

ROLE CALL

PEOPLE TO WATCH



DAVID L. ARSENAULT

Profession: Scenic designer

Hometowns: Born in Naples, Fla., raised in Fitchburg, Mass.

Current home: New York City

KNOWN FOR: He designed sets for Alan Ayckbourn's trilogy *The Norman Conquests*, presented in Vermont at Northern Stage, Dorset Theatre Festival, and Weston Playhouse in 2016. He also served as associate scenic designer for *The Color Purple* on Broadway and *Passion* at Classic Stage Company.

WHAT'S NEXT: Upcoming projects include *Sex With Strangers* at the Kitchen Theatre Company in Ithaca, N.Y., *Mamma Mia!* at Northern Stage, and two shows with director John Doyle: *Pacific Overtures* at CSC and the national tour of *The Color Purple*.

WHAT MAKES HIM SPECIAL: "David reads the play like a direc-

tor," says Rachel Lampert, artistic director of Kitchen Theatre Company. "I love talking about the script with him—all of our early conversations are so free-wheeling and fun. He is a terrific collaborator, and, whether we are working on something abstract like Stephen Massicotte's *Mary's Wedding* or the realism required for *Broke-ology* by Nathan Louis Jackson, he creates a world that actors love to inhabit."

MAGIC OR PUPPETS: Arsenault says he once heard a story from designer John Lee Beatty that set designers, when meeting each other for the first time, ask one another, "Magic or puppets?," referring to their childhood interests. "The magician may be more interested in the illusions you can create onstage," Arsenault continues, "and the puppeteer more interested in the heart of story and the characters. My interest was divided between both of these hobbies when I was growing up. I feel like this has come to define my work, which can vary quite a bit between gritty naturalism and more elaborate stagecraft."



PAIGE HERNANDEZ

Profession: Performer/director/
playwright/educator

Hometown: Baltimore

Current home: Washington, D.C.

KNOWN FOR: Hernandez performs her original solo works, including *Paige in Full* and *Havana Hop*, and she's created and toured 10 shows with B-fly Entertainment, which specializes in multicultural and multigenerational shows grounded

in hip-hop and education. She was among the inaugural class of Kennedy Center Citizen Artist Fellows and was named a Rising Leader of Color by Theatre Communications Group.

WHAT'S NEXT: A newly commissioned piece, *Stomping Grounds*, blends hip-hop, spoken word, and opera to tell the story of a modern-day coffee shop fighting gentrification. The show will

tour New York City this spring and have its world premiere at the Glimmerglass Festival in Cooperstown, N.Y., this summer.

WHAT MAKES HER SPECIAL: Arena Stage artistic director Molly Smith calls Hernandez the "complete artistic package, and kind and friendly on top of it. Paige performs in every discipline, writes, directs, teaches—she is great with kids and adults, and everyone in between. She is a beautifully talented and inspiring artist, and you won't find a more genuinely lovely person."

STAGE GUMBO: Hernandez says her favorite theatre supports people of color in positive and unprecedented ways, conceived with "thoughtful intention that speaks to authenticity, inclusion, and equity throughout its process," Hernandez says, explaining that she wants to challenge the state of representation in theatre. "I'd love to see more of my experience as an American on the stage: a gumbo of ingredients, people of all backgrounds, music, and visuals of many cultures, complicated and hopeful stories, and an oh-sooooo-fly execution."



SOPHIE NIMMANNIT

Profession: Joker and theatremaker

Hometown: Washington Township, N.J.

Current home: Brooklyn

KNOWN FOR: Nimmannit, a cofounding member of Theatre of the Oppressed NYC (TONYC), holds the titles of joker and program director. They also co-created and performed in *Peg-ass-us: A Sex-Ed Burlesque*.

WHAT'S NEXT: At TONYC, Nimmannit is preparing for the fifth Legislative Theatre Festival May 7-13.

WHAT MAKES THEM SPECIAL: "Sophie can solve any problem with creativity and integrity, both on the stage and behind the scenes," says TONYC founder and executive director Katy Rubin, who's known Nimmannit since they attended a show

Rubin facilitated in 2011; Nimmannit joined the company later that year. "They are the rare artist who is just as rigorous and inspired when working as an administrator or creating a budget as they are in the rehearsal room," Rubin enthuses. "As one of the original Theatre of the Oppressed NYC 'jokers,' or facilitators, Sophie makes the devising process feel accessible and fun for both actors and 'non-actors,' and never lets the audience off the hook. Budding jokers and arts administrators around NYC have been mentored by Sophie."

SURVIVAL STORIES: "I am curious about art that feels rooted in survival—whether that means raucous play, sharing stories that are suppressed, or imagining different worlds (I read science fiction)," says Nimmannit. "What keeps me going is exploring ways to show and become more awake to what's going on, with other creators as well as with the audience. That's the path I trace that led me to Theatre of the Oppressed."