

Children's Theatre Company

BEHIND THE CURTAIN BEYOND THE STAGE

SPRING | 2020



Isabella Spiess and Malia Berg in *Spamtown*, USA. Photo by Glen Stubbe.

Write On! Wednesdays

Connecting CTC with the community during a time of uncertainty.

While we're all being encouraged to stay at home and practice social distancing, it can be difficult to stay positive, especially on social media. But that's where Children's Theatre Company breaks the mold.

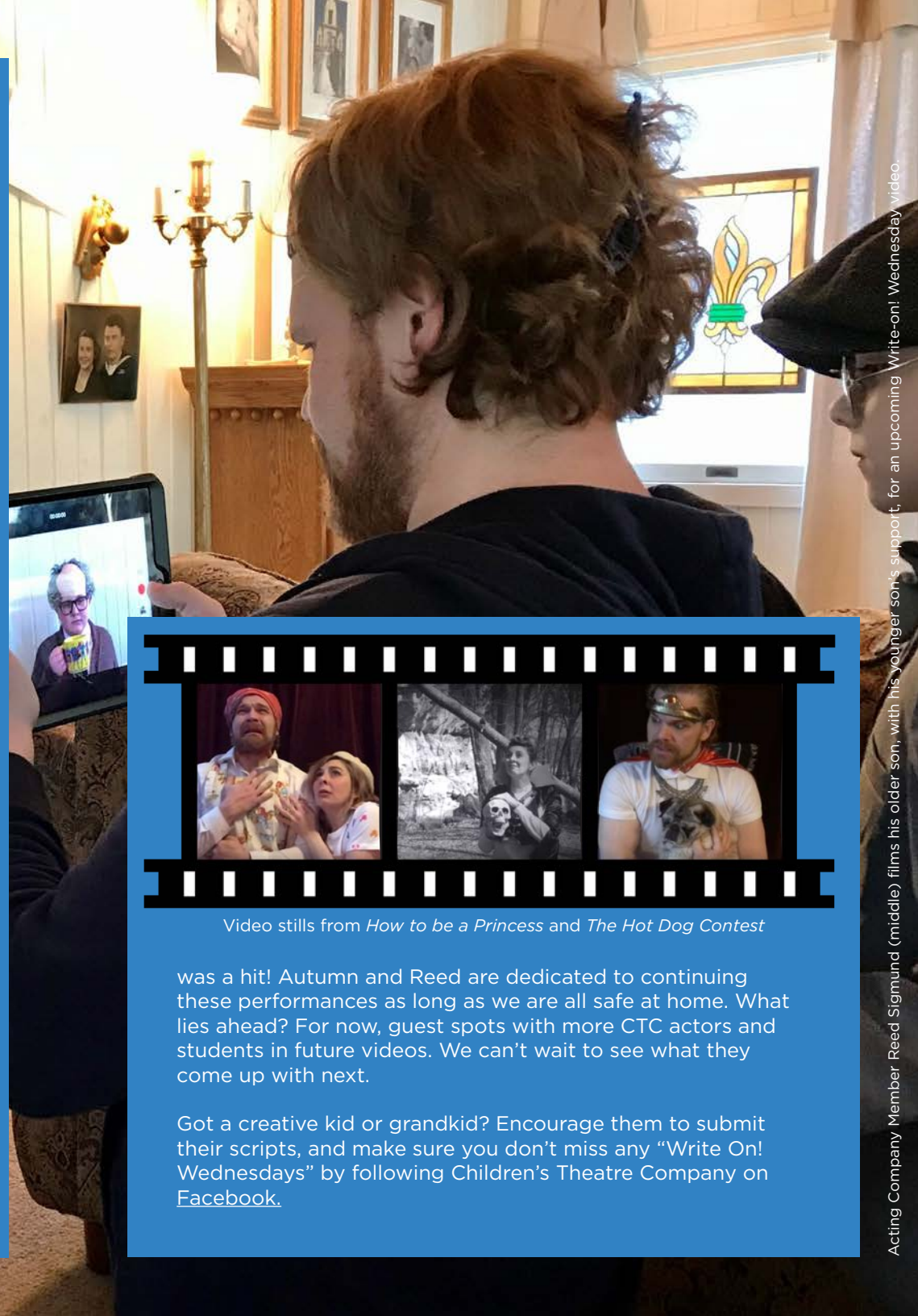
Inspired by Early Childhood Education Manager Laura Mann Hill's ten-year-old daughter Amira's penchant for writing stories and turning them into lively theatrical productions, "Write On! Wednesdays," is CTC's new initiative designed to get your kids thinking, writing, and laughing!

Each week, children are encouraged to write short scripts and submit them to Children's Theatre Company via Facebook. Then, Acting Company members Autumn Ness and Reed Sigmund select one that inspires and delights them to perform.

For Autumn and Reed, Sunday is a day of filming. Confined to their home and its surroundings, they get creative with costuming (Autumn's area) and location scouting and props (Reed's forte). The biggest challenge? Lighting. "All of the lights are on in the house! And we're using our flashes from our phone cameras and yet...the scene is still grainy!" exclaimed Autumn. Despite technical difficulties the end result is pure theatrical magic.

Their first production, *How to be a Princess*, written by Amira Hill, was shot on the family tablet and featured Autumn, Reed, and their eleven-year-old pug Kermit. Once all the scenes were shot, Reed, a whiz at iMovie and all things editorial and cinematic, whipped together the entire production in just one night!

How to be a Princess debuted Wednesday, March 25, on Facebook, and received glowing reviews (and thousands of views!). "We were worried," said Autumn, "We thought maybe the reaction would be more like 'Just stay in your homes — QUIETLY!'" Much to everyone's delight, *How to be a Princess*



Video stills from *How to be a Princess* and *The Hot Dog Contest*

was a hit! Autumn and Reed are dedicated to continuing these performances as long as we are all safe at home. What lies ahead? For now, guest spots with more CTC actors and students in future videos. We can't wait to see what they come up with next.

Got a creative kid or grandkid? Encourage them to submit their scripts, and make sure you don't miss any "Write On! Wednesdays" by following Children's Theatre Company on [Facebook](#).



“You had to look for the hooks, small nuggets and activities from the story that would excite the kids...”

— Aaron Fiskradatz, Teaching Artist

Expanding the Reach of Neighborhood Bridges

Teaching artists learn how to approach special education classrooms in new and innovative ways.

For over 20 years, CTC's award-winning Neighborhood Bridges in-school residency program has married critical literacy and theatre arts skills. Recently, Teaching Artist Lindsey Samples wanted to improve how the Bridges program served special education students. Many of these students are taken out of large group classes for more specialized work. Because of this, they miss the majority of Neighborhood Bridges sessions, and when they are able to attend, the classes aren't taught in a way that is accessible to their style of learning.

To address this problem, CTC was awarded a Minnesota State Arts Board Arts Learning Grant to bring Neighborhood Bridges into three special education classrooms at Mississippi School for Creative Arts. This project allowed teaching artists to adapt their curriculum and focus on smaller classes of special education students.

Teaching Artists Lindsey Samples, Aaron Fiskradatz, and Peter Morrow, and advisor and Neighborhood Bridges Program Director Maria Asp quickly discovered that the project had a steep learning curve. Ideas that worked in theory were quickly shut down by the class. Nimble, the teaching artists learned to pivot and understand the best way to engage students.

What didn't work? Sitting in a circle, expecting everyone to sit still, and exploring characters in a story. What did work? Activities that explored concepts within the stories, warm-ups that seamlessly led into guided play, physical engagement, musical instruments, and experimentation with lighting! Since some of the students were nonverbal, this proved to be a great way to engage with everyone. “You had to look for the hooks, small nuggets and activities from the story that would excite the kids and get them to expand on its meaning, while walking that fine line between enthusiasm and distraction,” explained Aaron.

Just as the project was gaining momentum and bonds of friendship and trust had formed, the outbreak of COVID-19 reached the United States, affecting each and every corner of normal life. With Minnesota schools making a huge shift to distance learning for seemingly the rest of the school year, it looks as though this project may be on hold for now. Yet the small and mighty group of teaching artists that led this charge will put all they learned to use for future special education classes, and continue to deliver enriching, creative experiences for students living with special needs.

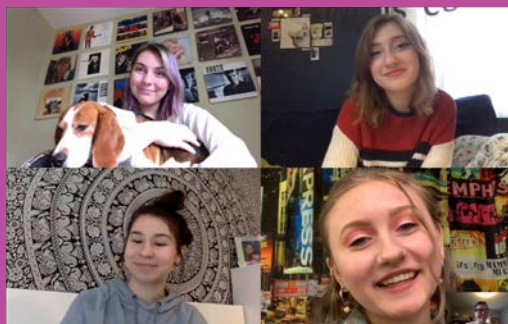
Pomp Under Unusual Circumstance

The very first Institute class is set to graduate in the midst of a global pandemic.

We are thrilled to celebrate CTC's first graduating class of Institute students this spring! CTC's four-year training program, which began in 2016, prepares young actors for college and professional theatre careers. Over the past four years, this band of dedicated students have enjoyed intensive acting and musical theatre training from industry professionals, mentorship from CTC artists, field trips to plays at Twin Cities theatres, and so much more.

This spring, their final project will move into a digital format due to the social distancing requirements during the COVID-19 outbreak. These students have spent the last seven months generating an original piece of theatre reflective of their own experiences in life and as actors.

While there is plenty of disappointment in not seeing this project take its original form on stage, Director of Education Ellie McKay is happy to have them at the helm: "I couldn't be more proud that Maddie, Celia, Peyton, and Audrey are the first to graduate Institute. They are pillars of what I want this program to be—extremely generous collaborators, incredibly thoughtful artists, and beautifully open hearted humans. They have really shaped what this program has become and will continue to be because they lead the way. I am excited to see what's next for each of them!"



Institute seniors Celia, Maddie, Peyton, and Audrey, now attend their weekly class via Zoom.

**"They are so smart and creative that I know what they innovate over the next six weeks will be beyond anything I could imagine."
— Ellie McKay, Director of Education**



Senior Institute students Maddie Neal and Peyton Seacrist star in *Carrie: The Musical*. Photo by Dan Norman

Stay Connected to CTC

Explore new ways to engage with our community at a distance. Follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#), or visit our [virtual resources page](#) to get the latest content.

Weekly Engagements

Mindfulness Mondays

Find your center every Monday on CTC's Facebook by watching a short video or reading an article aimed at achieving thoughtfulness and calm.

Write On! Wednesdays

Time to get creative! CTC actors will perform stories written by your child(ren) every Wednesday! Send a private message to our Facebook with your child's script/story by Saturday night. Then, one will be chosen to debut that following week via Facebook.

Suggestion Saturdays

We want to hear from you! Each Saturday, Artistic Director, Peter Brosius, asks a question to the community on our Facebook and Instagram. Throw out a suggestion! It could be made into a theatrical work of art!



Video still of Ellie McKay from Mindfulness Mondays



Video still of Reed Sigmund and Autumn Ness from Write On! Wednesday

Special Online Events

Virtual Milk and Cookies

These family-friendly virtual happy hours are held on Instagram Live and include fun conversations with CTC actors and staff where you can ask questions, learn a thing or two, and perhaps even go live yourself!

Virtual Chorus

On April 3, CTC debuted its first ever virtual chorus on Facebook, singing the hit song "Tomorrow" from *Annie*.



Video still from the *Annie* virtual chorus

But wait, there's more!

At-home Activities

Who knew the days spent at home were so long?! Allow CTC to help your family with some fun and educational activities. These are posted regularly on our Facebook.

Meet CTC Staff!

Who makes it all happen backstage? Who creates the beautiful backdrops that accompany many of our shows? Who creates the "Who shoes" used in *Dr. Seuss's How The Grinch Stole Christmas*? Learn about these folks and more, posted periodically on our Facebook.



From hip new shows to CTC favorites, we guarantee your family will be inspired by every production in our **Impossibly Possible 2020 - 2021 Season!** We can't wait to welcome you and your families back to the theatre again soon, and **your support will help us get there.** Thank you for your generous support of our mission to educate, challenge, and inspire young people and their communities with theatre!

Donate Today!