

place that you have given me in the most unlikely  
places. Thank you for giving me a place to just be during  
an afterthought in a public health crisis. I miss  
workshops especially since that's where I believe I can

REHABILITATION THROUGH THE ARTS PRESENTS

# LULU, I HEAR YOU...

MESSAGES FROM THE INSIDE  
DURING COVID-19

Directed by Thomas Coté

Adaptation by Joe Giardina

Written by RTA Participants in  
NY State Correctional Facilities and RTA Alumni

Original music composed by Patrick Griffin

**December 9, 2020 at 6pm**



## CAST (in order of appearance)

Nick Lopez	.....	Jose, Josh
Myxolydia Tyler	.....	Ivie, Shanikqua, Kate
Kenyatta Emmanuel	.....	Eliot, Sir L.
Sammie Werkheiser	.....	Sammie
Margaret Ables	.....	Vanessa, Karen, Sharon
Jazzy Mason	.....	Lulu
Tyrone Taylor	.....	Levar, Joel
LaToya Lewis	.....	Sarah, Mannie, Miss Smalls
Drew Drake	.....	Freddy, Shane
Clarence Maclin	.....	Timmy
Jason Calkins	.....	Bill
Colin (Tai Chi) Absolam	.....	Julio, Nas, Dumb Dumb
Charles Moore	.....	CO, Guy
Robbie Pollock	.....	Inner Shane
Kevin Boone	.....	Terrance
Vinny Mraz	.....	Dustin

## VIDEO PRODUCTION

Craig Feldman	.....	Director of Photography/Editor
Mark Mandler	.....	Sound
Anthony Scalia	.....	Assistant Camera

## PANEL

Facilitated by	.....	Charles Moore, RTA Director of Operations
Panelists	.....	Dustin Hale, Omar Williams, John Zoccoli

*in reminding myself to focus on what really matters, take one step at uncertainty of tomorrow's experiences is even stronger now. I want to safe space that you have given me in the most unlikely of places. Thank you for the opportunity to reflect on what I have thought in a public health crisis.*

## PROGRAM

**Introduction** by Katherine Vockins,  
RTA Founder and Executive Director

***Lulu, I Hear You...***  
*Messages from the Inside During COVID-19*

**Panel of RTA participants**  
released from prison during COVID-19

***Lulu, I Hear You...Messages From the Inside During COVID-19*** is not a traditional play but a compilation of writings that Rehabilitation Through The Arts (RTA) received from the men and women in the six NY State correctional facilities where we work. We also used a poem written by RTA alumna, Sammie Werkheiser, about the first and - to date - only woman to pass away from COVID while incarcerated in a NY State prison.

The material has been arranged in a way to give the audience a sense of what life is like behind the walls during these stressful times. Ultimately, we hope that you, the audience, have a deeper understanding of the fears, hopes, aspirations and humanity that exists in this largely ignored population.

During the production of *Lulu, I Hear You*, all COVID-19 safety protocols and mandates were followed. Nothing is more important to us than the health of our community members.

*This performance is dedicated to all our brothers and sisters still incarcerated during this pandemic and especially to the memory of our friend and sister Lulu (Darlene Benson-Seay) who passed from COVID-19 while serving a sentence at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility.*

## CAST BIOS

**Nick Lopez** (Josh, José) hails from Albuquerque, New Mexico where he received his BA in theater from the University of New Mexico and later, his MA in performance from West Virginia University. He teaches theater at SUNY Sullivan Community College, has been working with RTA for a year and has taught theater and communication in prison for over three years.

**Myxolydia Tyler** (Ivie, Shanikqua, Kate) credits include Season 6 *Homeland*, Showtime, Season 3 *I am Homicide*, *Investigation Discovery*. Teaching: Lincoln Center Education, Harlem School of the Arts, The Conservatory for the Dramatic Arts of Film and Television, and The Acting Studio. She is a Hermitage Artists Fellow and a Michael Bradford Writing Fellow with QuickSilver Theatre. In 2020 she premiered her first written play production of *Freebird: The Early Life of Sarah Vaughan* for NJPAC Education Assemblies Program.

**Kenyatta Emmanuel** (Eliot, Sir L) has been a member of RTA since 2007. Kenyatta is a composer, lyricist, actor and activist. He has participated in every RTA production at Sing Sing from 2007 through 2018, in nearly every capacity of the production process, and has shared his music from Sing Sing to Carnegie Hall.

**Sammie Werkheiser** (Sammie) is a legislative activist for Women on the Inside, the Justice for Women Task Force and Citizen Action. She gave birth to twins on the inside, and now fights for the rights of incarcerated pregnant women, advocating for access to adequate nutrition, quality medical care and humane conditions. She dedicates this performance to her wife Jewel, her son Julius Kingston, to the memory of Jacinta Rain Werkheiser and her beloved friend, Lulu Benson-Seay.

**Margaret Ables** (Vanessa, Karen, Sharon) has been a teaching artist with RTA for over five years, most recently having produced Suzan Lori-Parks' *Father Comes Home from the Wars* at Green Haven Correctional Facility. Margaret has worked as a comedy writer and performer for over two decades; her work has appeared on Steve Harvey, Nickelodeon, MTV and PBS. She currently produces and co-hosts the comedy parenting podcast *What Fresh Hell: Laughing in the Face of Motherhood*.

## CAST BIOS

**Jazzy Mason** (Lulu) is an advocate, actress and entrepreneur. She is currently affiliated with the Women in Prison Projects which reconnects leadership and advocacy training program. She worked with the Coalition for The Homeless which provides advocacy youth services, housing, a mobile soup kitchen, crisis intervention, voicemail and job training. Past acting credits include Momma in *I'll Cry Today, Dance Tomorrow* with the Afrikan Woman's Repertory Theater and Margaret in *Amazing Grace*. Jazzy will also play a role in an upcoming play regarding criminal justice.

**Tyrone Taylor** (Levar, Joel) is an RTA alumnus, a professional theater artist and a trained dancer. He began his career in Chicago, Illinois at Collaboration Peacebook, combining his love for hip hop music and passion for theater in his own powerful story *17 To New Life*, featuring actor and rapper GQ from the hip hop musical group Q Brothers. He has appeared in *Parole Reform: Can it Happen & What Will It Take?* (Tobie) and an RTA alumni performance of *Freedom Feather* (CO Durst), a collaboration with PEN America.

**LaToya Lewis** (Sarah, Mannie, Miss Smalls) is a New York based actor. Credits include *Scurry* (Lincoln Center), *Minor Character* (Public Theater), *Some Higher Glimmer in our Landscape of Flat* (The Collapsible Hole), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (New Place Players), *House/DIVIDED* (BAM), *Saturn Nights* (Incubator Arts Project), *Make it Play* (Playwrights Horizons), *The Odyssey* (Symphony Space). She has previously worked with RTA in *Freedom Feather* (PEN America) and is a graduate of the Acting Conservatory of SUNY Purchase.

**Drew Drake** (Freddy, Shane) is an actor, poet and teaching artist from Huntsville, Alabama. Recent credits include: National Coors Seltzer commercial (October 2020), independent film *Privilege* (May 2020) and New York Time's Critics Pick *TJ Loves Sally Forever* at Jack Theatre (February 2020).

## CAST BIOS

**Clarence Maclin** (Timmy) was born in Memphis, Tennessee in 1965 and grew up in Mt. Vernon NY. The eldest of three, he is a father of two and a grandfather of three. Incarcerated in 1995, he found RTA and was fortunate to land roles such as Juror #5 in the *12 Angry Men*, Booster in August Wilson's *Jitney*, Prosecutor Alvin Jones in *The N Trial* and Brent Buell's comedy *Breaking The Mummy's Code*. Clarence works as a supervisor at Lincoln Hall Boys' Haven, specializing in at-risk teens with behavioral issues.

**Jason Calkins** (Bill) is an RTA alumnus and member for six years and counting. He participated in multiple RTA productions including *Twelfth Night*, *On the Waterfront*, *Cyrano* and *Macbeth*. Jason also served as a Steering Committee member and, under the RTA banner, organized a puppet show for a children's event. He is a co-creator and original member of the Phoenix Players Theater Group, motivational mentor for youth and composer of original poetry for a TEDx event.

**Colin (Tai Chi) Absolam** (Julio, Nas, Dumb Dumb) spent over 25 years of a life sentence in prison. While incarcerated, Tai Chi transformed into a deeply caring, thoughtful and smart individual, receiving his GED, associate degree, baccalaureate degree and master's degree, and secured a scholarship to Columbia University. Tai Chi has been a member of a number of programs and organizations, all serving to better the incarcerated population and the outside community. An RTA member for almost two decades, Tai Chi continues to participate in RTA's endeavors.

**Charles Moore** (CO, Guy) is the first RTA participant to be employed by RTA on the outside, currently working as RTA's Director of Operations. Charles holds a bachelor's degree in Human Services from Mercy College and a master's in Professional Studies from New York Theological Seminary. As a participant, Charles worked as stage manager, served on RTA's steering committee and was even an occasional performer.

## CAST BIOS

**Robbie Pollock** (Inner Shane) is a multidisciplinary teaching artist who uses his lived experience to promote creative vulnerability as a tool for personal growth and societal change. An RTA member since 2010, he is currently the Prison Writing Program Manager at PEN America and collaborates with educators, arts and justice organizations to highlight the humanity behind the walls and the transformative power of connection.

**Kevin Boone** (Terrance) has been an RTA member since 2011 and a leader in RTA's alumni program. His acting experiences include roles in *Death of a Salesman*, *12 Angry Men*, *Home is a Verb* and *Freedom Feather*, a PEN America Brooklyn Bookfest event. Kevin also performed, wrote and directed a piece for The Hopper House in Nyack, NY.

**Vinny Mraz** (Dustin) is an interdisciplinary theater-maker in NYC. His work has been seen at Object Movement Festival, The Tank, Dixon Place, Little Theater, The Dallas Solo Festival, Harlem Nights, the Secret Theater, New Short Play Festival, and the PIT Solocom. Artist in Residence with the Object Movement Festival from 2018 - 2019 and 2019 artist-in-residence for the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's Su Casa program. MFA from Sarah Lawrence College, Vinny is an RTA teaching artist and an adjunct professor of theater at Manhattanville College.

## PRODUCTION STAFF

**Thomas Coté** (Director) is the Artistic Director of The WorkShop Theater in New York City, as well as a teaching artist for RTA. Over the past 15 years, Thomas has assisted in the development of hundreds of new plays at The WorkShop Theater as the former company dramaturg, director and now Artistic Director of the company.

Thomas' New York directing credits include world premieres of *The Jazz Age*, *The Last Seder* and *The Astonishing Times of Timothy Cratchit* (all written by Allan Knee), *Interchange* by Ken Jaworowski, a New York Times' Critics' Pick, and the Audelco Award-winning *The Guest at Central Park West* by Levy Lee Simon. He co-directed the critically acclaimed NYC revival of Lanford Wilson's *Balm in Gilead* and the Off-Broadway production of *The Devil and Billy Markham* by Shel Silverstein.

Regional directing credits include critically acclaimed productions of *She Loves Me*, *Man of La Mancha*, *The Game's Afoot*, Disney's *Tarzan* at Gretna Theatre and Tony Sportiello's *National Pastime* at the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, NY.

**Joe Giardina** (Adaptation) has been RTA's Program Director since 2018. His plays and adaptations have been produced by Off World Theatre, Ensemble Studio Theatre, Playwrights Horizons Collective, Icarus Theatre, Playwrights Theatre of New Jersey and the Unlimited Potential Theater Company. He was the Managing Director for Gretna Theatre in PA and the WorkShop Theatre in NYC, as well as the Director of Education at The New Victory Theater and Theatre for a New Audience in New York City.

## PRODUCTION STAFF

**Craig Feldman** (Director of Photography/Editor) is a New York City based Director of Photography/Video Editor with 20 years of industry experience. His work includes documentary, corporate, broadcast, web video, live theater performances and promotional pieces for various theater companies including The Public Theater, ART and Page 73. Craig believes that when you film a live performance, you become a part of it.

**Richard Maldonado** (Stage Manager) was an RTA member for over a decade and a leader in RTA's alumni program. He participated in a multi-year RTA project to develop a play about the challenges of reentry, *Home is a Verb*, which was performed at Carnegie Hall studios and Playwrights Horizons, and appeared in an RTA alumni performance of *Freedom Feather*, a PEN America Brooklyn Bookfest event.

**Patrick Griffin** (Composer) an RTA alumnus since 2005, performed in RTA productions both inside and outside the walls. A musician most of his life always looking to contribute his talent. He is currently employed at the Osborne Association on the Outreach team providing free face masks and Department of Health information on free COVID-19 testing and social distancing to local communities.

## ABOUT RATTLESTICK

Rattlestick Playwrights Theater, an Off-Broadway theater, is honored to partner with RTA on this very special event. Like RTA, Rattlestick is committed to finding unique ways to use the arts for healing and justice. Two years ago, Rattlestick produced Cori Thomas' *LOCKDOWN*, a play which centers on a man who is incarcerated over 40 years. We partnered with RTA and a number of criminal justice organizations to ensure that those voices with lived experiences were heard during this production. Since that time, we have held numerous panels and conversations focused on incarceration and are in the early stages of developing a new collaboration that focuses on reconciliation.

Daniella Topol, Artistic Director

## ABOUT RTA

Founded at Sing Sing Correctional Facility in 1996, RTA's mission is to use the transformative power of the arts to help people in prison develop skills to unlock their potential and succeed in the larger community. RTA works in six NY State maximum and medium-security, men's and women's prisons in the Hudson Valley, teaching workshops in theatre, dance, music, writing and visual arts and producing performances for the prison population and community guests. Grounded in work, family and community, fewer than 5% of RTA participants return to prison, compared to the national average of 60%.

As a prison organization, RTA stands in solidarity with incarcerated people; as an arts organization, we are committed to telling the story of our shared humanity.

ArtsWestchester is generously matching all new donations up to \$7500. To support our work, please visit [rta-arts.org/donate](http://rta-arts.org/donate).

## SPECIAL THANKS

NY State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision for their support of RTA distant learning activities and for their long collaboration.

## PROJECT FUNDERS



RTA thanks The Art for Justice Fund, a sponsored project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, for the generous support that made this production possible and allowed these voices to be heard.

The logo for ArtsWestchester, featuring the text "PROUD TO BE SUPPORTED BY ARTSWESTCHESTER AND WESTCHESTER COUNTY GOVERNMENT" in a black sans-serif font, with "ARTSW" in a larger, bold yellow font below it, and "ARTSWESTCHESTER" in a smaller black font at the bottom.

RTA is proud to be a grantee of ArtsWestchester with funding made possible by Westchester County government

## RTA FUNDERS



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## CONTRIBUTORS

## Producer

Anonymous  
Ildiko Sragli and  
Barry Appelman

# Playwright

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Robert E. Rubin

## Actor

Linda Meyers

## Stage Manager

Melissa Brown  
Karen and  
Bruce Sabath

## Friend

Lynda L. Ables  
Rory Anderson  
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# Rattlestick Playwrights Theater

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