

Children's Theatre Company

BEHIND THE CURTAIN BEYOND THE STAGE

SUMMER | 2023



Meet Janely Rodriguez

The newest member of the CTC Acting Company

For many of us, a trip to CTC is not complete without seeing the familiar faces of CTC Acting Company members. CTC is one of only a few professional regional theatres to employ a full-time resident acting company, and members are cast in productions throughout the season, returning year after year in ever-changing roles.

Starting in our 2023-2024 Season, Janely Rodriguez (she/they/he) will be the newest and first Latine member of the Acting Company, joining standing members Gerald Drake, Dean Holt, Autumn Ness, and Reed Sigmund. In advance of their first season, we sat down with Janely to talk about this new chapter.

Tell us a little about yourself and your path to CTC.

I was born and raised in Miami, to a Guatemalan mother and a Cuban father. I've always loved theatre and chased opportunities to be immersed in it; after receiving an Associate's degree from Florida School of the Arts and a B.F.A. from Brenau University, I moved to Atlanta and started working for the Alliance Theatre. It was there that I first met CTC Artistic Director Peter Brosius and learned about CTC's performing apprenticeships—I knew some people in Minneapolis and had heard good things about the program, so I decided to audition and ultimately was offered the job for the 2019-2020 Season. It was a complete leap of faith to move to the Twin Cities, and even though my season was cut short by the pandemic, it set me on the path to joining the acting company. I love the Twin Cities and have performed at lots of theatres here, and I'm so excited to deepen my relationship with CTC.

What is one of your favorite memories of working at CTC thus far?

When I was performing in *Dr. Seuss's How the Grinch Stole Christmas!*, there is this moment when the Grinch is trying to say "Merry Christmas" to the Whos and is struggling to get the words out. It's the most magical moment, because without fail, kids start standing up in the audience and trying to help him—yelling "It's 'Merry Christmas!'" and "Just say it!" and "You can do it!" It's so heartwarming to hear them cheering him on, and to feel how connected and invested they are in that moment.



Photo of Janely Rodriguez by P&D Portraits



Photo of Janely Rodriguez and Lolla Remington in *Alice in Wonderland* by Glen Stube Photography

CTC is one of the only theatres in the country that maintains a professional acting company. What does it mean for you to be joining one?

I am so excited and so grateful to be joining this acting company. Every member of this team is incredibly skilled, and I just keep thinking how lucky I am to get to work with them. I feel like there are big shoes to fill, and at the same time, I feel so ready to jump in and take my place, because I know there is an exceptional team waiting to welcome me.

You have performed at a lot of different theatres, including many here in the Twin Cities. What excites you most about being at CTC and creating work for multigenerational audiences?

I love how playful and honest the audiences are at CTC. There is nothing like getting out on stage in front of all those kids at a student matinee—they are completely unfiltered. They will tell you if you are good or bad; if they disagree with what's happening on stage, they will yell straight at you, and if they think they can help, they do the same thing. It's such an experience to be on your feet and adhere to that energy, to be able to ride it through to the end of the story and know that you are carrying all these young people with you.

What shows are you most excited for in our 2023-2024 Season?

I'm excited for our production of *Alice in Wonderland*—the music in that show is so incredible, and the artistry of Victor Zupanc [CTC Resident Music Director] was one of the first things I fell in love with at CTC. I'm also thrilled to be here for the return of *A Year with Frog and Toad*; it's such a classic, and as a member of the queer community, I'm happy to be a part of a show that celebrates the breadth and depth of who we can love. I get to help kids feel seen for who they are, and that's really special.

To subscribe or learn more about our 2023-2024 Season, visit childrenstheatre.org/season.

Bethune, One Year Later

An educational partnership that is growing and thriving

In our Winter 2022 issue of *Behind the Curtain, Beyond the Stage*, we introduced you to CTC's newest educational partner: Bethune Arts Elementary, an arts magnet school located in north Minneapolis. Beginning in fall 2021 and designed as a three-year program, the vision for this partnership is to provide quality arts programming at every grade level at Bethune—integrating theatre arts education into everyday classroom work as a way to bolster students' social, emotional, and cognitive development.

Now at the conclusion of its second year, the Bethune partnership—and the students, families, educators, and staff who comprise it—is thriving. This second year has brought depth, stability, and trust to the program; the curriculum is now well-established, and CTC teaching artists have led arts residencies in every single classroom, deepening their relationships with students and teachers.

Critically, the impacts of the Bethune partnership are not just limited to the four walls of the classroom. Mindfulness is cornerstone of the Creative Play curriculum currently being implemented at Bethune, and as students have become more familiar with the content, the themes and benefits are starting to pop up in day-to-day student life. Teaching artists practice breath work and encourage emotional self-awareness with students, asking questions like, “What big feeling are you experiencing right now?” and “What would it feel like to breathe all the way down to your toes?” Outside the classroom, students can be seen calling on these resources: this winter, one student was having trouble getting his coat on, and instead of losing



Photo of Bethune Arts Elementary Students visiting CTC for *Circus Abyssinia: Tulu* from Bethune Arts Elementary Facebook page

his temper, he practiced “bunny breathing”—taking three small sips of air followed by one big exhale—and then was able to try again. Later in the spring, a different student got overwhelmed during a group activity, and stepped away to the edge of the classroom to center herself before joining back in. All the way from Pre-K to 5th grade, students are increasing their self-awareness, learning to self-regulate, and practicing settling their own nervous systems—skills that will serve them during and after their time with CTC.

A key expansion of the Bethune partnership this season has been hosting Bethune Family Nights at CTC. Modeled as a companion for the existing student matinee program, Family Nights offer \$5 public performance tickets to Bethune students, family members, teachers, and administrators.

“Family Nights are a perfect example of our larger goal at Bethune,” says CTC Director of Education Ann Joseph-Douglas. “This program is elevating the game of what arts partnerships can look like: it’s about building long and deep partnerships that extend beyond the classroom; offering holistic, community-oriented support; and investing in a vision of a full-service education that supports academic, social, and emotional development.”

While the Bethune partnership was initially designed as a three-year program, expansion is already on the horizon. On the slate for next year is adding more programming for 2nd-grade students, who already participate in city-wide student matinee programming at CTC; the curriculum will also be expanding to include math integration to better support students’ work in science, technology, engineering, and math. Ultimately, Joseph-Douglas hopes to use Bethune as a model to recreate this partnership at other schools—pursuing the vision of a world where every child, at every age, can benefit from an arts education.

Educational programming like the Bethune partnership is made possible by generous support from our community. To learn more, visit childrenstheatre.org/education-and-engagement.



Photo of Bethune Arts Elementary Students from Bethune Arts Elementary Facebook Page

Centering Jewish Experiences in *An American Tail the Musical*

As the final production of our 2022-2023 Season, CTC proudly presented the world premiere of *An American Tail the Musical*. While this story has many themes—family, perseverance, hope—one of the strongest throughlines of this story is the Mousekewitz family's Jewish background and faith.

In keeping with our steadfast commitment to creating accessible and inclusive theatre that is representative of our community, CTC worked closely with Jewish artists, religious leaders, and community members throughout the development and production of this new work. These partnerships ensured that Jewish experiences and stories remain at the heart of this production, and will continue to take center stage wherever this beloved musical goes next.

On the Stage

- *An American Tail the Musical* opens on Hanukkah, showing Papa and the Mousekewitz family lighting a menorah while singing a prayer, dancing the hora, and eating latkes.
- At the close of Act I, Mama encourages Tanya to say a *shema* for her lost brother Fievel, leading into the siblings' duet of the iconic song, "Somewhere Out There."
- Fievel's parents praise him for overcoming huge obstacles at such a young age, before becoming an adult at his "bar-mouse-vah."

In the Rehearsal Room

- The show's creative team was led by multiple Jewish artists, including Itamar Moses (book and lyrics) and Alan Schmuckler (music and lyrics).
- During rehearsals this spring, musical director Andrea Grody hosted the writers and crew for a Passover Seder.
- CTC partnered with local Jewish cultural consultant Jacob Hellman during the rehearsal process.



Photo of *An American Tail the Musical* cast by Glen Stubbe Photography



Photo of Autumn Ness in *An American Tail the Musical* rehearsal by Kaitlin Randolph

In the Media

The premiere of *An American Tail the Musical* was covered and syndicated by dozens of press outlets worldwide, including the following:

- *American Jewish World*
- *Jewish Broadcasting Service*
- *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*
- *Intermountain Jewish News*
- *Philadelphia Jewish Exponent*
- *Pittsburgh Jewish Journal*
- *TC Jewfolk*
- *Times of Israel*
- *The Forward*
- *The Jerusalem Post*
- *The Cleveland Jewish News*



Fievel illustration courtesy of Universal Pictures

In the Community

- CTC and the Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest co-hosted a Shabbat dinner for community members before one Friday evening show, led by local Rabbi Daniel Ettedgui of Sharei Chesed Congregation.
- Families from local branches of PJ Library, a program that sends free Jewish children's books to families across the world, attended a performance and a private post-show event.
- CTC hosted a talkback series in partnership with Robin Doroshov of the Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest and Sarah Buchlaw of Jewish Community Action.



Photo of guests at the CTC Shabbat dinner by Josephine Yang



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