

Commonwealth Theatre Center

Arts Programming Overview + Teaching Artist(s) Bio

WORKSHOPS

Following years of collaboration, Walden Theatre and Blue Apple Players, each founded in 1976, merged on January 1, 2015. As Commonwealth Theatre Center (CTC), the organization's mission is developing youth and our community through excellence in comprehensive theatre education and performance. CTC's Outreach and Conservatory programs provide a continuum of learning ranging from student engagement through curricula-aligned drama programs to professional theatre training and performances, offering many youth and families their first theatre experiences. With decades of research showing that students of all abilities involved in theatre have stronger gains in reading, writing, and problem-solving, as well as greater empathy and tolerance for others, CTC provides unique, outcome-based theatre programs in the midst of diminished access to art, both in school and out of school. CTC's essential functions as an arts education organization--and at the core of our mission-aligned definition of success--centers on our ability to engage youth and families with theatre education and performances. Our staff are performing arts professionals who have dedicated their expertise to teaching students and adults, as well as entertaining audiences of all ages. CTC's Blue Apple Outreach (BAO) team concentrates their efforts on outreach theatre arts education for K-12 students in Jefferson County and Southern Indiana. Our BAO staff provide quality theatre education to about 500 schools annually, covering 63 zip codes throughout the Kentuckiana region. Outreach programming includes a variety of productions that aim to provide deep connections to emotional, mental, social, and academic growth. CTC's Walden Theatre Conservatory (WTC) offers a wide range of youth and adult theatre classes to engage artists and promote excellence in the performing arts. CTC hosts a season of professionally produced theatrical plays that are open to the public to view.

Teaching Artists Bios

Heather Burns, Outreach Director - Heather joined Blue Apple Players in the spring of 2006. As Outreach Director at CTC, she oversees programming, including the design and development of new projects. Heather has led development of 6 new scripts for Blue Apple audiences. In 2014, the Governor's Office of Early Childhood invited her to be a plenary speaker at the Ready Kids Conference, where she also copresented a session on process drama in the early childhood classroom with Dr. Kathryn Whitmore, Director of the University of Louisville Early Childhood Research Center. In 2009, Heather joined Walden Theatre as a director for summer academies, including Grimm Tales, Alice's Adventures In Wonderland, Law & Order: Fairy Tale Unit, The SeussOdyssey, and Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. As a Co-Artistic Director of Le Petomane Theatre Ensemble, Heather co-created over 10 new plays. Heather is a proud alumna of the Kentucky Governor's School for the Arts. She has worked with Missoula Children's Theatre, Kentucky Shakespeare, Louisville Science Center, Frazier

History Museum, and other Louisville theatre companies. Heather holds a B.F.A. in Theatre Arts from Northern Kentucky University.

Keith McGill, Teaching Artist - Keith has been a freelance theater teacher and workshop leader for over 25 years for organizations including Shakespeare Behind Bars, Kentucky Shakespeare Festival, ArtsReach, Commonwealth Theatre Center, and Actors Theatre's New Voices playwriting program. He has a BA from the University of Louisville. He created a one-person show about civil rights entitled Nation in Crisis, as well as crafting the current version of No Turning Back. Keith directed Ghost for StageOne, several plays for Actors Theatre's New Voices Festival, and has directed for Derby City Playwrights. He has appeared in productions with Actors Theatre, Looking for Lilith, and Stage One, as well as regional and national television commercials and several films and TV series. Keith was a 2019 Hadley Creative and serves on the board of Elevator Artists Resource. Keith has also worked as a stand-up comedian for 30 years, appearing nationally on LAUGHS on Fox, and The Bob and Tom Show, CMT and BET, as well as being a featured entertainer on Holland American and Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines

Meg Caudil, Education Resource Manager - Meg joined the team as a teaching artist in 2012. She holds a B.A. in Elementary Education and the M.A. in Communications and Theatre from Morehead State University. She has worked as a box office manager and tour manager MSU's children's theatre troupe "The Little Company." In 2007, she worked as a teaching artist and tour actor for Kentucky Shakespeare. She is a proud alumna of the Kentucky Governor's Scholars Program and worked for the program for several summers.

Tessa McShane, Education Associate - Tessa graduated from Hanover College with a B.A. in Theatre. She is passionate about sharing arts education as an accessible tool for everyone. Tessa has worked extensively as a teaching artist for theatre organizations including Kentucky Shakespeare and Looking for Lilith.

Robert McFarland, independent Teaching Artist - Robert has worked as a dance choreographer, director, teacher and performer with Cleveland/San Jose Ballet, Richmond Ballet, Ballet Arizona, Sweden's Göteborgs Balett, Oregon Ballet Theatre, Eugene/Boise Ballet, and Louisville Ballet, and as a guest artist with Ft. Worth Ballet. He has taught dance and yoga, worked as a vocalist with Motherlodge, as well as staying active directing, choreographing and performing with local organizations including Louisville Ballet, Actors' Theater of Louisville, Kentucky Shakespeare, and more. Through the course of his 18 year professional dance career, he worked in every imaginable strata and permutation of dance, theater and opera, performing in middle-school cafeteriums and major venues (including featured roles with the New York City, Santa Fe and Metropolitan Opera companies.

Brooke Morrison – is a multidisciplinary visual and performance artist from Louisville, Kentucky. After moving to Seattle, Washington to earn her B.F.A. in Original Works, Brooke worked with experimental and regional Theaters and Pacific NorthWest musicians, dancers, actors and visual artists to create immersive multimedia performances. Brooke also uses her Kentucky roots as inspiration for plays and characters, one being an ongoing Solo Performance project called "Merdle Sprinkley's Big Show" where

Brooke blends characterized stories and true stories from her Kentucky family across the state, performed in Seattle and Louisville. Brooke's work has been produced and/or developed by Actors Theatre of Louisville, Base Experimental Arts (Seattle, WA), Studio Current (Seattle, WA) and Cornish College of the Arts. Awards include: New Voices Playwright's Festival Recipient (Actors Theatre of Louisville). She has worked as an artistic intern at The Playwright's Center as well as Literary and Dramaturgy intern at ACT Theatre. Brooke earned a BFA in Theatre with an emphasis in Original Works from Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle, Washington.

Zach Stone, independent Teaching Artist - Zach graduated from the University of Louisville with a degree in Theatre Arts and Film Studies & Production in spring 2020. They have worked locally with Kentucky Shakespeare as a camp co-lead, with StageOne Family Theatre as a Producing Artistic intern under Idris Goodwin, and with Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park as an Improv instructor.

Lindsay Chamberlain, Resident Costume Designer - Lindsay joined the staff as resident costume designer after designing CTC shows Henry VIII, Cyrano de Bergerac, Pinocchio, A Bright Room Called Day, Henry VI Part 3, and Kafka's Metamorphosis. Lindsay began in costumes as a Halloween designer in California. When she moved to Louisville, she began designing for theatrical productions. She's worked with several local companies including Looking for Lilith, Pandora Productions, Theatre [502], Actors Theatre of Louisville, Bellarmine University, Josephine Sculpture Summerstage, and Hardin County Performing Arts. She recently designed Alice in Black and White for 59E59 Theaters in New York.

Hannah Greene, Production Associate - is a local designer who has been active in the theatre community for the last four years. They have worked primarily with Bunbury Theatre on shows including The Green Book, Grace and Glorie, Boatwright, and most recently Visiting Edna. Hannah is thrilled to be joining the Commonwealth Theatre Center community.

Artistic Content of Programming

Commonwealth Theatre Center artistic content is primarily focused on theatre education, and due to the collaborative nature of theatre, CTC occasionally has learning opportunities that include music, technical theatre, visual art, and movement/dance. Our season of professionally produced plays include both our touring plays featuring professional actors and a season of plays performed by conservatory students and occasionally professional actors. The artistic themes and styles of our productions range widely from classical theatre, American classics, contemporary theatre, and new plays. We have consistently offered a touring play focused on Black History for 10+ years, and will be doing so again this Jan-March 2023 with No Turning Back by Keith McGill (4th grade & up). During the same months, we'll be offering a touring production of The Inventive Princess of Floralee by Maggie Lou Rader (K-5). While our touring productions are primarily performed on site during the day, they are available on request for evening/weekend performances for families with advance notice. There are weekend/weeknight opportunities for all ages to attend our season productions on our Nancy Niles Sexton Stage, including The Young Playwrights Festival in February 2023, Little Women adapted by Kate Hamill in March 2023

and our Shakespeare Festival in May 2023 featuring *As You Like It*, *The Tempest*, and *Dear Brutus* by J.M. Barrie. During the summer months, we host a series of performances from our Summer Academy day camps, which regularly “sell out” to Cultural Pass families and groups requesting field trips.

The artistic content of workshops and residencies at outreach sites is more centered on student ideas. Some workshops provide themes and boundaries while others are more open for student lead creation. Our artistic content and sharing performances are built by the participants themselves through improvisation and devising theatre techniques and activities. The real “product” of workshops and residencies is the process of the experiences for students and not all end in a public performance.

CTC conservatory students complete a pre & post self assessment and an in person end of year meeting with Artistic Leadership, while their instructors measure their growth on a rubric based on 21st Century skills. More broadly, CTC tracks quantitative data regarding the enrollment, attendance and box office. We maintain relationships with alumni and collect qualitative data on both current student growth as well as alumni progress. Each year, CTC publishes a Gratitude Report featuring both qualitative and quantitative data.

Educational Content of Programming

CTC’S Blue Apple Outreach (BAO) team strives to create joyful, community-driven learning through accessible, quality arts experiences, and encouraging imaginative pathways to social & academic growth. BAO’s educational content includes theatre education as the central focus and process for learning, while connecting with original student ideas, and other academic and social emotional learning content. Our goal for a HeARTS partnership is to work with partners to craft a customized and layered series of engagement opportunities for grades K-12 to suit the interests of the community. We imagine a series of Discover Drama events, performances, workshops, and residencies that would engage students with the arts.

Program Examples Include:

Movement for Stories: Desert Discoveries

Grades K-3 / For a classroom size group / 1 hour workshop An interactive scavenger hunt that teaches students about the biome. Students will act out an original story of How the Tortoise Got Its Shell.

ARTivism

Grades 4–12 / For a classroom size group / 6 hour residency Introduces students to youth activism through the arts. Students will observe examples of prominent young leaders and identify their own issue, compile and organize information and create themed art to inspire change. Artists of all skill levels will experiment with the medium of their choice.

Emotional Literacy

Grades 4–12 / For a classroom size group / 6 hour residency Drama games, acting exercises and storytelling provide an ideal kinesthetic learning experience for introduction and establishing the foundation of Emotional Literacy.

No Turning Back by Keith McGill

Grades 4th-12th recommended/ large audience / Touring Jan - Mar 2023 A live, 2 actor performance highlighting the obstacles and triumphs of Black people using personal perspectives of Kentucky history from the 1860s to the 1970s.

The Inventive Princess of Floralee by Maggie Lou Rader

Grades K-5th recommended/ large audience / Touring Jan - Mar 2023 This 2-person, interactive, fairy tale will have your audiences “thinking like scientists” as they follow Floralee on an adventure to find the kidnapped king kept in the clutches of a wicked witch. This unique educational opportunity unites science and art with laughter, dancing, and critical thinking about STEM topics.

CTC also has experience offering classes for early childhood in dramatic play to build school readiness skills, advanced scene study for youth and adults, improvisation, playbuilding, field trips, behind the scenes and more. Outcomes measurements are designed in coordination with sites and can include assessments, surveys, discussion, etc.

Process for hiring, training, and evaluating performance/effectiveness.

CTC Outreach Director oversees hiring, training, and evaluating Blue Apple Outreach teaching artists and collaborates with various staff members on the process. To begin the process, a job description and job listing are created, proofed/reviewed by two fellow staff members and then approved by executive administration. The job listing is posted on social media, websites, and various job listing boards, as well as personally forwarded via word of mouth and individual emails to colleagues in the field. The Outreach Director reviews resumes and selects appropriate candidates for interview, which is approved by the Artistic Director. Candidates are then invited to interview and/or audition with the Outreach Director and 1-2 fellow staff members. Interviews/Auditions are assessed by the attending staff in follow up meetings, and then the Outreach Director reaches out to finalists for 3 professional references and/or follow-up materials (example: lesson plans, photos of productions, etc). The Outreach Director makes phone calls with questions to the references, and then recommends the selected staff for hire to the Artistic Director. Hiring process for permanent full-time staff members may also include a phone interview and a follow up interview for finalists. CTC is currently revising a new hiring procedure in collaboration with our DEIA committee (Diversity Equity Inclusion Access). New staff and contractors are required to pass a criminal background check and given an orientation for onboarding with the company. Blue Apple Outreach offers various training in alignment with the new personnel experience and with the specifics of our curriculum, led by staff members who developed or specialize in those curricula. The Outreach Director leads regular check-in meetings (or assigns a senior staff member to lead them) with teaching artists to measure the progress and challenges of each residency, and offer strategies and support where needed. Site staff are invited to fill out an evaluation on their residency

experience, which includes questions in regards to the teaching artists. Outreach Director conducts yearly one-on-one meetings with teaching artists to discuss growth and goals.

How are participants of all backgrounds and abilities included in programming?

In 2020, CTC formed the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Steering Committee to deepen our understanding of inclusion, identify our strengths, and to create a plan to address challenges. Our work with Carl L. Williams in 2021 was the first of many steps our board and staff have taken to expand our DEIA training and planning. Currently, our committee meets monthly and the co-chairs meet weekly to create opportunities for DEIA education. The committee's current focus is to create CTC's Cultural Equity Plan and strategic vision for DEIA. The co-chairs have implemented monthly Professional Development "Deep Dives" into DEIA topics for the staff and Board, such as white privilege in theatre, Accessibility, and neuro diversity in education. Furthermore, our board of directors and staff are actively pursuing funding for theatre productions that enable artists and crew members of different abilities to perform at CTC and/or participate in our outreach productions in schools and community centers. We are working with Tallerie McRae, Access, Inclusion and Education Consultant and former Director of Professional Development & Training at the National Disability Theatre, to improve CTC's internal DEIA culture and to expand our partnerships with community organizations. Many of the Outreach staff pursue independent DEIA studies with other organizations, both national and local. Blue Apple Outreach is committed to hiring a diverse and inclusive roster of artist educators to increase representation in stories, on stages, and in our leadership.

How do we engage teachers and community center staff before, during, and after programming?

In addition to the pre/post-surveys we conduct, CTC's BAO staff stay in contact with teachers and community center staff throughout the academic year and summer to gauge interest in programs and to facilitate outreach services that are conducive to curricula goals. Moreover, they are in direct communication with JCPS's resource development team to ensure our programming goals align with that of JCPS schools. CTC BAO staff invite partner sites/teachers to CTC events throughout the year. When planning a new residency, Outreach Director and teaching artists conduct email/phone communications for any reminders/requests, offer an orientation meeting prior to a residency start date, and reach out for informal progress updates during the course of the residency.

How do we engage participants in the creative and learning process?

Blue Apple Outreach teaching artists set the foundation of openness and connection with participants from the first moment of our work. When students file in to get seated for a performance, our actors are chatting with them as they get comfortable. Each workshop and residency begins with students seated in a circle with their peers and teaching artists, creating an open space. All Blue Apple Outreach programming offers opportunities for engagement and interaction with participants. In performances of *The Inventive Princess of Floralee*, young audiences will create the sounds of the play and help the princess solve problems. During the performance of *No Turning Back*, teaching artists engage students in

Q&A and discussion on the history and themes of the scenes/monologues. In workshops and residencies, students are actively engaged in receptive and expressive processing in following the guidance of teaching artists, observing/responding to peers, and creating drama with their own actors' tools. Most frequently in Outreach, we base our work on improvisation and devising, so that students have the opportunity to share ideas and invest their energy in creating original pieces of theatre to share. Blue Apple Outreach classroom management focuses on positive reinforcement. We strive to understand the diverse needs of the groups we work with and offer translations and variations so that we're offering an inclusive experience for all learners. There are many modes of learning and we keep a variety of games and exercises in our active vocabulary to support and challenge the students we work with so that they have fun and feel the rewards of growth.