Girl*, *The Giver*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Go, Dog. Go!*, *New Kid*, and *Hana's Suitcase*. Louis' many design credits include STAGES St. Louis, The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, Imaginary Theatre Company, and St. Louis Shakespeare Festival. Louis is associate professor at Saint Louis University, where he teaches costume design and construction as well as stage combat.

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**CATHERINE ADAMS (Lighting Designer)** is thrilled to return for her fifth production with Metro Theater Company. She is a graduate of the Conservatory of Theatre Arts at Webster University and holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts in lighting design. Some of her design credits include *The Glass Menagerie* (Tennessee Williams Festival St. Louis), *It's a Wonderful Life* (Metro Theater Company), *Urinetown*, and *Canfield Drive* (both with Webster Conservatory). [catherinecadams.com](http://catherinecadams.com)

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**RUSTY WANDALL (Sound Designer)** returns to Metro Theater Company for *Digging Up Dessa* after serving as sound consultant for *The Very Hungry Caterpillar Show* and sound designing for *It's a Wonderful Life*. He is currently head of sound design at Webster University and the sound supervisor at The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis. In 2016, Rusty was honored with the St. Louis Theater Circle Award for his work on *Antony and Cleopatra* with St. Louis Shakespeare Festival. He has also worked with Variety Children's Theatre, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, HotCity Theatre, and Mustard Seed Theatre in St. Louis, as well as theatres across the country. Rusty holds a Master of Fine Arts in sound design from the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

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**SARAH RUGO (Stage Manager)** is so happy to be working in the theatre again as well as with Metro Theater Company. She has missed theatre so much during the pandemic hiatus! After serving as production manager for MTC from Fall 2004 to Spring 2017, Sarah took some time off to raise her young son. She returned to MTC in the 2019-20 Season to stage manage *It's a Wonderful Life* and *Ghost*. Sarah earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts in musical theatre from Shenandoah Conservatory in Virginia, followed by a stage management internship with Lexington Children's Theatre before moving to St. Louis to work for MTC. In addition to taking MTC's touring productions to hundreds of local and regional schools and community centers, Sarah has overseen its mainstage productions in venues such as the Grandel Theatre (*It's a Wonderful Life*, *Ghost*), Missouri History Museum (*And In This Corner: Cassius Clay*, *Afflicted: Daughters of Salem*, *Battledrum*), Wydown Middle School (*The Boy Who Loved Monsters and the Girl Who Loved Peas*), Clayton High School (*Interrupting Vanessa*), the West County YMCA (*Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse*), COCA (*Go, Dog. Go!*), and the Edison Theatre (*Hana's Suitcase*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Giver*, and *Jackie and Me*). Her other favorites include *Earth Songs*, *New Kid*, and *Delilah's Wish*. In past years, Sarah spent her summers stage managing for Union Avenue Opera. She has also worked for Opera Theatre of Saint Louis and Shenandoah Summer Music Theatre.

# PRODUCTION BIOGRAPHIES

**JIMMY BERNATOWICZ (Production Stage Manager)** is a stage manager, director, and producer, who has worked with Metro Theater Company in various capacities before joining the staff full time in 2021. He has stage managed MTC's productions of *Frida Libre*, *The Hundred Dresses*, *The Girl Who Swallowed a Cactus*, *Jacked!*, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar Show*, and *Say Something, Do Something*. He has also worked in other roles at MTC as house manager, props master, and audience outreach coordinator. He served as production stage manager for COCA's *Suffer the Children* and *Billy Elliot*. Jimmy has stage managed with other institutions, including Equally Represented Arts, Prison Performing Arts, St. Louis Shakespeare Festival, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, and Indiana University Jacobs School of Music. He directed, wrote, and produced Post-Romantics' premiere production of *Doomsday Faust*. He is a graduate of Saint Louis University, holding a B.A. in theater and English.

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**ERIK KUHN (Technical Director)** is a St. Louis-based actor, technician, and stage combatant. While working in the scene shop at Washington University in St. Louis, he also began serving as a technical director for various student projects and developed an interest in working in technical theater, while continuing to study acting. After graduating with his degree in drama, he also began studying stage combat with the Society of American Fight Directors and Dueling Arts International. As a freelance theater professional, he has served as a technical director, designer, carpenter, electrician, fight director, stage combat instructor, and actor on innumerable productions and workshops with educational institutions and professional companies across St. Louis. He first worked with Metro Theater Company as assistant technical director to Nick Kryah on 2012's *Jackie and Me*. After that production, he continued to contract with the company in various capacities before joining the Metro Theater Company staff full time in 2017. In most recent seasons, Erik served as production manager and technical director for *The Girl Who Swallowed a Cactus*, *It's a Wonderful Life*, *Ghost*, and *The Very Hungry Caterpillar Show*.

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**KATIE ORR (Properties Master)** is a designer, painter, theatre-marketing aficionado, and graduate from Stephens College. As a theatre advocate and native St. Louisan, it's her passion to highlight local theatre. She believes there are many incredible, unsung companies, which is why she came back to St. Louis to further her mission as a committed designer, artist, and advocate in the St. Louis community. Katie's design credits include *Brighton Beach Memoirs* (New Jewish Theatre), *Dress the Part* (The Q Brothers – St. Louis Shakespeare Festival), *It's a Wonderful Life* (Metro Theater Company), *Tiny Beautiful Things* (Max & Louie Productions), and *Forgottonia* (Fly North Theatricals). [katiemicorr.com](http://katiemicorr.com)

# PRODUCTION BIOGRAPHIES

**DEBORAH WICKS LA PUMA (Composer)** is a composer, music director, orchestrator, and one of today's most produced Theatre for Young Audiences artists. Her works include *Frida Libre* with playwright Karen Zacarías, *She Persisted* with playwright Adam Tobin, and *Elephant and Piggie's "We are In A Play!"* with bestselling children's author Mo Willems. She received her master's degree in composition from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, her bachelor's degree from Stanford University, and studied folk music with ethnomusicologist Alfredo López Mondragón. Her honors include an Off-Broadway Alliance Award for Best Family Musical, the Jane Chambers Playwriting Award, an NEA New American Works Grant, two Parents' Choice Awards, and a Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding Musical Adaptation. A proud Mexican American and "Navy brat" who grew up in Brazil, Portugal, and California, La Puma is a member of TYA/USA and The Dramatists Guild. [crunchynotes.com](http://crunchynotes.com)

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**KEATING (Assistant Stage Manager)** is a theatre artist in St. Louis, co-artistic director of Poor Monsters, and the communications director at Equally Represented Arts (ERA). They are completing an M.F.A. in arts management and leadership from Webster University. Keating created and directed *Classic Mystery Game* with Slightly Askew Theatre Ensemble (SATE) in 2019 and performed with St. Louis Shakespeare Festival in *Love's Labors Lost*. They are thrilled to work with MTC again after performing in *Talkin' Trash* and *And In This Corner: Cassius Clay*.

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**CAMERON TYLER (House Manager)** joins Metro Theater Company as house manager for *Digging Up Dessa* before making his MTC stage debut later this season in the ensemble of *Last Stop on Market Street*. Some of Cameron's past roles include Roger in *Grease* (Paul Bunyan Playhouse), Donkey in *Shrek* (MBU Theatre and Larry D. Clark Summer Repertory Theatre), and Billy in *Anything Goes* (Missouri Baptist University). Cameron is a native of southeast Missouri, where he grew up in the Jackson-Cape Girardeau area. He is a recent graduate from Missouri Baptist University, where he received a Bachelor of Music in musical theatre.





# MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT

## LAURA SCHELLHARDT



**Laura Schellhardt is a playwright and adaptor.** Her original works include *Upright Grand*, *Air Guitar High*, *Auctioning the Ainsleys* (Jeff Award Nominee), *The Apothecary's Daughter*, *How to Remove Blood From a Carpet*, *The K of D* (Jeff Award Nominee, 2010 NYC Fringe Festival Best New Play Award), *Courting Vampires*, *Shapeshifter*, *Inheritance*, and *Je Ne Sais Quoi*. Adaptations include *The Phantom Tollbooth*, *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick*, *The Outfit* (Jeff Award Nominee), and *Creole Folktales*. She is also the author of *Screenwriting for Dummies*.



Schellhardt is a recipient of the TCG National Playwriting Residency, the Jerome Fellowship, the New Play Award from ACT in Seattle, and a Dramatist Guild Playwriting Fellowship. She has participated in the SoHo Rep Writer/Director Lab, the Women Playwrights Festival at SRC, The Kennedy Center's New Visions/New Voices Festival, The Bonderman TYA Symposium, and the O'Neill National Playwright's Festival. She received her graduate degree from Brown University, under the tutelage of Paula Vogel. Schellhardt oversees the undergraduate playwriting initiative in the Department of Theatre at Northwestern University.

[communication.northwestern.edu/faculty/LauraSchellhardt](http://communication.northwestern.edu/faculty/LauraSchellhardt)



# METRO THEATER COMPANY LEADERSHIP

## **JULIA FLOOD** (Artistic Director / Director, *Digging Up Dessa*)

has directed *The Very Hungry Caterpillar Show*, *It's a Wonderful Life*, *The Girl Who Swallowed a Cactus*, *The Hundred Dresses*, *Frida Libre*, *Bud, Not Buddy*, *Hans Brinker and the Silver Skates*, *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane*, *And In This Corner: Cassius Clay*, *Out of the Box*, *Talkin' Trash*, *Afflicted: Daughters of Salem*, *Unsorted*, and *Say Something, Do Something!* for Metro Theater Company since she moved to St. Louis to become artistic director in February 2014. Previously, Julia spent 16 years as artistic director of Eckerd Theater Company in Clearwater, Florida where she commissioned such plays as *Vote?*, by Eric Coble, provoked by Florida's role in the 2000 presidential election, and *Battledrum* by Doug Cooney with Lee Ahlin, a musical about the effects of war on young people through the lens of Civil War drummer boys, subsequently produced at Metro Theater Company. A graduate of Northwestern University, Julia spent seven years as a resident member of the Bloomsburg Theatre Ensemble in Pennsylvania, a unique artist-led ensemble founded under the guidance of legendary acting teacher Alvina Krause, before following a freelance career as actor/director/playwright/teacher. Julia served on the national board of directors of Theatre for Young Audiences/USA from 2011 to 2019, and brings more than 40 years of experience to her role as artistic director of Metro Theater Company.



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## **JOE GFALLER** (Managing Director) joined the Metro Theater

Company team in 2019. During his tenure to date, Metro Theater Company has seen dramatic growth in both its audience base and its donor base. In partnership with Artistic Director Julia Flood, he has co-led the company through its recent evolutions during the COVID-19 pandemic, from its virtual programming to its safe return to live performances. Prior to joining the MTC team, Joe received national recognition for his work in building young, diverse, and national audiences for Opera Theatre of Saint Louis during his tenure as director of marketing and public relations – and for expanding OTSL's civic footprint as the producer of the company's Opera Tastings series, through artist community tours, and the creation and growth of its Engagement + Inclusion Task Force. His career has also included roles with the American Repertory Theater, the Alliance Theater, and 7 Stages, and consulting projects for the National Blues Museum, the Utah Symphony, and the documentary film *Flint: The Poisoning of an American City*. He has directed over two dozen professional or university productions, including regional premieres by David Mamet, Caryl Churchill, and others. A graduate of Harvard University, he also serves as adjunct faculty at Webster University in the Arts Management and Leadership MFA program.





# Digging Up Dessa

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# CONTRIBUTIONS

We are grateful for the generous support of so many in our community. Without you, Metro Theater Company's work would not be possible. We include a list of all supporters who have made contributions or pledges between January 1, 2020 and October 11, 2021.

We regret any inadvertent omissions from this list. If you made a pledge or a gift and do not see your name listed here, please contact Managing Director Joe Gfaller at [joe@metroplays.org](mailto:joe@metroplays.org).

## THE CAROL NORTH NICHOLAS KRYAH SOCIETY

The Carol North and Nicholas Kryah Benefactor Society was established to honor four decades of leadership by Artistic Director Carol North and Resident Artist Nicholas Kryah.

Members of the Benefactor Society contribute a minimum of \$1000 annually to ensure that Carol and Nicholas' legacy of meaningful artistic work for young audiences continues to grow.

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Inspired by the intelligence and emotional wisdom of young people, we create professional theater, foster inclusive community, and nurture meaningful learning through the arts.

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Metro Theater Company is a professional theater for young people and families and a not-for-profit 501(c)3 organization. It is a proud member of the Theatre Communications Group (the national service organization for non-profit professional theaters), Theatre for Young Audiences/USA (the U.S. chapter of the international association of theaters for young people), and Missouri Citizens for the Arts, as well as a proud Cultural Partner of the School District of Clayton. Metro Theater Company receives financial assistance from the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency; Missouri Arts Council, a state agency; Missouri Humanities Council, a state agency; the Regional Arts Commission; the Arts and Education Council; and numerous corporations, foundations, and individuals.

COVER ART BY TANIA YAKUNOVA [YAKUNOVA.COM](http://YAKUNOVA.COM)

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These questions are great to use on ride home or any time after you have watched the performance!

1. Mary Anning is Dessa's hero. Who is one of your heroes?  
.....
2. Have you ever had to start over in a new place? Maybe it was a new school, or a new club or extracurricular activity. What made you feel welcome or unwelcome?  
.....
3. Dessa and her mom have a hard time talking with each other for most of the play. Have you ever had a hard time talking to your parents or caregivers?  
.....
4. Dessa and Nilo become friends, but still fight sometimes. How do they handle their disagreements? How do you deal with arguments with your friends?  
.....
5. Dessa feels a lot of anger during the play, and struggles with how to deal with it. How do you cope with your anger?  
.....
6. One thing Dessa is frustrated about is that women in the sciences are underrepresented – in other words, there aren't as many women with science careers as there are men. Can you think of any other examples where certain identities are underrepresented? Why might it matter to be aware of when people are underrepresented?  
.....
7. Even though she makes mistakes, Dessa's mom always has her back. Who's someone who always has your back?  
.....
8. Why do you think Dessa chooses to talk to Mary Anning instead of her mom, or her friends from her old school?  
.....
9. When Nilo tries to tell Dessa that he gets how she feels about wanting to pursue science when it's rare to hear about women scientists, she says, "you do not GET that... You can say you HEAR that, IF in fact you hear that." What does Dessa mean by that?  
.....