



by Charles Ludlam

Directed by Christie Vela

April 24 - May 18, 2025



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This playbill is a publication of Theatre Three, Inc.
in support of
The Mystery of Irma Vep



Photo by Jeffrey Schmidt



The Mystery of Irma Vep

by Charles Ludlam

ARTISTIC STAFF

DIRECTOR
Christie Vela
SCENIC DESIGNER
Cody Stockstill
LIGHTING DESIGNER
John Moss II
COSTUME DESIGNER
Korey Kent
SOUND DESIGNER
Noah Heller
PROPS DESIGNER
Kennedy Smith
FIGHT CHOREOGRAPHER
David Saldivar

CAST

NICODEMUS UNDERWOOD
Lydia Mackay*
LADY ENID HILLCREST
Lydia Mackay*
ALCAZAR
Lydia Mackay*
JANE TWISDEN
Nicole Berastequi
LORD EDGAR HILLCREST
Nicole Berastequi
AN INTRUDER
Nicole Berastequi
UNDERSTUDY
Jayden Russell

PRODUCTION STAFF

STAGE MANAGER
Brenna Bishop*
PRODUCTION ASSISTANTS
Olivia Andre
Cole Rookfeld

SPECIAL THANKS

Dallas Opera
Adrian Churchill
Ani Vera



**indicates members working under
Actors' Equity Association contracts in
this production*



Photo by Jeffrey Schmidt

Bios

Charles Ludlam, he/him (Playwright) grew up in Queens, New York, just a few subway stops from Greenwich Village, and the heart of Gay America. At 24, he founded the Ridiculous Theatrical Company, where he wrote, directed and performed in almost every production for the next two decades, often with Everett Quinton, his life partner and muse, by his side. Renowned for drag, high comedy, melodrama, satire, precise literary references, gender politics, sexual frolic and a multitude of acting styles, the Ridiculous Theater guaranteed a kind of biting humor that could both sting and tickle. His many plays included *Turds in Hell*, *Der Ring Gott Farblonjet*, a riff on Wagner's Ring Cycle, *Bluebeard*, and *The Mystery of Irma Vep*, his most popular play, and a performer's tour-de-force. Ludlam continued working until almost the day he died of PCP pneumonia, just three months after his AIDS diagnosis. He was 44.

Christie Vela, she/her (Director) currently serves as the Associate Artistic Director at T3, is a founding member of the Brierley Resident Acting Company at Dallas Theater Center, a company member at Kitchen Dog Theatre, and an artistic associate at Second Thought Theater. You've seen her work as a director/actor in the Metroplex at Dallas Theater Center, Kitchen Dog, Second Thought, Echo Theatre, Amphibian Stage, Undermain Theatre, Shakespeare Dallas, Circle Theatre, and Stage West. She most recently directed *La Tempestad* (a bilingual adaptation of *The Tempest*) at Trinity Rep Theatre in Rhode Island, where she is frequently a guest artist. Christie's feature film directing debut *The Finale*, is available for streaming on Amazon. She's thankful to John, Isa, Dante, Scully, Roxie and Stella for their patience & support.

Cody Stockstill, he/him (Scenic Designer) is new to the DFW area and is a scenic and media designer. Prior to moving the area he was an Assistant Professor of Scenic Design at the University of Mississippi and Mississippi State University. Recent design credits include *Waffle House: The Musical*, *Pin-Up Girls*, *By Strouse*, *Carey Dinner Theatre*; *Ring of Fire*, *Hell in High Water*, *New Stage Theatre*; *Elf The Musical*, *Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, *Ragtime*, Nashville Rep. More of Cody's work can be seen at www.codystockstill.com.

Korey Kent (Costume Design) is a Designer, Director, and Producer local to Dallas. Regional Credits include: T3: *The Manufactured Myth of Evelyn Flynn*, *Once*, *Heisenberg/Actually*, *Laugh* (Costume Design); Shakespeare Dallas: *Measure for Measure* (Scenographer/Costume Designer) *Two Gentleman of Verona* (Director); *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged)[Revised]* and *Hamlet* (Costume Designer); Kitchen Dog Theater, *Pompeii*, *Paper Flowers*, *Betrayal*, *Boom* (Costume Designer), *The Chairs*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Gary: A Sequel to Titus Andronicus* (Asst. Director); The Drama Club: *Faust*, *Wild Wicked Wyrld* (Costume Design); Second Thought Theater: *Great God Pan*, *Cock* (Costume Design). Korey is an Artistic Company Member at Kitchen Dog Theater and an Artistic Associate for The Drama Club. Additionally, he serves as the Company Manager and Producer for Shakespeare Dallas and is a member of Actor's Equity Association. Korey has a B.F.A. in Theater Studies from Southern Methodist University.

John Moss II, He/Him (Lighting Designer) is thrilled to be back at T3 after just designing *Debbie Does Dallas*! John has designed for Dallas Children's Theater, Firehouse Theater, Bishop Arts Theater, Theatre Britain, and most recently The Joyful Noise Christen Theater and their production of *A Walk with the King*.

Bios Continued

Noah James Heller, he/him (Sound Designer) is excited to be working with T3 once again! He has a degree in Directing/Playwrighting from Southern Methodist University and has sound designed many shows around the Dallas Metroplex. Recent credits include *God of Carnage* at T3, *Julius Caesar* at Shakespeare Dallas, and *Edward Snowden single?* at Second Thought Theatre. He works full time at Zero Productions as the Install Supervisor. When he is not at work he is most likely watching a movie, or spending time with his cats.

Kennedy Smith, she/her (Props Design) is a Dallas based Stage Manager and Designer. You may have caught her work most recently here at T3 on *Carrie The Musical* as the ASM or at Uptown Players on *We Are Continuous* (Props Design), *Boys In The Band* (Props Design), *Artemesia* at Circle Theatre (Props Design), or *Could Tectonics* at Teatro Dallas (Set Design). You can see more of her work on Instagram @Kennedybrooke_smith. She hopes you sink your teeth into this show!

David Saldivar, he/him (Fight Choreographer) is a certified Advanced Actor Combatant with the Society of American Fight Directors, an Associate Member of Stage Directors and Choreographers Society, and a licensed pyrotechnician. His most recent work includes *Julius Caesar* and *King Lear* at Shakespeare Dallas, *Sleuth* and *Carrie* at T3, *Deathtrap* and *Into the Breeches* at MainStage Irving, and *As You Like It* at Shakespeare Live! in Arlington. He is the current lead instructor for monthly Fight Nights at T3. When he is not working on projects he spends his time finding hole in the wall taquerias with friends. You may reach him at d.saldivar@theatricalsyndicate.com

Brenna Bishop, she/her (Stage Manager) is a stage manager based in Fort Worth, Texas, and she is thrilled to be making her T3 debut! She is a graduate of Harding University, where she obtained a Bachelor of Arts in Theatre Design/Production with a minor in Business Management. Her career highlights include *Big Fish* (Harding University), *Cabaret* and *Little Shop of Horrors* (Alabama Shakespeare Festival), *Rent* (New London Barn Playhouse), and *A Christmas Carol* (TheatreSquared). You can find her at brennabishopsm.com.



Photo by Jeffrey Schmidt

Bios Continued



Lydia Mackay, she/her (Nicodemus Underwood, Lady Enid Hillcrest, Alcazar) is PUMPED to be back at T3/T2, where you've seen her in *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, *She Kills Monsters*, *Light Up the Sky*, and *Other Desert Cities*, to name a few. In addition to being a stage & voice actor, Lydia is an Associate Professor of Performance at TCU in Fort Worth. She holds a BFA from Texas Wesleyan and an MFA from SMU. She's a Certified Yoga Teacher, a proud member of AEA, the SAFD, and ATME, and is represented by The Mary Collins Agency. She would like to thank YOU, the audience, for supporting live theatre in Big D!



Nicole Berastequi, she/her (Jane Twisden, Lord Edgar Hillcrest, An Intruder) is beyond thrilled to be tackling this incredible piece of theater magic with this dream team cast and crew as her first performance foray in Theatre Too! Not infrequently, you will find her trodding the boards at Shakespeare Dallas, where some of her favorite roles have been: Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*, Laertes in *Hamlet*, Tamora in *Titus Andronicus*, and Reagan in *King Lear*. A few other acting highlights include: Macbeth in Shakespeare Everywhere's *Macbeth* and Mother Holly in Drama Club's *Wyld, Wicked, and Weird*. She would like to thank Adrian Churchill for volunteering his valuable time to be her dramaturg and line memorizing coach for this Herculean feat-- she will eternally be in his debt.



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Bios Continued



Jayden Russel (Understudy) is so excited to be back at T3! Jayden was most recently seen at Lyric Stage as Nellie in *Jekyll in Hyde!* Additional experiences that they hold near & dear include Amneris in *Aida* (Lyric Stage), Lisa in *Debbie Does Dallas* (T3), Audrey in *Little Shop of Horrors* (Theater Coppel), Marcy in *25th...Spelling Bee* (Theatre Arlington), St Jimmy in *American Idiot* (Lakeside Community Theater), & Marley in *Margaritaville* (Firehouse Theatre). In addition to performing on stage, they have recently began their journey to the other side of the table, most recently assistant directing the world premiere of Brian Christensen's *Lend Me A Chainsaw*. Jayden will also be co-directing Grand Prairie Arts Council's production of *Rent* later this year! "Special thanks to my family, friends, & my partner in life, Beck." @jayjayjetplanex

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THE MYSTERY OF IRMA VEP

A PENNY DREADFUL

In a 1978 interview with the *Performing Arts Journal*, the American theatremaker Charles Ludlam described a creative session from the day before. He was working on a sculpture, while a collaborator stood off to the side, “[correcting Ludlam] every time [he] did something that was in good taste.” It’s possible that Ludlam, ever the wit, ever the provocateur, only said this as a pithy remark. Yet we might say that this sculpture - whose final appearance we can only imagine - is a perfect embodiment of Ludlam’s approach.

In 1967, at just twenty four, Ludlam founded the Ridiculous Theatrical Company, a New York City-based troupe dedicated to original productions by Ludlam and his collaborators. These productions were often comedic, and drew much of their inspiration from drag performance. (Of course, it should be noted that the Ridiculous Theatrical Company was only founded after Ludlam was ejected from John Vaccaros’ Play-House of the Ridiculous, a state of affairs which, to type it all out like this, seems rather...well...)

But while the productions of the RTC were anarchic to say the least, it must also be said that they were conceived and carried out according to a specific vision - one which Ludlam had outlined in his manifesto, “Ridiculous Theatre, Scourge of Human Folly.” Comprising seven brief “axioms” and one set of “instructions for use,” the manifesto urges those who heed it to “treat the material in a madly farcical manner without losing the seriousness of the theme.” For Ludlam, this meant writing toward a “panorama,” with an eye for both high and low culture (a distinction for which Ludlam himself didn’t care). The RTC’s scripts were brimming with historical allusions, literary quotations, references to film and popular music, and no shortage of bawdy jokes and double entendres. And *The Mystery of Irma Vep: A Penny Dreadful* is no exception. It’s a suspenseful, uproarious, horrific thriller, about a couple in the English gentry who are nearly driven to madness; Ludlam assembled the text out of the bloody entrails of Shakespeare, Poe, and Hitchcock, to name a few.



THE MYSTERY OF IRMA VEP

A PENNY DREADFUL

Irma Vep premiered in 1984, and it starred Charles Ludlam and his partner and collaborator, Everett Quinton. Despite Ludlam's self-imposed outsider status, Irma Vep was a critical darling, winning both the Drama Desk Award and the Obie Award for its cast. In the years following, Irma Vep has enjoyed a continuous cycle of revival, with subsequent productions becoming darlings in their own right (including a 1998 production, once again starring Quinton, and mounted eleven years after Ludlam's death). Irma Vep, for a time, was the most-produced play in the United States, and was a hit in the United Kingdom and Latin America.

How could it be that a play as strange as Irma Vep should make its way onto so many stages, for so many years? Ludlam's sense of humor, of course, is a big draw. But could it also be a difficulty lying within the text, a challenge to whosoever should put it on? After all, Irma Vep demands that its two actors play every part in this gothic tale, making rapid costume changes and seemingly pulling new characters out of thin air. "When you get actors who are not afraid to go there," says Theatre Three associate artistic director Christie Vela, "it's amazing." It's an investment in the craft of performance that, for Vela (who is directing Irma Vep at Theatre Three) makes Ludlam's work "purely theatrical."

Which raises a question: What does it mean for an actor to reach with one hand into the gestural vocabulary of Shakespeare, and with the other into Universal Horror (see: Boris Karloff as Frankenstein's monster)? Ludlam himself was sceptical of the "realist" and "naturalist" styles of acting, which dominated the early half of the twentieth century, and which Ludlam felt were too staid, too reflective of a cold attitude toward art. "Concept and execution is academic," he remarked, "going crazy and committing an atrocity is more modern."

And let's not forget ourselves: what does it mean when we, the audience, experience something that seems to be more than reality? Does that necessarily take away from the truth? If we're having fun, if we're laughing with delight or leaping back in terror, is anything getting in the way? Perhaps not; perhaps a funhouse mirror is the only real mirror. In Vela's words, "we need to see that we're ridiculous."