

Children's Theatre Company

BEHIND THE CURTAIN BEYOND THE STAGE

WINTER | 2023

Photo of Veronica Albee and Nora Montañez in *Carmelo's Full of Wishes* by Glen Stubbe Photography

Bringing Back “BUTTON!”

A conversation with CTC Acting Company Member Dean Holt about his return to the role of Corduroy

This February will bring the return of Corduroy, a beloved children’s classic that premiered as a stage production at CTC in our 2017 – 2018 Season. In advance of opening night, we sat down with CTC Acting Company Member Dean Holt and spoke with him about bears, buttons, and the power of friendship.

Tell us about the first time that you played this role.

Corduroy really evolved as a character. Many people don’t know how far into the rehearsal process scripts are getting rewritten when a play is brand new, but Barry Kornhauser probably wrote two dozen drafts of this piece, and it just kept changing. Originally, Corduroy was going to talk a lot, but as we got deeper into the process, we realized that he needed to be more focused. So, we distilled the dialogue down to reflect his singular goal: a button, and a friend. Those are the only two words I say in the show, and it shows just how powerful his purpose is.

This is a great segway, because even though Corduroy only says “Friend” and “Button,” his story tackles some complex issues. How do you approach playing such a full character with such a limited vocabulary?

My approach is always to start from the heart. It’s about tapping into that imaginative space: what would it feel like to be the toy that was never picked? What does it feel like to find that sense of belonging?

In all the different ways that I say “button,” we see Corduroy’s need for a friend, his overcoming of obstacles, and his deep desire to have a connection. I think we can all identify with that.

This is also a hugely physical show, and the storytelling depends on it. You can walk onstage and show how you’re feeling without saying a word, and people understand; that nonverbal communication is incredibly powerful, and even more so when it comes from a place of true feeling.

Corduroy is a great story for all ages, but it’s particularly special for our youngest patrons—for some, it may even be their first introduction to theatre. How does it feel to be creating a play for such a young audience?



One of the things that is special about creating work for young people is that your audience of today is also your audience of tomorrow. Cultivating an early interest and appreciation for the arts is important, and we are lucky at CTC to be able to start engaging kids early, so that they have time to learn what the arts can do for them. Multigenerational theatre is an investment in our future, because we are giving these young kids the tools to access the arts in a deeper way very early in their lives; we make it a part of who they are, and then they grow up and teach their kids all the things they learned, and the whole thing just keeps expanding.

Corduroy is also special because it’s a book that many of these kids know—it’s a storybook they can physically hold in their hands, and they get to see it translated onto a stage. The idea that a story can move from a page to real life is powerful, and hopefully inspires them to think about the next storybook they pick up and how that could be turned into a play. In our post-show Q&As, we’re often asked why we did something a certain way, or what we would do if the story was different. I like to ask them back: “How would you do it? What do you envision? How can you make this story come alive?”

What do you hope audiences will take away from this show?

First off, we should all be prepared that the word “button” will be making a consistent appearance in our collective lives for a long time. There is no way around that.

What I hope most is that audiences keep the conversation going after the show finishes. If you do a show well, the conversation goes out the door, to the car, all the way home, and then into the next few days—as an actor, having that story continue is how you know you’ve done a good job. The play is just the starting point, the spark; it’s what comes after it that matters most.



"My Favorite Part Was Everything"

A collection of thank you notes from young attendees of *Circus Abyssinia: Tulu*

At CTC, our Student Matinee performances are nothing short of electric. Hundreds of kids stream out of buses, bouncing with sometimes uncontainable energy, and pile into theatre seats, some of them for the very first time. They laugh and talk and scream louder than any audience, totally transported by the story they see on stage—filling our building with the purest proof of why our work here matters.

Over the course of our 2022 - 2023 Season, over 60,000 students will take field trips to see a performance at Children's Theatre Company, and hundreds more will see productions as a part of CTC camps and educational partnerships. Friends like you share in our belief that witnessing theatre is a powerful and transformative experience, and thanks to you, we're able to share this magic with thousands of young people.

You've heard us say—and we truly believe it—that your support makes an incredible impact in the lives of young people. But don't just take our word for it: these thank you notes, written by young attendees of *Circus Abyssinia: Tulu*, speak for themselves. We hope you enjoy them as much as we did.



Photo of *Circus Abyssinia: Tulu* by Glen Stubbe Photography



Drawing by Pillsbury MPS 2nd Grader

Thank you, Circus Abyssinia! It was fun and amazing to watch your show! By the way...I'm Ethiopian too! I speak some Amharic but can't write it, but I would show you if I could. I hope you guys keep putting on your amazing show more and more!

Lilly, Age 10

Thank you for inviting us to the theatre and the show, and you did awesome, and I like the part where the hoop is on fire.

Ritat, Age 7

You put on a wonderful show. To be honest, there are no words to describe your fantastical, wondrous, breath-taking, amazing, cool, rad, unforgettable, astounding, fun, and just awesome performance. I hope you keep putting on your magical circus.

Eliza, Age 12

At the Heart of Creativity and Community

A spotlight on CTC's growing Artistic and Equity team

At CTC, we believe that we are creating theatre for the most important audience in the world: our young people. They are tomorrow's teachers and artists, doctors and parents, and each one will have a hand in shaping how our community grows together. We know that the experiences they have at CTC will shape them for the rest of their lives, and we take seriously our commitment to give them the tools they need to succeed in whatever their futures hold.

A cornerstone of this commitment to the next generation is CTC's Access, Connect, Transform (ACT) One program. ACT One sits at the heart of creating accessible, inclusive theatre that serves and represents our entire community, and reflects our dedication to ensuring that every person experiences the magic of the arts. The platform includes the ACT Pass, which provides \$5 theatre tickets and educational scholarships to families who have been traditionally excluded from professional arts experiences; resources to help families navigate difficult topics, including the post-show conversations hosted during the run of *Something Happened in Our Town*; and community partnerships with other local nonprofits like Avenues for Youth and The Somali Museum.

In July of 2022, CTC announced that Michael Winn, a member of the theatre's senior leadership team and a key leader of the theatre's ACT One work, would serve in a new position as Associate Artistic Director/Director of Equity and Community Partnerships. As an expansion of the Artistic team, Winn's new role sits at the intersection of CTC's creative and community work, deepening the connection between ACT One and artistic initiatives.

"This is a natural evolution of who we are and our values," says Winn.

"Our job is to help them strengthen that voice, to help them practice compassion and empathy, so that they can grow up to be the kind of people we all hope our kids will be: strong, kind, fair, and nothing less than who they truly are."



- Michael Winn

Associate Artistic Director/Director of Equity and Community Partnerships



"I'm excited about the impact we can make, especially working with organizations that serve traditionally underrepresented communities."

- Josephine Yang

Artistic and Equity Coordinator

"Our artistic work and our work to build a more just, equitable, and accessible world are one and the same; the stories we tell have incredible power, and the impact we can have in our community by telling those stories is immeasurable."

The expansion of CTC's artistic and access department also brought the welcoming of Josephine Yang—a familiar face to anyone who has joined us for a performance since our doors reopened last fall. Formerly the Patron Experience Manager, Yang is stepping into a brand-new role as CTC's Artistic and Equity Coordinator and will be focused on growing partnerships with diverse audiences, artistic teams, and partner organizations.

"The more we expand this platform, the more people we can serve," Yang explains. "But this work takes time—it's qualitative, not quantitative. I'm excited about the impact we can make, especially working with organizations that serve traditionally underrepresented communities."

For both Winn and Yang—and for all of us who believe in the power of young people—the children on our stages, in our audiences and classrooms, and out in our community are at the heart of their work.

"CTC has the power to inspire kids at such a pivotal age," notes Yang. "We are so privileged to be able to help them participate in their values, to experience what it means to feel represented, to be supported, to feel like their voices and stories are being heard."

Winn adds: "Young people have an incredible sense of right and wrong. They speak up when something isn't fair or when someone isn't being treated well, and their honesty can be humbling—anyone who has ever spoken with the average fourth grader can attest that they don't stand for anything less than what they think is right."

"Our job is to help them strengthen that voice, to help them practice compassion and empathy, so that they can grow up to be the kind of people we all hope our kids will be: strong, kind, fair, and nothing less than who they truly are."

To learn more about CTC's commitment to ensuring that the theatre is as home for all people, all families, and is reflective of our community, visit childrenstheatre.org/actone.



SUMMER CAMP 2023



Children's Theatre Company offers a variety of weekly summer camps for students grades K-12. Join us for a summer of fun, creativity, and delight.

REGISTER TODAY!

childrenstheatre.org/summer

