

BILLY STRAYHORN: *SOMETHING TO LIVE FOR*

Founded by John Houseman and Margot Harley, The Acting Company seeks to develop emerging actors and build enthusiastic, knowledgeable audiences for the theater in towns across the United States. The Acting Company has launched the careers of nearly 500 actors, including Kevin Kline, Patti LuPone, Mary Lou Rosato, Keith David, Rainn Wilson, Lorraine Toussaint, Frances Conroy, Harriet Harris, Lisa Banes, Jeffrey Wright, Hamish Linklater, Jesse L. Martin, Roslyn Ruff, Jimonn Cole, and Kelley Curran.

Among many accolades, the Company received the 2003 Tony Award for Excellence in the Theater, and recently won the 2019 Audelco Award for Best Play for its production of Nambi E. Kelley's *Native Son* directed by Seret Scott.

Since 1972, The Acting Company has performed for over four million people in 48 states, 10 foreign countries, on and Off-Broadway, and at leading resident theaters including The Guthrie and The Kennedy Center. New works commissioned by the company include plays by William Finn, Marcus Gardley, Rebecca Gilman, John Guare, Beth Henley, Tony Kushner, Lynn Nottage, Meg Miroshnik, Ntozake Shange, Maria Irene Fornés, Spalding Gray, Marsha Norman, Charles Smith, Samm-Art Williams, and Wendy Wasserstein.

Music and Lyrics by
Billy Strayhorn

Written by
Rob Zellers with Kent Gash

Musical Direction by
Matthew Whitaker

Directed by
Kent Gash

March 6, 2023

The Acting Company

Kent Gash, Artistic Director
Erik Schroeder, Managing Director
Devin Brain, Producing Director

by special arrangement with
Steven Tabakin/Swee Pea LLC

presents

Billy Strayhorn: Something to Live For

Music and Lyrics by Billy Strayhorn
Written by Rob Zellers with Kent Gash
Matthew Whitaker, Music Director
Directed by Kent Gash

Featuring

Charl Brown*, Sidney Dupont*, Cory Jeacoma*,
Keziah John-Paul*, J.D. Mollison*, Alphonso Walker, Jr.*,
Allan K. Washington*, and Tatiana Wechsler*

Ellie Handel*, Production Stage Manager
Olivia Fletcher, Assistant Stage Manager

Ilya Osachuk, Bassist
Issac Harlan, Copyist

Rebecca Satzberg, Production Sound Engineer

Casting by Tara Rubin Casting/Merri Sugarman, CSA

This performance is underwritten by
Abigail Klem Spector & Warren Spector



CHARL BROWN*

Aaron Bridges

Charl Brown was nominated for a Tony Award for Best Featured Actor in a Musical for his role as Smokey Robinson in *Motown the Musical*; he reprised this role opening London’s West End production in 2016. He is also featured on the Grammy-nominated Original Broadway Cast recording. Other credits include *Jersey Boys* on Broadway and Las Vegas (Hal Miller), *Sister Act*, Broadway (Officer Eddie Souther, TJ, Pablo U/S, Ensemble), *Hair*, (Hud), European Tour. Favorite Regional Credits; *Ragtime* (Coalhouse Walker Jr), Moonlight Stage; *Smokey Joe’s Cafe* (Adrian) The Muny; *The Who’s Tommy* (Captain Walker), Denver Center; *Ever After* (Captain Laurent), Paper Mill Playhouse; *The Who’s Tommy* (The Specialist) and *Children of Eden* in Concert (Adam/Noah), Kennedy Center; *Johnny Baseball* (Tim Wyatt) ART. TV: “FBI,” “Evil,” “Madam Secretary.” Charl is a proud graduate of the University of Southern California School of Dramatic Arts.



SIDNEY DUPONT*

Mercer Ellington

Sidney Dupont is a 2022 Tony Award nominee, originating the role of Washington Henry in *Paradise Square* at the Barrymore Theater. He made his Broadway debut in *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical*, and continued with the 1st National Tour and Australian Company. Other National Tours include *Memphis: the Musical* and *A Chorus Line*. DuPont has also appeared in regional productions all over the country including the world premiere of *Paradise Square* at Berkeley Repertory Theatre (TBA nomination), *Man of La Mancha* (The Shakespeare Theater), *In the Heights* (The Geva Theater), and *Gypsy* (North Carolina Theater). Television/Commercial: “FBI: Most Wanted” (CBS) & Cartier. DuPont has also stepped behind the scenes as a director, choreographer, cinematographer, and award-winning screenwriter. Who am I?...I am the conclusion of my Ancestors’ story and I am the prologue to my descendants wildest dreams.



CORY JEACOMA*

Lennie Hayton / Mickey Scrima / Sailor

Cory Jeacoma is an actor and musician who has appeared on both stage and screen. Jeacoma was recently seen as a series regular on CW’s sci-fi drama, “4400,” and can currently be seen recurring on the hit Starz series, “Power Book II: Ghost,” now in its third season. On stage, Jeacoma has been seen starring on and off Broadway in hit shows such as *Jersey Boys* and *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical*.



KEZIAH JOHN-PAUL*

Lillian Strayhorn / Ivie Anderson

Keziah John-Paul is a proud graduate of NYU Tisch’s New Studio and The Duke Ellington School of the Arts. She is currently in the cast of *The Book of Mormon* on Broadway. As a singer, songwriter, and rapper, she performs with her band, The Blackstarz, in NYC. Favorite roles: *The Wild Party* (Kate), *Broadway at the White House* (Ensemble), *The Seven* (DJ). With an abundance of love to Mom, family, friends and teachers, she’s thrilled to be a part of the reading of *Something to Live For*.



J.D. MOLLISON*

Duke Ellington

J.D. Mollison Productions with The Acting Company: *X or Betty Shabazz vs. The Nation, Julius Caesar, Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Other past productions: *Octet*, (Signature Theater NYC, Berkeley Rep.), *Black Odyssey* (CalShakes), *Moby Dick* (A.R.T.), *A Winter's Tale* (Public Works DTC), *Venice* (Public Theater), *A Civil War Christmas* (NYTW), *Les Misérables* (Broadway Revival), *The Box* (The Foundry), *Iphigenia 2.0* (Signature Theater), *Greater Angels* (EPbB), *Avenue X* (Dreamlight), *Monstrosity* (13P), *Jelly's Last Jam* (Alliance Theatre, Suzi Bass Award). Audio: *Hands Up* (National Black Theater), *King Lear* (PlayOn Podcasts). TV: "Godfather of Harlem," "Shameless," "Madam Secretary," "SVU," "Shades of Blue," Training: Carnegie Mellon University.



ALPHONSO WALKER, JR.*

Stage Directions

Alphonso Walker Jr. is an American actor, producer and writer from Buffalo, NY. He is based in NYC and holds a degree in Psychology with a special interest in motivational speaking. TV credits include: "Law & Order", "Blue Bloods", "The Equalizer" and "Wu-Tang: An American Saga" . Alphonso currently has two Broadway credits: *Pass Over* and *The Skin of Our Teeth*.

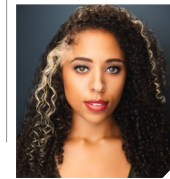
He is Pro-Black, enjoys John Coltrane and promotes mental health advocacy with goals of inspiring the world through storytelling.



ALLAN K. WASHINGTON*

Billy Strayhorn

Allan K. Washington Television: "Survival of the Thickest" (Netflix), "The SpongeBob Musical: Live on Stage" (Nickelodeon), "The Deuce" (HBO), "High Fidelity" (Hulu). Additional Television: "SpongeBob SquarePants Birthday Special" (Nickelodeon), "2019 Kids' Choice Awards" (Nickelodeon) and the "2018 Tony Awards" (CBS). Broadway: *SpongeBob SquarePants: The Broadway Musical* (Original Broadway Cast) and *Once on This Island* (2017 revival). Off-Broadway: *In the Southern Breeze* (Rattlestick Playwrights Theater), *A Man's A Man* (Classic Stage Company). Regional: *SpongeBob SquarePants: The Broadway Musical* (Oriental Theatre in Chicago), *Paint Your Wagon* (The Muny), *...Beautiful Room...* (Long Wharf Theatre). Training: University of North Carolina School of the Arts (B.F.A. acting). For more information, follow @allankwashington on Instagram.



TATIANA WECHSLER*

Lena Horne / Billie Holiday

Tatiana Wechsler is a Brooklyn-based actor, singer/songwriter, and creative. TAC: *X: Or...*, *Julius Caesar*, *Othello*. Broadway: *Mr. Saturday Night*. Off-Broadway/NYC: *Pericles* (Fiasco Theater); *The Golden Bride* (Folksbiene). Regional: *Love's Labor's Lost*, first woman to play Curly in *Oklahoma!* (Oregon Shakespeare Festival); *Benny & Joon* (Paper Mill Playhouse); *Love in Hate Nation* (Two River Theatre); *Legend of Georgia McBride* (Marin Theatre Company). Many readings and workshops. NYU New Studio grad. www.tatianawechsler.com

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

ELLIE HANDEL*

Production Stage Manager

Ellie Handel (she/her) is a stage manager, director, actor, and educator fueled through creating theater and mentoring theater artists to spark our industry into the 21st century. She's worked Off-Broadway on *Emojiland* (Sub PSM), *Rescue Rue* (PSM, Alex Standby), and *The Great Cat Massacre* (AD, u/s Pam/Henri). Most recently, she assistant directed the 2nd National Tour of *My Fair Lady* and was the PSM of the 1st National Tour of *Emojiland*. Directing credits include *Aussie Song* (Hudson Guild Theatre - Best Direction Nom), *90 in 90* (Teatro Latea), *As You Like It* (NYU Tisch), and virtual productions of *The Aviatrix* and *Puffs*. She holds a BFA in Drama from NYU Tisch's New Studio on Broadway, where she is profoundly honored to work alongside her former professors (shoutout to Kent Gash!) as an adjunct professor and director. Proud member of AEA and an associate member of SDC. Love always to her incredible family. See more at www.EllieHandel.com.

OLIVIA FLETCHER

Assistant Stage Manager

Olivia Fletcher is a freelance stage and company manager based in NYC. She recently worked with The Juilliard School as the Deck SM on *A Fiddler's Tale* and was the PSM on the Theodore Roosevelt Medora Foundations production of *Honky Tonk Angels*. She is excited to be working with The Acting Company on this reading after having worked on *The Misanthrope* and looks forward to continuing work with The Acting Company in the future.

KENT GASH

Director and Co-Book Writer

Kent Gash is the Artistic Director of The Acting Company, which is currently on national tour with Kirsten Childs' *The Three Musketeers* in repertory performances with *Romeo & Juliet*. Mr. Gash directed Robert O'Hara's *Barbecue* at the Public Theatre and is co-author and director of *Langston in Harlem* (2010 Audelco Awards Best Musical.) New York productions include Cori Thomas' *Lockdown* for the Rattlestick Playwrights Theater and the virtual co-production with WP Theater, *Broke-Ology*, at the Juilliard School, the Off-Broadway premiere of *Miss Evers' Boys* for Melting Pot Theatre Co., the York Theatre presentation of Ellington's *Beggar's Holiday* and the Off-Broadway revival of Samm-Art Williams' *Home*. Among nearly one hundred regional productions most recent include *Choir Boy* at Steppenwolf (winner of three Jeff Awards), Dominique Morisseau's *Paradise Blue* for City Theatre, *Master Harold ... and the boys* at Arizona Theatre Co., *Guys and Dolls* at the Guthrie, *The Wiz* at Ford's Theatre (Washington Post Ten Best, Broadway World Best Musical Award, Three Helen Hayes Awards) and August Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean* at South Coast Rep (LA Times Ten Best,) *The Mountaintop*, *Topdog/Underdog* (Elliot Norton Award-Best Director), *Ain't Misbehavin'* at Arizona Theatre Co., San Jose Rep, North Shore, Maltz Jupiter Playhouse and Trinity Rep, Tarell Alvin McCraney's *Wig Out!* for Studio Theatre, DC., *Choir Boy* at the Studio Theatre in DC, Marin Theatre Co. (Bay Area Critics Award for Best Production), and *The Comedy of Errors*, set in the Harlem Renaissance at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. Future productions for Oregon Shakespeare Festival: *The Three Musketeers* and the premiere production of *Billy Strayhorn: Something to Live For* at Pittsburgh Public Theatre. Mr. Gash is the former Associate Artistic Director of the Tony Award-winning Alliance Theatre (2001-2009) and The Alabama Shakespeare Festival (1999-2001), is an Arts Professor at Tisch School of the Arts, NYU where he is the Founding Director of the New Studio on Broadway. Mr. Gash is a graduate of the Carnegie-Mellon School of Drama (BFA in Acting) and UCLA (MFA in Directing for Theatre and Television).

ROB ZELLERS

Book

Rob Zellers' plays have been developed at Pittsburgh Public Theater, Pittsburgh Playhouse, Urban Stages, Writers Theatre of New Jersey, The Lark, PlayPenn, and the New Harmony Project. He is co-author of *The Chief*, the most successful play in Pittsburgh Public Theater's history, published by University of Pittsburgh Press and made into a feature film. Other plays: *Harry's Friendly Service* – Edgerton Award, semi-finalist O'Neill Conference, premiered Pittsburgh Public Theater 2010; *Mr. Wheeler's* – premiered Pioneer Theatre Company's 2015 Play-by-Play Series; and *Safekeeping* – semifinalist O'Neill Conference, Bay Area Playwrights Festival, and Ashland New Plays; *Redux* – zoom presentation Pittsburgh Public Theater, nominated National New Play Network. Rob was the Education Director at Pittsburgh Public Theater for over 25 years.

STEVEN TABAKIN

Lead Producer

Presently based at Triple Birch Media, Steven Tabakin has held senior producing and executive positions at Tashtego Films, The Public Theater, and Thirteen/WNET. His Public Theater producing credits include *Caroline, or Change; The Story; See What I Wanna See; Well; Embedded; Passing Strange; The Public Sings; Bring in 'Da Noise, Bring in 'Da Funk; The Wild Party; Saturn Returns; On the Town; The Tempest*; and many others.

MATTHEW WHITAKER

Music Director and Piano

Matthew Whitaker's love for playing music began at age 3 after his grandfather gave him a small Yamaha keyboard. At age 13, he became the youngest artist endorsed by Hammond. At 15 he became the youngest Yamaha Jazz Piano Artist. He is a graduate of The Juilliard School Jazz Studies program (May 2023). Matthew tours within the U.S., Europe, Asia, and Australia performing on prestigious stages such as the Apollo Theater, Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall, The Kennedy Center for The Performing Arts, and music festivals at home and internationally. He has appeared on television programs such as FOX TV's "Showtime at the Apollo", "The Today Show," "Ellen," and "60 Minutes." He has also done a television commercial for Apple. Matthew recently starred, produced, and scored the All Arts documentary *About Tomorrow*, as well as composed the original score for the film *Starkeisha*, which is currently streaming on Hulu. In 2019 & 2020, he was the winner of the ASCAP Foundation Herb Alpert Young Jazz Composers Award for original compositions "Emotions & Underground!". Matthew has three studio albums; *Outta The Box, Now Hear This*, and *Connections* where he has collaborated with Derrick Hodge, Ray Chew, Jon Batiste, Christian McBride, and Regina Carter.

THE ACTING
COMPANY

WISHES TO
ACKNOWLEDGE



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