



# A BRIGHT NEW BOISE

---

Written by Samuel D. Hunter  
Directed by Oliver Butler



# STUDY GUIDE

# CONTENTS

1. Introduction
2. A Closer Look
3. Understanding the World of the Play
4. Behind The Scenes
5. Deeper Dive

# INTRODUCTION

## Synopsis

Will has fled his northern Idaho hometown and found a new community in the artificially bright break room of his new Boise workplace, a Hobby Lobby craft-supply chain store. But there are other reasons he's chosen to make a fresh start for himself in the world of this specific big box store: one recent scandalous tragedy and another from long ago involving a new coworker. Will's presence—the past that sticks to him, the grandiosity of his troubled faith, the weight of his hunger to connect—threatens to throw the sanctuary of the Hobby Lobby ecosystem into chaos.

## Time

2010

## Place

The breakroom of a Hoby Lobby in Boise, Idaho



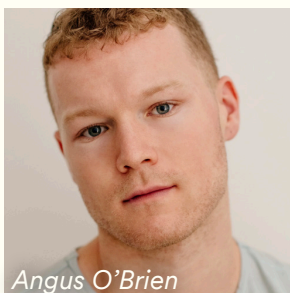
# Characters



## **WILL**

He/him, late 30s-early 40s. Newly arrived to Boise from a smaller, more obscure Idaho

town. Will has seemingly left behind his church, and his fervent religious zealotry, to attempt to reconnect with his son Alex, who he put up for adoption as an infant years ago.



## **LEROY**

He/him, mid-late 20s. Alex's protective, witty (and perhaps even wise), older, adoptive brother.

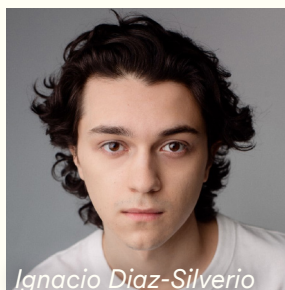
A visual artist whose bold, attention-demanding work seeks to disrupt what he deems as unacceptable cultural norms and tropes. He sees working at Hobby Lobby as its own sort of performance art.



## **PAULINE**

She/her, late 30s-mid 50s. Manager of the Hobby Lobby. A scrappy survivor who has seen some things

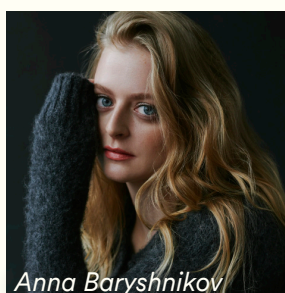
in her life, and who has put blood, sweat and tears into keeping this Hobby Lobby alive and thriving.



## **ALEX**

He/him, 17. Put up for adoption when he was a baby, Alex has grown up resenting his adoptive parents

and his seemingly dead-end life in his seemingly dead-end town. His work at the Hobby Lobby does not offer a wide berth for his dreams of a better life. Prone to panic attacks.



## **ANNA**

She/her, mid 20s-early 30s. An employee at the Hobby Lobby who, like Will, hides in

the aisles at closing time to remain there after hours to pursue personal interests, in her case, reading.



*From L to R: Angus O'Brien, Eva Kaminsky, Peter Mark Kendall, Anna Baryshnikov, and Ignacio Diaz-Silverio at first rehearsal. Photo by Jonathan George.*

# A CLOSER LOOK

## → An Interview with Playwright Samuel D. Hunter

**How did you find your way into theater, and when did you decide to pursue a career in the arts?**

I knew I wanted to be in the arts from a very early age, but I didn't know exactly how or what my place was. In the beginning, I wanted to be a musician. I played classical piano, but then I started competing. When I saw that world, I was like, "I am not nearly good enough on a technical level to be a professional." Also, it didn't feel like my people. It didn't feel like my tribe. I continue to love classical music, it's my favorite kind of music, but I started drifting away from it, and I started writing more.

I was in a very conservative school, and writing was an outlet for me. There was one point where our English teacher read excerpts of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* out loud, and she did it for the purpose of demonstrating how awful it was. Everybody snickered through the whole thing, but I immediately sought it out and devoured it. I didn't understand it, but I loved it.

I started writing a lot of poetry but didn't show it to anybody because I didn't have anybody to show it to. When I eventually left that school and enrolled in public school, I showed a bunch of my poems to my English teacher. He was the first person who – I will remember that day for the rest



Samuel D. Hunter, photo by Jonathan George

of my life – he came to me in the hall and was so supportive and like, "please keep going."

I was very lucky that around 11th grade, when you start thinking about college, I read *Our Town* and *Angels in America*. Something about the confluence of those two plays exploded in my chest. I started writing plays after that. The nice thing about being in a small town in North Idaho is that there's no competition if you want to write plays. I just wrote a play, and the community theater was like, "Okay, here's \$300." I got a bunch of local actors, very gracious local actors, to act in it. It wasn't good; it was really long and set in New York City, where I had never been. But I just really wanted to be a playwright.

I assumed I was going to go to the University of Idaho like everybody in my family did. Then somebody was like, “I think there’s a playwriting program at NYU, where Tony Kushner teaches,” (which wasn’t true, he didn’t teach there. I think he did briefly, but he wasn’t teaching when I went there). I went online and looked at the application for NYU. The application was limited to 25 pages and the play I had written was 150 pages long, so I was like, “Okay, I’ll just write a one-act play.” I wrote a two-character, one-act play, sent it to NYU, and ended up getting in. Then I moved to New York in a very naive way. That’s how it started.

### **Where did you first get the idea for *A Bright New Boise*?**

I’ve always been interested in religion, and I’ve written about America’s unique brand of Christianity. Or brands, I should say. Writing *A Bright New Boise*, I remember I was watching this documentary about Fred Phelps, who runs the Westboro Baptist Church – the notorious anti-gay Church in Kansas. The most interesting shot of that documentary to me was this pullback shot of the Phelps family barbecue. It looked so normal. It was just kids playing, but then they would zoom into these kids and hate speech would fall out of their mouths effortlessly. It got me really interested in how you can hold beliefs that somebody might say are extreme, or fundamentalist, or at least very rigid. How do you negotiate that with modern life—of having a family barbecue, or even just changing a tire? It got me interested in writing a story about somebody who’s trying to negotiate his worldview with modern working-class

American life.

### **Is there a central theme in *A Bright New Boise* that you find yourself returning to?**

I think if the play is about one thing primarily, it’s [the question], How does one negotiate one’s worldview with one’s daily life? You don’t need to be an evangelical Christian in order to have that question of, How do I negotiate my world view with the world at large?

Since I wrote this play, a lot of people have become very ossified in their belief systems. We’re becoming increasingly at war with one another through these belief systems and through conflicts of beliefs. I think it’s a discussion worth having. This is a very specific discussion about this guy [from] this specific church in North Idaho who is now trying to re-enter a suburban life and meet his son. But I think we are all presented with things that contradict what we believe, and people who live drastically different lives than us. We all need to figure out how to negotiate that.

### **Why did you set this play in the breakroom of a Hobby Lobby?**

I set this play in a Hobby Lobby well before Hobby Lobby became embroiled in the Supreme Court case, so Hobby Lobby has become a different cultural institution since I wrote this play. I’m really interested to see how that resonates with audiences and tells a different story in 2023.

I wanted to set [the play] in that suburban sprawl landscape. I worked at Walmart. That was my first job when I was a kid. I was a cashier at Walmart and then I



*Samuel D. Hunter and Oliver Butler at first rehearsal. Photo by Jonathan George.*

worked at the returns desk. The break room is an interesting place because you do this incredibly repetitive work when you're working at a store like a Hobby Lobby or Walmart. When I was a cashier at Walmart, it was almost like I'd go into a fugue state, because you're just doing the same thing over and over. I almost enjoyed it. It was like a weird retail meditation, just scanning and doing the same motions. Those 15 minutes that you would go into the break room were really interesting. I found people to be incredibly open with each other, very honest, and craving connection in this windowless, fluorescent box. There was a weird purgatory feel to it.

**How are you exploring faith or religion throughout this play?**

I hesitate to even say the play is about religion, because it's really not. I think religion is just the container that one of these characters brings into this world. It's

an examination of faith and modern life.

I think it's one thing to have discussions [of faith or religion] in a church or monastery, but it's another to have them in a break room of a Hobby Lobby. I think there's actually a greater need in a break room of a Hobby Lobby for that larger human connection.

As a writer, I'm interested in discussions of faith because I think we don't talk about it enough. It's such a huge part of modern American life. For millions of Americans, their faith is foundational to their entire identity. But I think we're too scared to explore it in our narratives.

**Is there anything in your life that has shaped your relation to the play since you first wrote it?**

Funnily enough, I wrote *The Whale* and

*A Bright New Boise* right on top of one another. I actually wrote *The Whale* first, even though it was produced after. They've always felt like companion pieces to me, because they're both stories of a father in a very complicated situation trying to reconnect with an estranged kid.

I wrote both plays before I had a kid, and my husband and I became dads five years ago. I think I always knew I wanted to be a dad, but it was pretty theoretical back then. I was interested in writing about how modern American Christianity, or this brand of more fundamentalist, non-denominational American Christianity, affects modern life. I think the volume on that discussion continues to be turned up really high, and the line between politics and religion is becoming increasingly blurred in the ten-plus years since I wrote this play.

I think it's important to take the politics out of it and just look at it for what it is. What is this kind of faith? How does it interact with people? Look at it in an honest and human way. I think a lot of people who are going to come see this play are going to bring in a host of assumptions about who this [character] is, and I think the first assumptions that are routinely made about these kinds of people are that they're crazy or deluded or simple-minded.

I had an experience of going to a non-denominational Christian school that taught the kinds of things that Will believes...that the Earth is 6,000 years old, that Christ is going to come again, and that we're likely living in end times. I know what that feels like from the inside. It provides this sense of community, of purpose, and

a sense of order to everything. In that way, it's almost like this really warm sweater. But the dogma can be so rigid that any sense of opposition or lack of clarity just destroys the entire thing. It's almost like a Jenga puzzle late in the game, where if you take out one thing everything just topples.

Not that long ago, say 700 years ago (which seems like a long time, but that's 12 to 15 human lifespans stacked on top of one another), a religious person, specifically a Christian person, was working class, likely illiterate, probably never ventured beyond the small confines of their community. They were told, "Those guys over there in the robes, they have the keys to the kingdom. They have God's ear."

You would have no reason to question that. Even if you did have the wherewithal to be like, "Well, wait a minute. Why should I trust that?" then there'd be a comet, or an earthquake, or a solar eclipse, or something so unexplainable that you'd be like, "Never mind, okay, I believe. Obviously, magic is real. Obviously, God is up there."

But now we're all walking around with the constantly updating encyclopedia of the world in our pockets. It's becoming harder to negotiate everything we know about the universe with that literal reading of the Bible, so people are digging in their heels. I understand why, because I think many people see modern life as a threat to a faith that is deeply organizational to them and fundamental to how they live in the world.



## **What excites you about working with director Oliver Butler on this play?**

I've known Oliver for years, and I've been trying to work with him for a long time. I remember one of the first things I saw that Oliver directed was *Blood Play* in Williamstown. It's one of the very few plays I saw multiple times because I was just utterly hypnotized by it; it was so beautiful and mysterious. I'm always attracted to the kind of theater where I feel like I'm presented with all these perspectives, all these ideas, and it's my job to wander through, take what I can, and arrive at a place.

Oliver is one of the kindest human beings. He's such a joy to work with. He's such a good collaborator; he listens to everybody. Now ten-plus years after writing the play, I think we live in a different America than when I wrote this play back in 2010. A lot of the discussions that I've had with Oliver have been [about] how the story resonates very differently in 2022.

## **Where do you see *A Bright New Boise* in the landscape of your work?**

I think my plays are always on some level about the tragedy of isolation and the redeeming value of human connection. Once I realized that my fundamental concern as a writer is isolation and connection, writing about family was natural, because that's our base level connection. With both *The Whale* and *A Bright New Boise*, those are examinations when, for whatever external reasons, those connections were broken. The question in both plays is, What is it to knit that [connection] back together if these two

people have been separated by years and have a genetic, familial origin story that they share? What is it to try to repair that when they've lived such different lives for all those years?

Both Charlie in *The Whale* and Will in *A Bright New Boise* meet these kids later in their lives, and they're both searching, and [asking], "How can I best parent this kid in this incredibly complicated situation when I'm in an incredibly complicated situation in my own life?"

## **We often ask experts for advice in the field, hoping they can point us in the right direction. Instead of advice, I'm wondering if you can share a creative exercise or question for folks interested in further developing their own voice?**

Try writing something that you're not going to show anybody else. Say to yourself, "I'm never going to show this to anybody else," and just write something. Once you put the pressure of having to make something good, you immediately put handcuffs on yourself. You're not writing something authentic anymore, you're writing something that you think should be produced. I did that for a long time, so I can speak from experience. It wasn't until I took off those handcuffs and was like, "Maybe I'm just going to write something that will never leave my hard drive." I really didn't do that until I wrote *The Whale*, which was after nine years of school for playwriting. ✨

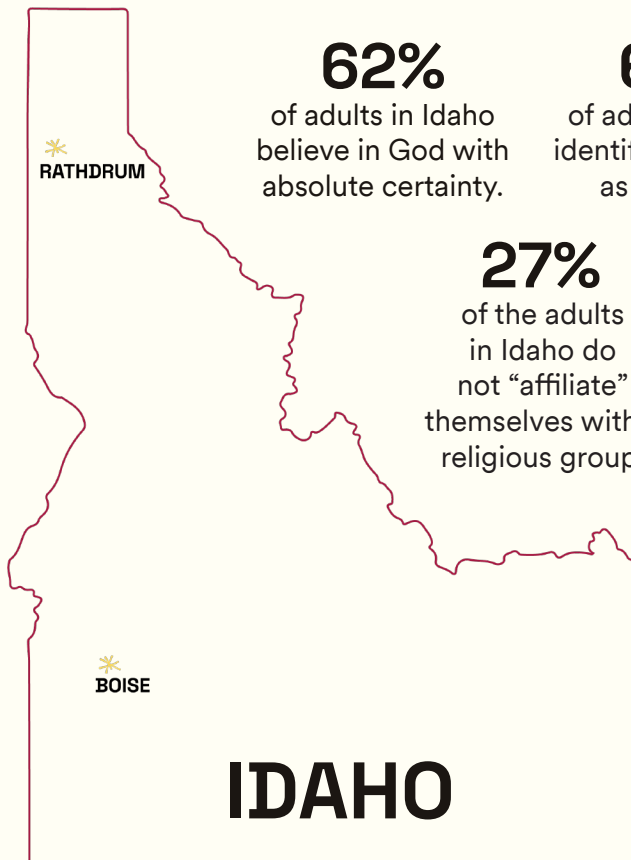
# UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD OF THE PLAY



	2010/11	2021/22
Boise City Population	210,000	237,000
Boise Metropolitan Area Population	616,561	795,268
Boise Median Income	\$25,900	\$68,373
Idaho Minimum Wage	\$7.25	\$7.25
Hobby Lobby Minimum Wage (Full-Time Employees)*	\$11	\$18.50

In 2010, 72.9 million American workers aged 16 and over were paid at hourly rates, representing 58.8% of all wage and salary workers.

\*Hobby Lobby has consistently paid full-time employees higher rates than the federal minimum wage. In 2010, full-time Hobby Lobby employees earned \$11. In 2022, they made \$18.50. Part-time employees continue to earn lower hourly rates.



**62%**  
of adults in Idaho believe in God with absolute certainty.

**67%**  
of adults in Idaho identify themselves as Christian.

**27%**  
of the adults in Idaho do not “affiliate” themselves with a religious group.

**21%**  
are evangelical Protestant.



Eva Kaminsky, photo by Joan Marcus

**PAULINE**

Boise’s a good town. You’ll like it here, it’s grown a lot over the past ten years.

**WILL**

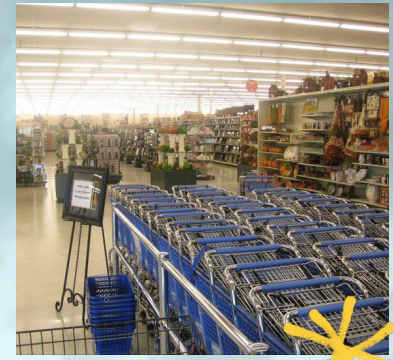
Yes, it really / seems like—

**PAULINE**

When I was a kid, it was nothing like this. Where we’re sitting right now used to be cow pastures. Nowadays, all the surrounding towns just spill right into one another. Friend of mine lives in Caldwell, tells me sometimes it takes him *forty minutes* to get to work. We have honest-to-god *city traffic*, you believe that?

# HOBBY LOBBY

Hobby Lobby is the largest privately-owned arts and crafts retailer in the world, with over 900 stores in 47 states. Founded in 1972, Hobby Lobby has long been known for its evangelical Christian affiliation and conservative values. Hobby Lobby is affiliated with Mardel Christian & Education Supply, which sells Bibles and religious curricula.



## Hobby Lobby's Core Values Include:

- Honoring the Lord in all we do by operating in a manner consistent with Biblical principles
- Offering customers exceptional selection and value
- Serving our employees and their families by establishing a work environment and company policies that build character, strengthen individuals, and nurture families
- Providing a return on the family's investment, sharing the Lord's blessings with our employees and investing in our community\*



*Eva Kaminsky, Ignacio Diaz-Silverio, and Peter Mark Kendall, photo by Joan Marcus*

**After the events of the play:**  
In 2014, Hobby Lobby was involved in the Supreme Court case of *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc.* regarding the obligation of the company to provide health care that covered contraceptive birth control. The court sided with Hobby Lobby, ruling that family-owned and other "closely held" corporations did not need to pay for insurance coverage for contraception under the Affordable Care Act. The landmark ruling was the first time the Supreme Court allowed commercial, for-profit entities to deny access to health care due to religious beliefs.



Stores like Hobby Lobby account for a larger movement of big-box retail, which began in the 1960s and remains a fixture of global consumerism today. The popularity of chain retail is often attributed to population rise in the suburbs, increasing access to cars within the household, and the ascent of consumerism.

## BIG-BOX RETAIL

In 2016, it was reported that retail accounts for 10,379,714,045 square feet of American property, which breaks down to 32.5 square feet per person living in the U.S. This number does not include the vast additional space occupied by retail parking lots.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had lasting impacts on big-box retail, as consumer shopping habits shifted to online sales. As a result, many hourly retail employees have been laid off and stores have shuttered, causing lasting effects on hourly wage workers and the real estate market. Despite the closure of brick-and-mortar stores, big-box stores have been better positioned than small businesses to shift to e-commerce during the pandemic, and many have seen profit margins rise.

\*[www.hobbylobby.com/about-us/our-story](http://www.hobbylobby.com/about-us/our-story)

# HEITOR VILLA-LOBOS



Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887-1959) was one of the foremost Latin American musicians and composers of the 20th century. Villa-Lobos is known for combining classical Western traditions alongside folk and indigenous Brazilian musical traditions. A prolific musician, Villa-Lobos played cello, guitar, and clarinet. Among his most famous works is *Bachianas Brasileiras*, a collection of nine pieces for instrumental and vocal groups influenced by Bach and Brazilian musical heritage.

**WILL**

Sorry, I—I'm just wondering, what're you listening to?

**ALEX**

Villa-Lobos.

**WILL**

Is that—pop music?

**ALEX**

He's a composer who mixed traditional Brazilian music with European classical music.

**WILL**

Oh. Wow. That's impressive.

**ALEX**

Yeah, well, I'm glad you're impressed, that means a lot.

*Peter Mark Kendall and Ignacio Diaz-Silverio, photo by Joan Marcus*



# RAPTURE

In Christianity, rapture refers to the belief in an end-time event that unites living and dead believers with Jesus Christ during the Second Coming. The idea of an impending rapture is often attributed to the Book of Revelation. While the theory has a substantial following, the term “rapture” does not appear in the New Testament.

End-time predictions and religious beliefs are not new or unique to Christianity, though rapture theory is a relatively modern preoccupation. The doctrine has been supported widely by American nondenominational and evangelical preachers and theologians. Events such as the Cold War and fear around the year 2000 sparked increased attention to the rapture, as religious and agnostic end-time theories proliferated.

---

## EVANGELICAL VS. NON-DENOMINATIONAL

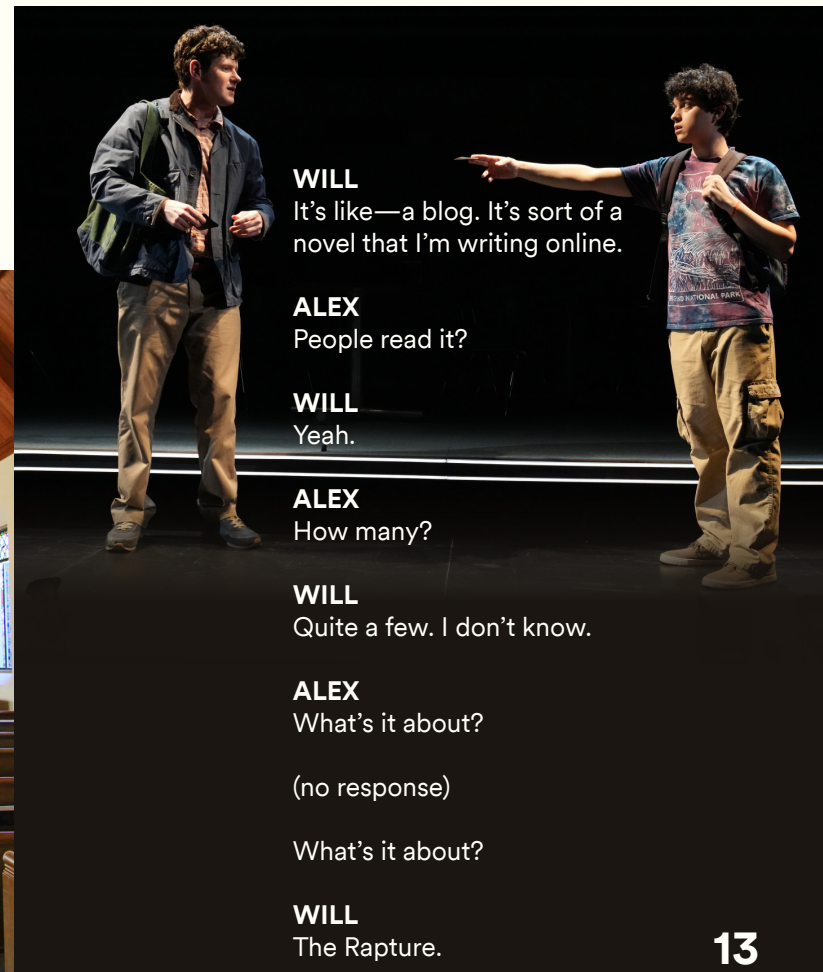
### Evangelical

Evangelicalism describes a movement within Christianity (and often within Protestantism) that focuses on the gospel of Jesus Christ. Evangelical churches can be denominational or non-denominational, though most are non-denominational. Evangelicalism and fundamentalism share similar theology. The word evangelical comes from the Greek word “euangelion,” which translates to “gospel” or “good news.” Defining characteristics of evangelicalism include being “born again,” following the teachings of Christ, and working to lead others to Christ.

### Non-denominational

Non-denominational churches describe those that aren’t affiliated with a specific denomination. Most non-denominational churches are congregational, without a regional, state or national organization.

*Peter Mark Kendall and Ignacio Diaz-Silverio, photo by Joan Marcus*



# 2011

Six in ten evangelical leaders (61%) say they believe in the Rapture of the Church — the teaching that believers will be instantly caught up with Christ before the Great Tribulation, leaving non-believers behind to suffer on Earth.

*Peter Mark Kendall and Anna Baryshnikov, photo by Joan Marcus*



**ANNA**

Yeah but what kind of church was it?

**WILL**

It was a nondenominational—

**ANNA**

No, I mean like Methodist, Lutheran, whatever—

**WILL**

That's what I'm saying, it was nondenominational. / Never mind, it doesn't—

**ANNA**

I don't know what that means.

**WILL**

It means that we weren't part of any huge network or organization, we just wanted a church that was dedicated to saving people through Christ.

[Pew](#) (2011)

[American Survey Center](#) (2022)

[www.christianitytoday.com/news/2022/november/religion-census-nondenominational-church-growth-nons.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2022/november/religion-census-nondenominational-church-growth-nons.html)

# 2022

Approximately four in 10 (39%) former evangelical Protestants report feeling lonely or isolated from those around them all or most of the time, versus former mainline Protestants (28%) and former Catholics (23%). This may be due to the impact of leaving a religious community, thus severing social ties and losing contact with systems of support.

Research has shown that those who come from conservative religious backgrounds organize their social lives through their church or place of worship. When a person leaves their religion, most social bonds are abandoned, leading to increased feelings of social isolation and loneliness.

As of 2022, “nondenominational” is the largest segment of American Protestants. If “nondenominational” were a denomination, it would account for more than 13% of churchgoers in America.



## Rapture

---

*noun*

1. Ecstatic joy or delight; joyful ecstasy
2. Often raptures. an utterance or expression of ecstatic delight
3. The carrying of a person to another place or sphere of existence
4. The Rapture, *Theology*. the experience, anticipated by some fundamentalist Christians, of meeting Christ midway in the air upon his return to earth
5. Archaic. the act of carrying off

*verb (used with object), rap-tured, rap-tur-ing*

6. To enrapture.

## Apocalypse

---

*noun*

1. Any of a class of Jewish or Christian writings that appeared from about 200 B.C. to A.D. 350 and were assumed to make revelations of the ultimate divine purpose
2. A prophetic revelation, especially concerning a cataclysm in which the forces of good permanently triumph over the forces of evil
3. Any revelation or prophecy
4. Any universal or widespread destruction or disaster

# AN ABRIDGED HISTORY OF END TIME PREDICTIONS

95 CE



Written around 95 CE, the Book of Revelation is the final book of the Old Testament that plays a central role in Christian eschatology.

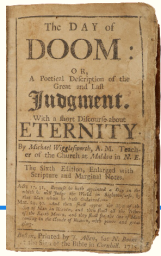
Romans thought 12 eagles had revealed to Romulus that Rome would be destroyed 120 years after its founding.



634 BCE

1500 BCE

Nomadic tribesman Zoroaster predicted a universal resurrection and a cosmic battle between good and evil that would form a new, perfect world.



1517 CE

About one out of every 20 Puritans in New England owned a copy of Michael Wigglesworth's apocalyptic poem, *The Day of Doom*.

Around 1501 CE, Columbus compiled the *Book of Prophecies*, a collection of apocalyptic revelations that signaled his voyages were part of ushering in the end times.



1501 CE

Written in 1517 CE, German theologian Martin Luther's *Ninety-five Theses* paved the way for new readings of Christian end-times prophecy.

1517 CE

1346-1352 CE

From 1346-1352 CE, the Black Death killed more than one third of Europeans, convincing many they were in the end times.



1844 CE

In what is now known as "The Great Disappointment," many Millerites quit their jobs and sold their possessions to prepare for the Second Coming on October 22.

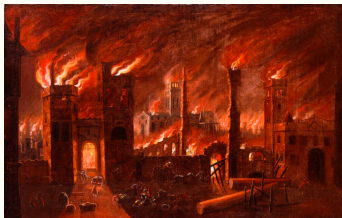
1938 CE

Some thought Martians were invading when they tuned their radios to The Mercury Theatre on the Air performance of H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds*, narrated by Orson Wells.



1666 CE

Some feared the number of the beast—666—meant the end was nigh in 1666 CE, a year that brought England a new wave of the plague and the Great Fire of London.



1947 CE

*The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* introduced the now-iconic Doomsday Clock on its 1947 cover to convey how close humanity is to the apocalypse.



1861-1865 CE

Many American Christians viewed the Civil War as a part of God's master plan to usher in Christ's 1000-year reign on Earth before the Last Judgment.



1910 CE

The discovery that comet tails contain a deadly gas called cyanogen left many fearing the 1910 return of Halley's Comet.



First published in 1970, Hal Lindsey and C. C. Carlson's *The Late Great Planet Earth*, which links current events to the coming apocalypse, eventually became the bestselling nonfiction book of the 1970s.

## 1970 CE

In November 1970, Nobel laureate George Wald warned, "Civilization will end within 15 or 30 years unless immediate action is taken against problems facing mankind."

10 million Americans who received Parade magazine on October 30th were greeted with a cover story that asked, "Would nuclear war be the end of the world?"

## 1983 CE

## 2000 CE

Many feared Y2K would cause global havoc on January 1, 2000 because of a widespread computer shortcut that would make 2000 indistinguishable from 1900.

## 2012 CE

December 21, 2012 marked the end of a cycle of the Mayan long-count calendar, which fueled cataclysmic predictions.

Evangelical radio broadcaster Harold Camping predicted the apocalypse would arrive 7,000 years after the biblical flood, on May 21, which he later amended to October 21.

## 2007 CE

In 2007, fears mounted that the Large Hadron Collider, the world's most powerful particle accelerator, would create a black hole that would devour Earth.

## 2011 CE

At the World Economic Forum, Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg said, "Adults keep saying: 'We owe it to the young people to give them hope.' But I don't want your hope. I don't want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. And then I want you to act. I want you to act as you would in a crisis. I want you to act as if the house is on fire. Because it is."



## 2019 CE

## 2020 CE



The Doomsday Clock moved to 100 seconds to midnight in 2020, because of worsening nuclear threat, lack of climate action, and rise of cyber-enabled disinformation campaigns.

# NOW

A 2022 Pew Research Center survey revealed:

- 39% of US adults say we are living in the end times.
- 47% of US Christians say we are living in the end times.
- 55% of US adults say Jesus will return to Earth someday.
- 10% of US adults say the Second Coming will definitely or probably occur during their lifetime.

# BEHIND THE SCENES

## An Interview with Director Oliver Butler



### ***How did you get your start in theater?***

My mother was an actor, and my father was an actor, director, and stage manager. I grew up backstage but knew that life was hard. I was also a soccer player and a baseball player, so I could never do the school plays until I auditioned for *Little Shop of Horrors* (I played Seymour). Then the next year I played Judas in *Jesus Christ Superstar*. I'm not cut out for singing in that way, but it did get me around theater people outside of what I grew up with.

I went to college, and to Williamstown Theatre Festival as an apprentice. It was hard, but I loved it. I got to work backstage making scenery and costumes. I was with people who I would go on to work with, so this whole thing is just like family for me.

Then I came to New York and started a theater company with Hannah Bos and Paul Thureen called The Debate Society. That was my graduate school. I learned what kind of plays I wanted to make by making plays from scratch with them for years.

The other start I got was from Jim Houghton here at Signature, who said he had faith in me to direct Will Eno's play [*The Open House*]. [Will] had suggested me because he had seen my work with The Debate Society. I got my first shot



*Oliver Butler, photo by Jenny Anderson*

here, and it helped me feel more confident with what I was doing. Then I had faith from other institutions that I could be trusted with productions. And Paige and Beth have brought me in twice here at Signature, and each time it feels like a new beginning for me.

So, where did I get my start? So many people lined up and believed in me at different points, and that got me to the next phase. But I still don't know what's next. There will be another start coming.

**A *Bright New Boise* is your first collaboration with Sam, but you've both been champions and fans of each other's work for a long time. How does it feel to finally get the opportunity to work together?**

It's awesome. I mean, you never know how it's going to work, right? You're excited and hopeful, but you never know.

I was nervous coming into this first rehearsal, but once I got here, I was like, "Oh, I'm home." I'm in a place where I feel at home. I'm at the theater in New York where I've worked the most. One of our actors, Peter, worked with my mother back in the day, so there's a little family connection. I feel like I've got an ongoing relationship that just continues.

Sam is as kind, intelligent, and concise as he seems. I'm overwhelmed by how thoughtful, supportive, and generous he is. He's one of my favorite writers. His words and the poetry...it's like my favorite thing, where you can't see the brushstrokes because it's so expertly done. He's a great person to work with; I'm so happy I went on this journey.

**Sam wrote this play over a decade ago; what does it mean to return to this piece at this moment in time? What conversations arose between the two of you as the process began?**

The thing I'm drawn to with this play, and we still set it in 2010-2011, so this is pre-Trump, this is pre-COVID; I think that's important – it's from another time. Setting it in the time it was written gives us a



*Oliver Butler at first rehearsal. Photo by Jonathan George.*

remove from the politics of today, which sometimes allows us to see ourselves more deeply. Not always, but sometimes by saying, “No, no, this is not you exactly,” we get to say, “Okay, what are the poetic resonances that relate to my life?”

This play takes place before the 2014 Hobby Lobby Supreme Court case, but Hobby Lobby still represents this Christian corporate entity with deeply capitalist ties. I’m fascinated by the role of a big-box store like Hobby Lobby in a play that’s about what people believe, and how those people go about creating their own value systems in such spaces. I see Hobby Lobby as this temple of capitalism, and this place where different characters, different people, are finding their way through the gnarly, rough edges of their own belief systems. They’re bumping up against each other, trying to self-manifest in the world that exists for them.

We watch the play as all these different people interacting with each other, but I think, on some level, we also see it as different parts of a single personality trying to find union with each other. I’ve been thinking a lot about who the [characters] represent. We see the religious believer butt heads with the Hobby Lobby manager. What I see there is an argument between order created through capitalism and order created through God and religion. I’m not saying that’s exactly what Sam wrote, I’m talking about how I now see stuff.

I teach students Sarah DeLappe’s, *The Wolves*, which is about teenage girls on an indoor soccer team. [But] it’s not about soccer, right? Soccer isn’t even about

soccer. I’ve been taking that [approach] and applying it to my creative work, [asking], what is this about? Sometimes you start by pointing at the obvious thing, and then be like, “What if it’s not about that? In fact, it’s not.”

**You have such an incredible group of collaborators on this show – from the cast to the creatives. Can you tell us about your experience working with this team?**

This is a wildly connected, deeply soulful, beautiful group of people. I’ve worked with so many great people. I love actors, creators, administrators...the people doing the work. Making theater isn’t about theater for me, it’s about family. It’s about our history; it’s about a safe place to take a nap; it’s about a safe place to talk about who we are, why we think the way we do, why we feel the things we do, and maybe sketch out some idea of what the hell is going on, beyond the reality that we are actually just some wet matter on the outside of a rock in the middle of a solar system that’s not particularly big.

I want to be in a room with people who are curious and interested. This experience, honestly, has been a salve for some of my own feelings of loneliness in the world. We created a space where people could bring their own sense of safety into the room. When people feel safe, included, and seen then sometimes the subconscious, or what some people might call the “spirit,” allows itself to appear. I feel that every single day. I believe in calling in the spirit and the invisible things that manifest between people. This is a group that allows that to happen and is interested in seeing

that happen. It's a great combination of mundane, regular people living their lives, eating sandwiches, grabbing coffees, and people who are also deep souls traveling through space along with me in the middle of the universe. That's the feeling, honestly, every time in the room. It's, "I get to do this," and it's awesome. ✨



# BEHIND THE SCENES

## \* An Interview with Actor Ignacio Diaz-Silverio

**This is your Off-Broadway debut, congratulations! How did you first get into theater?**

So, I didn't grow up in theater. I didn't grow up acting. I fell in love with acting through movies, and I moved to New York to pursue acting and went to school here. That's really when I started. That was my introduction to the theater world.

**You play the role of Alex in *A Bright New Boise*. What originally attracted you to the role?**

I knew Sam and his writing. I'd read a number of his plays in school, and I think he's a brilliant writer. He has an artistic sensibility that I'm drawn to, and that I think I might share. When I found out that *A Bright New Boise* was getting staged at Signature, I immediately contacted my reps. I was like, "I need to audition for this. I need to audition for Alex."

**What have been the most exciting aspects in developing your performance as Alex? Are there any challenges you've been working through as you find your personal rhythm in the role?**

The best part is getting to work with everyone in the room. There's not a single person in the rehearsal room that isn't brilliant, generous, dedicated, gracious;



*Ignacio Diaz-Silverio*

everyone comes in willing to give the best of themselves. It's not something I take for granted. The space that's been created is quite special and allows for the actors to find the deepest and most vulnerable performance they can. From Oliver, our director, to every single one of the actors, and the stage management team, it's such a wonderful group of people to be a part of.

Of course, there have been many challenges along the way, but none that you don't have partners and allies in navigating. Even the challenges are gifts. It's just been a wonderful process.

**The first few days of the process were spent doing table work. Can you tell us about the role table work plays in your character development, and if there were any takeaways from those conversations that have shaped your performance?**

We spent two or three days doing table work. Table work entails sitting around a table, reading the script, asking questions, [and sharing] preliminary ideas that come up in the first read-throughs of the script. To use Sam's language, "It breathes oxygen into the room." I find, as an actor, that the intellectual discussions around table work or text analysis are very stimulating and intellectually rigorous, but in a practical sense, when you get down to playing scenes, intellectualization isn't helpful. But it allows everyone to have this shared understanding of the world we're in and what we're exploring.

Something we discussed that I've been thinking about is the idea of the divine versus the quotidian, and even the divine within the quotidian. That's one of the bigger themes that's still been ruminating in my brain since table work.

**Can you tell us more about the divine versus the quotidian, or any other themes that are resonating with you during the rehearsal process?**

What really excites me personally is the idea of the divine within the quotidian. I don't want to tell anyone what the play is about, because everyone has their own experience of the play. For me as an audience member, I'm really drawn to plays and movies that reflect the quotidian

and the smallness and minutiae of day-to-day life in a way that's honest. *The Godfather*, or *2001: A Space Odyssey*, are great movies, but if you're anything like me, you're sort of left disappointed that you're not a mobster or an astronaut. They're so large and spectacular that they can leave one feeling like your life is small in comparison. What I really love about *A Bright New Boise*, or plays in this vein, is that idea of finding the divine within the quotidian or mundanity.

A movie or a play that reflects everyday life in its totality and its mundanity...its grandiosity and chaos, its misery, joy, absurdity and hilarity...and shows you regular people navigating that and still moving forward—that provides me with a tremendous amount of hope. In this weird way, it validates my life, makes my life feel bigger, and allows me to find the divine or the beauty in my own life.

**At the time of this interview, we're in week three of rehearsals. Can you give us a behind-the-scenes glimpse of what this time looks like in the rehearsal room?**

We have a 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. rehearsal schedule. We come in, share anything we'd like about our experience of rehearsal or what we're thinking about with regards to the play, or even completely unrelated to the play, just how we're doing. Then we jump into the work. Right now, we're at a point where we're doing full run-throughs and sometimes isolating specific sections that we think need work.

I'd say my favorite tradition that we've established so far is an afternoon dance



*Ignacio Diaz-Silverio at first rehearsal. Photo by Jonathan George.*

break towards the end of the day. When we need a little pick-me-up or some energy, we have a playlist that we've collaborated on, and we pick a song and have a dance break. I think it lifts everyone's spirits, and then we continue with the rehearsal.

**There's a gravity and urgency to Alex's situation that builds over the course of the play. How have you worked with your director, Oliver, to shape Alex's trajectory? Knowing you're accessing some deep places, do you have a process as an actor for how you take care of yourself as you navigate those turns?**

It's true that your mind knows you're acting, but your body doesn't. As we've gotten deeper into rehearsals, Oliver has talked more about having a structure in place for safety. Not just with the heavier moments for Alex that he experiences, but

also moments of physical confrontation in the play. We're putting a system in place where the actors can communicate to each other that something went wrong, and we might need to take an extra beat before we move forward without the audience being aware.

In terms of accessing those deeper, darker places...I don't have a clear, perfect answer right now, but it is definitely something we're navigating, and it's continuing to unfold and evolve.

**You have experience in film and TV as well. How has acting for the stage differed from your work on camera?**

The goal is the same, but the processes are very different. In theater you have the luxury of rehearsing for a long time, so it's a deeper, more specific understanding of what you're doing. In film and TV, it's a little bit of showing up and just diving



in. Not to say that you shouldn't or can't prepare on your own, but there's very rarely time to rehearse.

In my film and TV experience, there's been a lot of space for improvisation, which is a tool I'm not using in this process because Sam's writing is brilliant and incredibly specific. That's a different challenge: to be word-perfect, to be beat-perfect, to have all the silences, pauses and interruptions scripted. In film and TV [projects] I've worked on, there's always at least a little room for ad-libbing and improv.

Outside of medium, just from project to project, role to role, things change so much. I think one of the most necessary and useful tools for an actor is adaptability. When you come into a new project, whether it's in the theater, film, or TV, you have to be willing to jump into a completely new environment with new people and start from scratch. That's part of what's scary about being an actor, but it's also part of the joy.

Even day to day in the same scene playing the same character, what worked for you yesterday doesn't mean it's going to work for you today. That's why it's very important to have all the tools at your disposal and not be dogmatic about, "there's one way to do this." All the different tools and techniques equip you with an arsenal to choose from at any given moment.

### **Are there any obstacles you find yourself confronting as you continue to develop your craft?**

One of the main obstacles to acting is

self-consciousness. There was a point a few years ago where I started to think of self-consciousness as a wall. I realized that there are things that I can do completely outside of acting to chip away at that wall. [Then] when on set with 300-400 people, or in a room with brilliant people like Sam Hunter and Oliver Butler, [or] on stage in New York in front of however many people, [I've been] proactively chipping away at that self-consciousness so it wouldn't become a hindrance.

I would do things that gave me a little bit of anxiety or self-consciousness, maybe as ridiculous as dancing on the subway or just like skipping down the street singing. Then you realize, especially living in New York, no one cares. You're fine. You survived. [You came out] on the other side of something that makes you self-conscious realizing it doesn't matter.

I don't want people to think I'm just dancing on the subway and skipping down the street. I did that maybe once or twice...

### **What advice would you give to students still honing their craft and figuring out their path?**

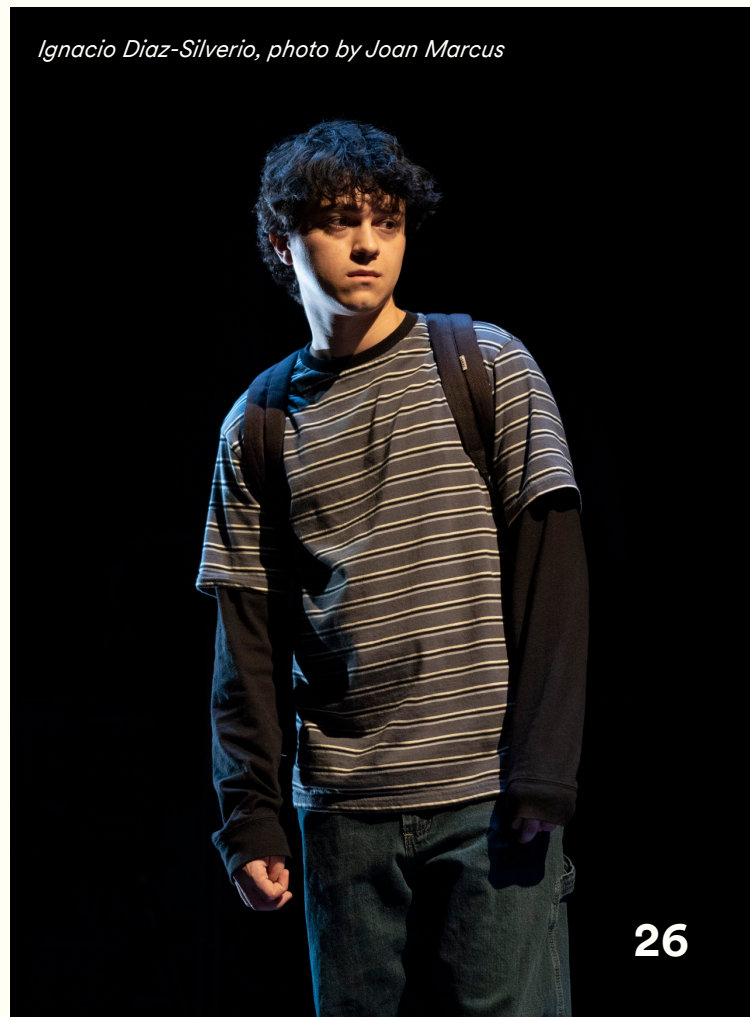
I was someone who consumed as much advice as I could from the artists I admired. Not just actors, but writers, directors... anyone and everyone. What became glaringly apparent was that there's not one way to do this; everyone's path and experience vary drastically. That's pretty terrifying because it's like, "Well then how do I get there? How do I even start? Where do I go?" On the other hand, it's liberating, because it means that you can only do what you feel is right for you.

You're left with no other option but to trust your own instinct and intuition.

Acting isn't meant to happen in a bubble; it happens in the space between people. You can go to the Drama Book Shop or your local library and grab a play and your friend and work on a scene together. There's nothing that prevents you from finding the screenplay to your favorite movie online and reading it before and after you watch the movie to start to understand what happens from the page to the screen.

If you live in New York City, this is the place in the U.S. for theater. I know Signature is very willing to provide access and resources. Most theaters across the city have various programs. If you're proactive and are able to identify the resources that the city has to offer (and are creative and resourceful enough to find ways to circumvent the system rather than listening to people's rules) that will serve you much better than anything else. ✨

*Ignacio Diaz-Silverio, photo by Joan Marcus*



# BEHIND THE SCENES

## ↪ An Interview with Projection & Video Designer Stefania Bulbarella

**You describe yourself as an interdisciplinary theater-maker. What about the art form attracted you to a career in the theater? What continues to inspire you?**

Theater was my first love and will forever be. I enjoy the process of gathering with a team to explore ways of telling the different stories that are presented to us. I strive to make theater that is loud and visceral. I construct to deconstruct. Vibrant atmospheres of controlled chaos are my limbo. I enjoy seeing human behavior on stage, the irrationality of our nature, and the animalistic qualities buried within ourselves as a reaction to society. I'm fond of theater that evolves to invite the audience to embark on a journey that culminates in a life experience. Theater is an invitation to change, to awaken, a reminder of humanity. I'm passionate about art that transforms, that challenges, and raises questions and conversations within our community by questioning the past, the present, and the future.

**The video elements in the play range from material we shot in-house to the sourcing of eye surgery videos. What was the process of creating and sourcing content?**

I truly enjoy when we get to pre-record material that is going to later be



*Stefania Bulbarella, by Albert Font Garcia*

manipulated to be seen on stage. There is something about the collaboration of being in the studio filming our own content that really fascinates me. In this particular project, we did have a script to follow written by Sam, but we also got to explore/improvise other ideas with some other props that Noah, our shoot props designer, sourced. Every department gets involved in creating the look of the scene we are going to shoot: sets, lights, costumes, sound, and props. Once we have the content, then we have the material to start editing and populate the stage.

In terms of the surgery content, it was hard to source. I looked for hours and

hours at videos of surgeries, which I never do. It was quite impressive to see so many different surgeries in real time.

**The Hobby Lobby video was its own small two-day production. What were some of your favorite moments?**

My favorite moment was when one of the actors plugged in one of the props, which was a bunny, and started inflating it. We had never seen the size of the bunny, so it was incredible to see the actors react to it as it got bigger and bigger. We might not see this shot in the play, but it was wonderful to experience it in the making.

***A Bright New Boise* takes place in 2010. How does time period influence your design approach, and how do you collaborate with other designers to make sure there's an authenticity to the time period?**

There is a lot of research involved to look at how 2010 looked. In terms of video, we also research quality of video, look of video, color correction of video, and tube TV features.

**You have extensive experience in theater here in New York, regionally, and internationally, how does a global perspective fuel your work?**

I love traveling, so traveling for work is one of the best gifts. I get to know other places, meet new cultures, and work with people from all over the globe.

**What advice would you give to young theater-makers interested in being multi-media artists?**

Reach out to the people you admire! ✨

# DEEPER DIVE

---

## Conversations with Playwright Samuel D. Hunter

### Read

[Samuel D. Hunter's Own Private Idaho](#) – *The New York Times*

[The Whale](#) screenwriter on writing about religious fundamentalism, bodies, and hope – *Vox*

[Waiting for a Revelation in A Bright New Boise](#) – *PBS News Hour*

### Watch

[A Bright New Boise Interview with Samuel D. Hunter](#) (20-minute watch)

[PBS Conversation with Samuel D. Hunter: Part 1](#) (30-minute watch)

[PBS Conversation with Samuel D. Hunter: Part 2](#) (30-minute watch)

## Hobby Lobby and Big-Box Stores

[The Past and Future of America's Biggest Retailers](#) – *NPR*

[Hobby Lobby, Megachurches, and the Trouble with Corporate Christianity](#) – *HuffPost*

[Here's How Much of America is Occupied by Big Box Stores](#) – *StrongTowns*

[The Hobby Lobby Decision: How Business Got Here](#) – *Harvard Business Review*

[The Hobby Lobby Decision and the Future of Religious-Liberty Rights](#) – *Pew Research Center*

## The Music of Heitor Villa-Lobos

[Listen to "Bachianas Brasileiras" on Spotify](#)

[Villa-Lobos channel on YouTube](#)

## Religion and Rapture in America

[The Apocalypse as an 'Unveiling': What Religion Teaches Us About the End Times](#) – *The New York Times*

[Vanished from the Earth](#) - *Slate*

[Why the Antichrist Matters in Politics](#) – *The New York Times* (2011)

[Apocalypse](#) – *This American Life* (1 hour listen)

[PBS: Evangelicals vs. Mainline Protestants](#)

[PBS Frontline: Apocalypse Series](#)

[The Book of Revelation](#)

[Understanding the Book of Revelation](#)

[Apocalyptic Literature in Judaism and Early Christianity](#)

[Pew Research Center: Evangelical Beliefs and Practices Survey](#)

## Plays by Samuel D. Hunter

*A Case for the Existence of God*

*Greater Clements*

*Lewiston/Clarkston*

*The Harvest*

*The Healing*

*Pocatello*\*

*The Few*\*

*The Whale*\*

*A Bright New Boise*\*

*A Great Wilderness*\*

*Rest*\*

*A Permanent Image*\*

*Norway*

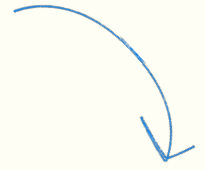
*Jack's Precious Moment*

*Five Genocides*

*\*Available at the New York Public Library*

# ABOUT SIGNATURE

A HOME FOR STORYTELLERS. A SPACE FOR ALL.



The Pershing Square Signature Center. Photo © David Sundberg / Esto

## Our Mission

Signature Theatre is an artistic home for storytellers. By producing several plays from each Resident Writer, we offer a deep dive into their bodies of work.

## What We Do

Signature Theatre is a space for artists and audiences to call home. Signature creates opportunities through the spaces and support it offers the theater community. For playwrights, Signature's unique playwright-in-residence model offers the stability and support of home. For audiences, Signature offers access to all, offering a welcoming creative community and affordable ticketing programs. Only Signature Theatre offers an immersive journey through a playwright's body of work to theatergoers seeking intimate human connection and extraordinary cultural experiences.

## Our History

Signature Theatre was founded in 1991 by James Houghton and its resident playwrights include: Edward Albee, Annie Baker, Lee Blessing, Martha Clarke, Will Eno, Horton Foote, María Irene Fornés, Athol Fugard, John Guare, Stephen Adly Guirgis, A.R. Gurney, Katori Hall, Quiara Alegría Hudes, Samuel D. Hunter, David Henry Hwang, Bill Irwin, Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, Adrienne Kennedy, Tony Kushner, Romulus Linney, Kenneth Lonergan, Dave Malloy, Charles Mee, Arthur Miller, Dominique Morisseau, Lynn Nottage, Suzan-Lori Parks, Sarah Ruhl, Sam Shepard, Anna Deavere Smith, Regina Taylor, Paula Vogel, Naomi Wallace, August Wilson, Lanford Wilson, Lauren Yee, The Mad Ones, and members of the historic Negro Ensemble Company: Charles Fuller, Leslie Lee, and Samm-Art Williams.

*A very special thank you to the New York City Department of Education*

*Free Student Matinees are generously supported, in part, by Nina Matis, Jeffrey Neuman, and Drs. Edward & Elaine Altman.*

Homepage



Student Membership



Connect  
with us



Signaturetheatre.org | @signatureinnyc | /signaturetheatrecompany