

Children's Theatre Company

# BEHIND THE CURTAIN BEYOND THE STAGE

SUMMER | 2022



Photo of DeAnthony Jackson and Lola Romning in *Something Happened in Our Town* by Glen Stubbe Photography

# Training the Next Generation

## How CTC is Building a Diverse Pipeline for Future Industry Professionals

As an organization that is deeply committed to anti-racist work, Children's Theatre Company is dedicated to a future where our theatre is a home for all people, all families, and is truly reflective of our community. Historically, many people have been excluded from participating in theatre experiences due to consequences of racism, bias, and classism; this not only applies to attending the theatre as a patron, but also to entering the field as a professional. As a national leader in the field of theatre for young audiences, CTC recognizes the urgent need to address these past injustices and inequities on an institutional level—both for the benefit of our current community and for the future of theatre.

This month, we are proud to spotlight two programs that align with our vision of a diverse and vibrant professional community: the newly-announced Theatre Arts Training Academy and our annual Theatre Fellowship Program. Both programs strive to reduce barriers for members of historically underrepresented communities who are interested in deepening their artistic experiences. By offering more entrance points for young people and professionals into this work, we aim to create a pipeline of passionate people with the industry knowledge to shape the future of our field.

As the newest branch of our educational programming, the Theatre Arts Training Academy will offer unparalleled access for young people in grades 4-12 to invest themselves in theatrical training. Designed for students who want to advance their skills and knowledge, this high-intensity program will offer in-depth training in the areas of performance, design, and production through bi-weekly group training classes and independent coaching sessions. Students will benefit from expert instruction from industry professionals, deepening their skills in multiple areas of theatre making that align with their interests and passions, including set design, costume creation, vocal performance, or stage management. As with all our educational programming, students will be eligible for ACT Pass scholarships to participate in Academy training, and we will focus on recruiting young people from BIPOC communities to participate.

CTC's Theatre Fellowship Program is a season-long, full-time, paid program that strives to address economic and institutional barriers to careers in theatre. Designed to create opportunities for early career administrators, this program focuses on recruiting those

whose lived experience is underrepresented in the theatre field—including but not limited to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, people with disabilities, and people from the LGBTQIAP+ community. CTC Fellows learn from and work directly with department directors and seasoned professional teams, gaining valuable industry experience that will shape their careers and our shared future of the theatre profession. Fellowships for the 2022 - 2023 season will be in the areas of stage management, production management, and education.

CTC believes that the best, most powerful, most impactful theatre is made when the diversity of our community is allowed to shine. We look forward to growing these programs with your support. Learn more about our commitment to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion by visiting [childrenstheatre.org/jedi](https://childrenstheatre.org/jedi).

Photo of Theatre Arts Training students by Kaitlin Randolph





# Quick Change!

## Shining the Spotlight on CTC's Wardrobe Department

If you came to see *Diary of a Wimpy Kid the Musical*, you'll remember the glitz and glitter of the costumes on stage, but have you ever wondered about what happens backstage?

We recently sat down with CTC's Wardrobe Supervisor Andi Soehren and Wardrobe Assistants Emily Jannusch and Jennifer Probst to chat about their work on the final show of our 2021 – 2022 Season. Keep reading for an exclusive behind-the-scenes conversation!

### How did you get started working in Wardrobe?

**JP:** I have loved theatre ever since I saw my first play as a kindergartner. It was *Beatrix Potter's Christmas* at CTC. I decided that I wanted to be involved with theater in some way for the rest of my life. I knew I wanted to work at CTC and when my schedule aligned to take a position as the Wardrobe Swing (a Wardrobe Understudy) on *The Wizard of Oz*, I jumped at the chance. I loved it and have been at CTC working Wardrobe ever since.

**EJ:** My first real show working on Wardrobe was as a swing on *Busytown the Musical* here at Children's Theatre Company. The show was fast paced, challenging, and a whole lot of fun.

### What was your favorite part of working on *Diary of a Wimpy Kid the Musical*?

**AS:** My favorite part was the resiliency of this cast and crew. We had a lot thrown at us and at every turn, these actors and crew rose to the challenge, all while supporting each other and lifting each other up. Everything was done with grace and kindness, and it made it all worthwhile. Also dancing backstage to "Animal Heart," and quick changes with tear away pants.

**JP:** It was a joy to see how much the cast cared about each other and how consistently delighted they were by each other's talents. The genuine love and encouragement and excitement they felt to be together, even when they were exhausted and things were changing around them constantly, was inspiring.



**Emily Jannusch (EJ)**  
Wardrobe Assistant

**Jennifer Probst (JP)**  
Wardrobe Assistant

**Andi Soehren (AS)**  
Wardrobe Supervisor

**EJ:** My favorite part of working on *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* has been watching our understudies go above and beyond when the show needed them most. It was great to see all their dedication and talent.

### What was the most challenging part of working on *Diary of a Wimpy Kid the Musical*?

**AS:** Our biggest technical challenge as a department was the fact that every single actor changed their costume after "Animal Heart." Some of those changes were 15 seconds long and some were around three minutes, but there are only three members of our team on the show and that was a lot of clothes. Being successful at it every day really felt like a victory.

**EJ:** The most challenging part of *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* has been putting on multiple understudies at once and the creative problem solving that comes along with that.

### What is one thing that happens behind the scenes that you want our audience to know about?

**AS:** Everything that happens backstage is just as choreographed as any dance number on stage. In order for a quick change to be successful, I need to know that my performer is going to lift their right foot before their left and put their arm in the same position for their sleeve and grab their hat with the same hand every day. Changes that seem impossible at the beginning of the run become smooth and beautiful by the end, just like a well-rehearsed dance.

**JP:** Sometimes we replace buttons with snaps or Velcro, sometimes we hide zippers under buttons, or attach multiple layers or clothes together so they go on as one piece. When things are extremely fast (like Patty Farrell adding getting a hat and coat and hopping onto a pastry cart mid-song), we use magnets. We do these changes so many times that we often remember them even years later.

### What show in our 2022 – 2023 Season are you most excited to work on?

**JP:** I might be most excited for *Locomotion*. The poetry of the piece will be wonderful to listen to and it is always fun to see how actors, directors, and designers work together to create distinct characters when we have a small cast portraying multiple roles.



# Continuing the Conversation: Processing Unrest Through Theatre

## How CTC's Community-Centered Approach to *Something Happened in Our Town* Created Space for Conversation and Healing

In our Winter 2022 issue of "Behind the Curtain, Beyond the Stage," we shared our anticipation for the upcoming world-premiere production of *Something Happened in Our Town*: a new work by playwright Cheryl L. West. Based on a children's book of the same title, the play addresses systemic racism and police brutality through the story of two best friends: one White, one Black. The project came to be shortly after the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020; Minneapolis became the epicenter of racial conflict in the nation, and Children's Theatre Company (CTC) spent time thinking about how we could mobilize our artistic strengths to meet the overwhelming needs in our community.

Our goal with *Something Happened in Our Town* was not simply to tell a story that reflected the confusion, trauma, and fear of that moment—we wanted to create a space where true conversation could happen. We wanted the young people in our community to feel supported in asking questions, and for their families to feel equipped to address them, even if it meant saying they didn't have the answers. And we wanted to do all of this in a way that leveraged the unique power of theatre: the act of stepping into someone else's story and allowing ourselves to be taken on a journey that may or may not be our own.

From the beginning of the project, CTC was committed to offering young people and their families a suite of resources to support the conversations about racial injustice we knew this play would spark. These resources included performance pre-reads to help prepare young people for the content; guiding questions for family discussions before and after the show; vocabulary lists to create common language; and sample question responses for parents who might feel unsure about how to navigate these topics with young children.

Early in the rehearsal process, CTC also decided to schedule post-show discussions with the audience after every one of the 28 public performances. With the shooting of Amir Locke and



Photo of Rajané Katurah and DeAnthony Jackson in *Something Happened in Our Town*  
by Glen Stubbe Photography

***"I can't express how this made me feel, but I could watch it over and over."* - CTC Patron**

student protests erupting mere weeks before opening night, the line between rehearsal and real life felt increasingly thin; we knew that children and families were once again having relevant and raw discussions about race and police violence, and that our discussions would be most effective if they reflected a diversity of experience. In response, CTC Associate Artistic Director/Director of Equity and Community Partnerships Michael Winn gathered discussion moderators from across our own community, reaching out with direct invitations to partners to come to CTC and share in this process.

These post-show conversations bloomed, sparking intensive, intercultural engagement and quickly becoming a cornerstone of the production experience. Leaders from throughout the community came to CTC to guide discussions, including Sondra Samuels, President and CEO of the Northside Achievement Zone; former Minneapolis Mayor Sharon Sayles Belton; City of Minneapolis Police Lieutenant Mark Klukow; Amir Locke's cousin, Nneka Constantino; and the three child psychologists (one Black, two White) who wrote the book on which the play is based.

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Hundreds of people stayed to participate in the discussions, gathering in the first few rows of the house, leaning over seats to better hear their neighbors' questions and comments. Every day was different but, as is usually the case, the hardest and most poignant moments of the conversations came from the children in the audience: "Do Black people still get shot?," "Why do people care about other people based on their color?," and, from a small voice struggling to put the words together, "I think this play really helped me understand."

Ultimately, CTC believes that theatre can be a powerful force to illuminate connections, create common bonds, and transform lives by building bridges to empathy, understanding, and inclusion. *Something Happened in Our Town* reaffirmed this belief, offering demonstrable proof that the arts are a vehicle for understanding and healing. This discussion doesn't end here, and we are grateful to you, our community, for continuing this conversation with us.



CTC partnered with WCCO-TV to create an exclusive, behind-the-curtain sneak peek into the creation of the play. Watch the five-part series here: [minnesota.cbslocal.com/inourtown](https://minnesota.cbslocal.com/inourtown)



Photo of Autumn Ness, Lola Ronning, Rajané Katurah, and Kevin D West in *Something Happened in Our Town* by Glen Stubbe Photography

