



## American Repertory Theater

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### AMERICAN REPERTORY THEATER INVITES AUDIENCES “BEHIND THE SCENES” FOR CONVERSATIONS WITH ARTISTS MAKING WORK AT A.R.T.

New Monthly Series Begins Monday, November 16 With  
Elliot Norton Award Winner Sara Porkalob and the Team Creating “Dragon Baby,”  
the Final Play in Porkalob’s “Dragon Cycle” Trilogy

Conversations with Whitney White, Todd Almond, Lear deBessonet in December &  
Kate Hamill in January to Follow

[{Behind the Scenes Images for Download}](#)

Cambridge, MA—American Repertory Theater (A.R.T.) at Harvard University, under the leadership of Terrie and Bradley Bloom Artistic Director Diane Paulus and Executive Producer Diane Borger, announces today details about the first three events in the theater’s new **Behind the Scenes** series with the writers, directors, composers, and choreographers who are making work at the A.R.T. The multimedia events will feature songs and scenes from the shows in development; conversation about process, research, and collaboration; and interactive Q&As with the audience.

Single tickets at \$20/pay-what-you-can and ticket packages to the series priced on a sliding scale are now available at [americanrepertorytheater.org/behind-the-scenes](http://americanrepertorytheater.org/behind-the-scenes).

Following the events, ten raffle-winning ticket holders, the series sponsors, and all A.R.T. donors of \$500 or more will be eligible to continue the conversation “backstage” in the Virtual Green Room with the commissioned artists and A.R.T. staff.

#### UPCOMING “BEHIND THE SCENES” EVENTS:

##### • **DRAGON BABY** Monday, November 16 at 7:30PM

Join “theatermaker to watch” (*American Theatre*) and Elliot Norton Award-winning storyteller Sara Porkalob (*Dragon Lady*, *Dragon Mama*, 1776 upcoming), composer Brian Quijada, and director Andrew Russell (*Dragon Lady*, *Dragon Mama*), for a conversation about the development of *Dragon Baby*, the final chapter in Porkalob’s autobiographical trilogy about three generations of Filipino Americans descended from gangsters and karaoke singers fighting to survive, thrive, and love. In this interactive session, learn about the team’s collaborative process, experience never-before-heard songs from the show, and engage in an autobiographical storytelling exercise.

After traversing 50 years of faulty family memories and dark secrets from Grandma Maria’s fantastical life in *Dragon Lady* and Maria Porkalob, Jr.’s 25 years of queer love in a barren land in *Dragon Mama*, Sara challenges society’s definition of a “Great American Musical” and asks who gets to decide the standards as she writes her own story her way in *Dragon Baby*.

Prior to the event, **Behind the Scenes: *Dragon Baby*** ticket holders are encouraged to purchase a ticket to attend the virtual launch celebration of A.R.T.'s archival recording of ***Dragon Mama*** on Thursday, November 12 at 7:30PM, streaming as part of the **Virtually OBERON** series through December 10.

About ***Dragon Mama***: How does a Dragon earn her wings? Maria Porkalob, Jr. yearns for a gayer, more POC-filled life than Bremerton, WA can offer. When presented with an opportunity to make a quick fortune, Maria must make an important decision: leave her debt-ridden mother, four young siblings, and newborn daughter Sara for the wild unknown of Alaska, or stay close to home, family, and intergenerational trauma. Traversing 25 years filled with queer love in a barren land, the 2019 Elliot Norton Award-winning ***Dragon Mama*** features ghosts, Filipino gangsters, and a dope 90s R&B soundtrack.

#### • **TWO CITIES**

**Tuesday, December 1 at 7:30PM**

Join composer and writer Todd Almond (***Kansas City Choir Boy***), co-creator Lear deBessonet, and Obie and Lilly Award-winning director Whitney White (creator, ***Macbeth In Stride*** upcoming; director, ***What to Send Up When It Goes Down***), for a conversation with A.R.T. Senior Advisor For Civic Engagement and Strategic Partnerships Dayron Miles and A.R.T. Artistic Producer Mark Lunsford about ***Two Cities***, a new adaptation of Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*. At this multimedia event, explore the creative team's research for the project, experience never-before-heard songs from the show, and discover how the team is reimagining Dickens' literary classic for the stage.

*Major funding for ***Two Cities*** has been provided by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation's Playwrights Horizons Musicals in Partnership Initiative.*

#### • **THE ODYSSEY**

**Wednesday, January 6, 2021**

Writer and performer Kate Hamill (***Bedlam's Sense and Sensibility***)—*Wall Street Journal's* 2017 Playwright of the Year and one of the 10 most produced playwrights for the last three consecutive seasons—talks with A.R.T.'s Director of Artistic Programs & Dramaturg Ryan McKittrick about adapting Homer's *The Odyssey*, reexamining classic texts through a feminist lens, and centering complex female characters in her plays. Experience a scene from her new play, hear about the images, events, and research that have inspired her adaptation, and discover why she feels she has always been meant to adapt *The Odyssey*.

Hamill's adaptation of ***The Odyssey*** engages with some of the most pressing questions surrounding the trauma of war, asking how we decide who our heroes are, and how we can learn to embrace healing and forgiveness to end cycles of violence.

*Production support of **Behind the Scenes** is provided by **Alison and Bob Murchison**. The Incubator Fund for new work in development is sponsored by **Allison Johnson**.*

#### **ABOUT THE ARTISTS**

##### ***Dragon Baby***

**Sara Porkalob** (she/they) is an artist-activist and creator of the ***Dragon Cycle***. She is based in Seattle but soon will be working all over the nation. Awards and nominations include: 2020 nominee Seattle Mayor's Arts Award, *Seattle Times* "11 Movers and Shakers to Watch this

Decade", 2019 nominee for Americans for the Arts Johnson Fellowship for Artists Transforming Communities, *Seattle Magazine's* 2018's Most Influential People, and 2017 City Art's Futures List. She is a co-founder of *DeConstruct*, an online journal of intersectional performance critique. She will make her Broadway debut as Edward Rutledge in the A.R.T./Roundabout Theatre Company revival of **1776**.

***Dragon Lady***, the first in the ***Dragon Cycle*** trilogy, received three 2018 Gregory Awards: Outstanding Sound/Music Design, Outstanding Actress in a Musical, and Outstanding Musical Production. The second, ***Dragon Mama***, premiered at American Repertory Theater (A.R.T.) and received 2019 Elliot Norton Awards for Best Original Script and Best Solo Performance. A.R.T. has commissioned the third, ***Dragon Baby***, for a future season.

For the last two years, Porkalob has been a consultant for the City of Seattle and its Creative Strategies Initiative (CSI), a new City effort that uses arts- and culture-based approaches to build racial equity in non-arts policy areas like the environment, housing, workforce, and community development. Earlier this year, Cafe Nordo produced her queer Victorian revenge thriller, *The Angel in the House*, and ArtsWest will produce her new play *Alex & Alix* sometime next year. For more information, visit [SaraPorkalob.com](http://SaraPorkalob.com).

**Brian Quijada** is an actor, playwright, composer, and Artistic Director of The Wild Wind Performance Lab for New Play Development at Texas Tech University. Quijada has spent most of his career acting in Off-Broadway and Regional Theaters across the country including The Public Theater, Roundabout Theatre Company, Playwright's Realm, Ensemble Studio Theatre, Victory Gardens, and Actors Theatre of Louisville. As a playwright/composer, Brian's plays and musicals have been developed at Pittsburgh CLO's Spark Festival, Victory Garden's Ignition Festival, Ars Nova's Ant Fest, New York Stage and Film's Powerhouse Festival, The Kennedy Center's Page-to-Stage, and The O'Neill's National Musical Theatre Conference. His play *Kid Prince and Pablo*, received its World Premiere at The Kennedy Center in fall of 2019. His critically acclaimed multi-Jeff award-winning, multi-Drama Desk-nominated hip-hop solo show *Where Did We Sit in the Bus?* has toured all over the country. Commissioning institutions include 1st Stage, Seattle Repertory Theater, A.R.T., and The Kennedy Center. Quijada is a proud member of The Ensemble Studio Theatre.

**Andrew Russell** is a writer and director whose work often focuses on brave Americans who risk it all to become themselves and in doing so change the world. These musicals include *The Long Game*, based on the stories of Dorothy Kilgallen, Jack Ruby, Edward Snowden, and Laura Poitras about whistleblowers, journalism, and American truths; *Cold Turkey*, based on the 1968 Norman Lear film; *American Bounce*, based on the life of New Orleans queer bounce artist Big Freedia; *True Blood*, based on the TV and book series; *Stu for Silverton*, with lyrics and music by Breedlove, performed by Lady Gaga, about the first openly transgender mayor in America; and Sara Porkalob's Filipino-American, gender-bending gangster trilogy, the ***Dragon Cycle***.

## ***Two Cities***

**Todd Almond**, last seen at A.R.T. in his original musical ***Kansas City Choir Boy***, most recently appeared on Broadway in *Girl from the North Country*, a musical by Conor McPherson featuring the music of Bob Dylan. Almond wrote and starred in *The Tempest*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The*

*Odyssey*, all for the Public Theater's Public Works at the Delacorte Theater in Central Park with director Lear deBessonet. Other original musicals include *Girlfriend*, based on Matthew Sweet's album of the same name, *Melancholy Play*, written with Sarah Ruhl, and *Iowa*, written with Jenny Schwartz. Other New York acting credits include *Girl from the North Country* at the Public Theater, *Stage Kiss* by Sarah Ruhl at Playwrights Horizons, *People Are Wrong* at the Vineyard, *Piece of Meat* opposite Sherie Rene Scott, and "Law And Order: SVU." As a composer and orchestrator, Almond has written and arranged music for *Noises Off!* on Broadway, *Fucking A* at Signature Theatre, and *How to Transcend a Happy Marriage* at Lincoln Center Theater, Kelli O'Hara Live at Carnegie Hall, and the recent film adaptation of Michael John LaChiusa's *Hello Again*. As a musical director, Almond tours with Laura Benanti and Judy Kuhn, and recently made his PBS debut with Andrew Rannells, *Live from Lincoln Center*.

**Lear deBessonet** recently became Artistic Director of the Tony-winning Encores! series at New York City Center. From 2012 through 2020, she worked at the Public Theater, where she founded the acclaimed Public Works program and served as Resident Director for eight seasons. For the Public, she directed Disney's *Hercules*, *Miss You Like Hell*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and the Public Works' productions of *The Tempest*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Odyssey* at the Delacorte. Other directing credits include *Good Person of Szechwan* starring Taylor Mac and Lisa Kron (The Foundry Theater/The Public), Suzan-Lori Parks' *Venus* (Signature Theater), *Pump Boys and Dinettes* (Encores! Off-Center), and *Big River* (Encores!). Her directing work has received an Obie Award, Lortel Award, Lilly Award, and multiple Drama Desk nominations.

**Whitney White** is an Obie-Award and Lilly-Award winning director, writer, and musician originally from Chicago. She is a believer of alternative forms of performance, multi-disciplinary work, and collaborative processes. She is the current recipient of the Susan Stroman Directing award, is part of the Rolex Protégé and Mentorship Arts Initiative, and is an Associate Artist at The Roundabout. Her five-part cycle deconstructing Shakespeare's women and female ambition is currently in development with American Repertory Theater. Recent directing: Aleshea Harris' *What to Send Up When It Goes Down* (The Movement Theatre Company, Woolly Mammoth, American Repertory Theater, The Public, NYT Critic's Pick), *The Amen Corner* (Shakespeare Theatre Company), *Our Dear Dead Drug Lord* (WP Theatre and Second Stage, NYT Critic's Pick), *An Iliad* (Long Wharf), *Canyon* by Jonathan Caren (LA Times Critic's Choice and recipient of the CTG Block Party Grant, IAMA), *Jump* by Charly Evon Simpson (National New Play Network Rolling World Premiere, PlayMakers Rep). Digital projects include: *Finish the Fight* by Ming Peiffer (*The New York Times*, 24K+ viewers), *Animals* by Stacy Osei-Kuffour (Williamstown Theatre and Audible) and *Soft Light* by Aleshea Harris (The Movement Theatre). Her original musical *Definition* will debut at the Bushwick Starr in 2021. Past residencies and fellowships: Sundance Theatre Lab, Colt Coeur, The Drama League, the Roundabout and the 2050 Fellowship at the New York Theatre Workshop. MFA Acting: Brown University/Trinity Rep; BA: Northwestern University.

## ***The Odyssey***

**Kate Hamill** is an actor/playwright and was named the *Wall Street Journal* Playwright of the Year in 2017. Her work includes her play *Pride & Prejudice* at Primary Stages / HVSF (in which she originated the role of Lizzy. Nominee, Off-Broadway Alliance Award), *Sense & Sensibility* at Bedlam (originated role of Marianne. Winner, Off-Broadway Alliance Award; Nominee, Drama League Award; produced with a different actor at A.R.T. in December 2018); *Vanity Fair* at the Pearl Theatre (originated the role of Becky Sharp; Nominee, Off-Broadway Alliance Award), *Mansfield Park* at Northlight (originated role of Mary Crawford), *Little Women* at Primary

Stages and the Jungle, *Dracula* at Classic Stage Company (originated role of Renfield) *Emma*, and *Scarlet Letter* (both upcoming; world premieres postponed due to COVID-19). Her plays have been produced Off-Broadway, at A.R.T., the Guthrie Theatre, Seattle Rep, PlayMaker's, Folger, OSF, Trinity Rep, Pittsburgh Public, Dorset Theatre Festival, Shakespeare Theatre of DC, Dallas Theater Center, Kansas City Rep, Long Wharf, A.C.T. & others; upcoming productions at the Guthrie, the Old Globe, Denver Center, Cygnet, McCarter Theatre, & more. She is currently developing a new adaptation of *The Odyssey* for A.R.T., a Christmas play called *Scrooge for Senate*; several original plays (*Prostitute Play* – O'Neill NPC Semi-Finalist, *The Party*, *The Piper* - O'Neill NPC Finalist); and *In the Mines* (a folk musical with music by The Bengsons). Kate has been one of the most-produced playwrights nationwide for three seasons running (2017-2020). [www.kate-hamill.com](http://www.kate-hamill.com)

## **ABOUT AMERICAN REPERTORY THEATER**

**American Repertory Theater (A.R.T.)** at Harvard University is a leading force in the American theater, producing groundbreaking work that is driven by risk-taking and passionate inquiry. A.R.T. was founded in 1980 by Robert Brustein, who served as Artistic Director until 2002, when he was succeeded by Robert Woodruff. Diane Paulus began her tenure as Artistic Director in 2008. Under the leadership of Paulus as the Terrie and Bradley Bloom Artistic Director and Executive Producer Diane Borger, A.R.T. seeks to expand the boundaries of theater by programming transformative theatrical experiences, always including the audience as a central partner. A.R.T. is committed to a long-term process of centering anti-racism in its practice, policies, culture, pedagogy, governance and organizational structure.

Throughout its history, A.R.T. has been honored with many distinguished awards including the Tony Award for Best New Play for ***All the Way*** (2014); consecutive Tony Awards for Best Revival of a Musical for ***Pippin***(2013) and ***The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess*** (2012), both of which Paulus directed, and sixteen other Tony Awards since 2012; a Pulitzer Prize; a Jujamcyn Prize for outstanding contribution to the development of creative talent; the Regional Theater Tony Award; and more than 100 Elliot Norton and IRNE Awards. Additional Broadway productions include ***Jagged Little Pill***; ***Waitress*** (also US National Tour and in London's West End); ***Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812***; and ***Finding Neverland***. Under Paulus's leadership, A.R.T.'s club theater, OBERON, has been recognized annually as a top performance venue in the Boston area, and has attracted national attention for its innovative programming and business models.

As the professional theater on the campus of Harvard University, A.R.T. is committed to playing a central role in the cognitive life of the University, catalyzing discourse, interdisciplinary collaboration, and creative exchange among a wide range of academic departments, institutions, students, and faculty members. A.R.T. is engaged in a number of multi-year initiatives with partners at Harvard that explore some of the most pressing issues of our day, including collaborations with the Harvard University Center for the Environment to develop new work that addresses climate change and with the Healthy Buildings Program at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health to develop a Roadmap for Recovery and Resilience for Theater that prioritizes a commitment to ethics, equity, and anti-racism as a guiding principle. A.R.T. plays a central role in Harvard's undergraduate Theater, Dance & Media concentration, teaching courses in directing, dramatic literature, acting, voice, design, and dramaturgy. A.R.T. staff also mentors students in the Harvard Radcliffe Dramatic Club working at the Loeb Drama Center and OBERON.

Dedicated to making great theater accessible, A.R.T. actively engages more than 5,000 community members and local students annually in project-based partnerships, workshops, conversations with artists, and other enrichment activities both at the theater and across the Greater Boston area.

A.R.T. acknowledges that its theaters are situated on the traditional and ancestral homelands of the Massachusetts Tribe.

@AmericanRep

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