



PENELOPE

A NEW MUSICAL

Music and Lyrics by Alex Bechtel
Book by Alex Bechtel, Grace McLean, and
Eva Steinmetz

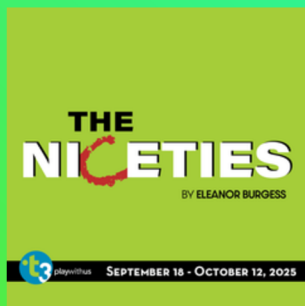
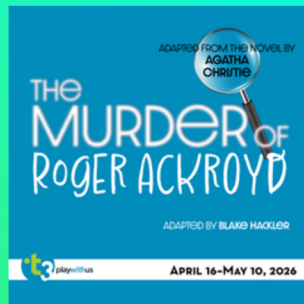
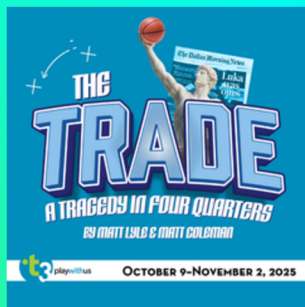
Directed by Sarah Gay

Music Directed by Jeff Lankov

February 19-March 22, 2026



25-26 Season



For more information about T3 , please visit www.theatre3dallas.com, call the T3 Box Office at (214) 871-3300 x 1 or email us at boxoffice@theatre3dallas.com



T3 is supported by its Board of Directors, by subscribers, by funds from the City of Dallas Office of Arts & Culture, TACA, Dallas Tourism Public Improvement District, and Hoblitzelle Foundation. This project is supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts. A major contribution from the estate of Marlene Webb, a longtime subscriber, has established the Theatre Three Endowment Fund in support of the building and its equipment.



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This playbill is a publication of
Theatre Three, Inc. in support of
Penelope

This production was independently created by Theatre Three as part of our vibrant local theater ecosystem. We deeply value the collaborative relationships with neighboring theaters, including Stage West, where many of the artists involved in this project previously collaborated on a remarkable production of *Penelope*



Photo by Jeffrey Schmidt



Penelope

Music and Lyrics by Alex Bechtel

Book by Alex Bechtel, Grace McLean, and Eva Steinmetz

ARTISTIC STAFF

DIRECTOR

Sarah Gay

MUSIC DIRECTOR

Jeff Lankov

LIGHTING DESIGNER

Bryan Stevenson

COSTUME DESIGNER

Sarah Mosher

SOUND DESIGNER

Dylan Hearn

CAST

PENELOPE

Cara Statham Serber*

BAND

KEYS/CONDUCTOR

Jeff Lankov

CELLO

Molly Wang

VIOLIN

Bethany Hardwick

VIOLA

Catherine Beck

PERCUSSION

Wes Griffin

PRODUCTION STAFF

STAGE MANAGER

Sydney Dormire*

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT

Case Hubbard

AUDIO ENGINEER

Dylan Hearn

SPECIAL THANKS

Dallas Opera

Cody Stockstill

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



Photo by Jeffrey Schmidt

Bios

Grace McLean, she/her (Playwright) is a performer, writer, composer. In addition to performing on Broadway (*Suffs*; *Bad Cinderella*; *Natasha, Pierre...*), Off-Broadway and regionally (MCC, LCT3, The Public, Vineyard, La MaMa, BAM, Weston Playhouse, ART, WTF), and TV (*The First Lady* [Showtime], *The Other Two* [HBO Max]), she also writes and composes for theater (*Penelope*; *Lunar Eclipse*; *The Apiary*; *In The Green*, Richard Rodgers, Lortel Awards) and film (*Marina*, Gotham Award; *The Photographer*; *Our Mine*, Best Score Brooklyn Film Festival, Black Bear Award for Best Score Athens International Film Festival). She toured Pakistan and Russia as an artistic ambassador with the U.S. State Department and released her first full length album *My Lovely Enemy* May 2024 with Rolling Stone calling her "avant-garde" tracks "brilliant." Lincoln Center Writer-in-residence, Vivace Award (2023), Larson Grant (2021), Broadway Women's Fund's Woman to Watch (2021), Civilians R&D Group (2019-2020), MacDowell Fellow (2018), Lincoln Center Emerging Artist (2017).
www.gracemclean.com

Alex Bechtel (Playwright) creates new works of music, theatre, and musical theatre. His latest musical *Penelope* - for which he wrote Music, Lyrics and Arrangements, and co-wrote the book with performer Grace McLean and Director Eva Steinmetz - has had productions at Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival and Signature Theatre in DC, and concert performances at Joe's Pub at the Public Theatre. Other recent work includes: Music & Lyrics for Lightning Rod Special's *The Appointment* ("Best of 2019" - The New York Times, *Vulture*, *TimeOut NY*, "Best of 2023" - The New Yorker), Arrangements/Music Direction for Pig Iron Theatre Co's *Poor Judge*, Original Music for Hudson valley Shakespeare's *The Matchmaker*, Music Direction for *Night Side Songs* by the Lazours, Music & Lyrics for People's Light & Theatre Company's *Peter Panto*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *Shakespeare in Love*, Arden Theatre Company's *The Light Princess* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and 8 seasons of new music for Shakespeare at Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival. Bechtel is a graduate of The Pig Iron School and The University of the Arts. He is a 7-time Barrymore Award Winner, and a 2015 Independence Fellow in the Arts. Bechtel is the creator/composer of *The West*, *Philadelphia Nocturne*, and *Cheer Up, Dostoevsky*.

Sarah Gay, (Director) previously at Theatre Three: *Young Frankenstein*. Directing credits include: *Penelope* (Stage West), *The Last Wide Open* (Circle Theatre), *Ring of Fire: The Johnny Cash Musical*, *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*, *Honky Tonk Laundry*, *The Great American Trailer Park Musical*, *My Way: A Tribute to Frank Sinatra* (TexARTS), and *Men on Boats* (Assistant Director, Circle Theatre). Sarah is a proud member of Actors Equity Association and has been seen on stages across Texas, including Dallas Theater Center, ZACH, The Alley, Uptown Players, Lyric Stage, Stage West, TexARTS, Penfold Theatre, Casa Manana, Circle Theatre and more. Thank you to Stage West for the foundation, and to T3 for giving us the opportunity to tell this story again!

Jeff Lankov (Music Director) is a pianist and music director whose playing has been described as "superb, fearless, ferocious, and sensitive" (*New York Times*). He has performed on Broadway in *Mary Poppins* and *Newsies*, served as Musical Director for the Radio City *Christmas Spectacular*, and worked on numerous Broadway national tours. As a concert pianist, Lankov has presented solo recitals at Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall, performed frequently with the Dallas Symphony and Fort Worth Symphony Orchestras, and is a specialist in the music of living composers and American minimalism. His performance work often involves cross-disciplinary collaboration and the use of the arts to engage current social issues. Lankov is Professor of Music at Tarrant County College and holds a Ph.D. in Piano Performance from New York University.

Bios Continued

Bryan Stevenson (Lighting Designer) holds a B.F.A. in Theatre from Texas Wesleyan University and an M.F.A. in Design from University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. He has designed at many local theatre companies including: Dallas Theater Center, Fort Worth Shakespeare in the Park, Stage West, Theatre Arlington, Jubilee and Circle. Nationally Bryan designs for the Boy Scouts of America National Conferences and Shows. He is also a member Stagehands Union, IATSE local 128.

Sarah Mosher, She/her (Costume Designer) had the joy of designing costumes at T3 for *Stede Bonnet*, a *F*cking Pirate Musical* and is thrilled to return for this beautiful show. Sarah is a designer working in theatre and film with a focus on sustainable process in materials and labor. Recent shows include: *Incarnate* and *Heroes of the Fourth Turning* at Second Thought Theatre, *All is Calm*, and *Cruel Intentions*, the *90s Musical* at Stage West and *I am an Island* at Watering Hole Collective. Sarah is an Associate Professor of Costume Design and Technology at Baylor University.

Sydney Dormire (Stage Manager) Sydney's recent credits include stage manager for *Instructions for a Séance* (Amphibian Stage Productions), *All Is Calm*, *Penelope*, *The Play That Goes Wrong*, *Poor Clare*, *Grand Horizons* (Stage West Theatre), assistant stage manager for *I Wanna F*cking Tear You Apart* (Stage West), and production assistant for *Into the Breeches!* (Stage West). She holds a BFA in Design and Technology from Midwestern State University of Texas.

Dylan Hearn, he/him (Sound Designer) is a graduate of Savannah College of Art and Design with a B.F.A. in Sound Design. He is working as the Production Manager at T3, a place where diverse artist make diverse work, and inclusivity thrives. He loves making weird sounds in multiple different mediums like animation, film, and theatre. The people in the office love his work. Dylan has experience as an Audio Engineer, Sound Designer, Re-recording Mixer, and his favorite, otamatone player. Again, the people in the office love his work. His love of both theatre and film pushes him to be a sound designer that blends the two realms of media and creates something new.



Cara Statham Serber (Penelope) is so incredibly happy to be back at T3! She played Penelope at Stage West last year and is thrilled to bring her to this side of the metroplex. Other T3 credits include Diana in *Next to Normal* and Margaret White in *Carrie*. Cara has been a part of the DFW theatre community for over twenty years, performing on many stages, including: Dallas Theatre Center, Casa Mañana, Uptown Players, WaterTower Theatre, Theatre Arlington, Lyric Stage, and Dallas Childrens Theatre. Cara is so grateful to the T3 creative team. Thanks to Sydney, Case, Lankov and Sarah. As always, this is for her remarkable daughters.

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Prism Movement Theater | La Maupin: The French Abomination | Photo by Courtney

Toward the end of his essay "Why Read the Classics?" the novelist and literary critic Italo Calvino asks "Why read the classics rather than concentrate on books that enable us to understand our own times more deeply? or, Where shall we find the time and peace of mind to read the classics, overwhelmed as we are by the avalanche of current events?" Calvino wrote the essay in 1986, but the question, fittingly, is relevant forty years later. One might even go so far as to say that the question has become *more* relevant: how much does our world seem to have accelerated in the past few years? How much more distraught? How the hell can anyone read at a time like this?

But where some find it impossible to revisit the classics at times like these, others, like the writer and composer Alex Bechtel, feel spurred to it. At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Bechtel recalls having been in a long-distance relationship: he was in Philadelphia and his partner was in Boston. These were the "lockdown" days. And Bechtel, per an interview with Arts West Seattle, found that the feelings of "curiosity and fear and longing and grief" came to life in the process of writing his album *Penelope*, named for the queen-consort of the *Odyssey*.

Let us remind ourselves that the *Odyssey* tells the story of Odysseus and his ten-year homecoming (or 'nostos' in the ancient Greek), following his participation in the also-ten-year Trojan War. Through the poem's twenty four sections, Odysseus encounters blessings and mishaps alike, relying on his exceeding cleverness (or 'mêtis') to make his way back to Ithaca, where he is king, and reunite with his wife Penelope. Penelope, for her part, has spent these long years fending off the suitors who, presuming their king dead, vie for her hand in marriage: employing some cleverness of her own, Penelope promises to marry one of the suitors as soon as she is done with her weaving - that she secretly undoes each night.

Like many, Bechtel had read the epic poem in school; he had a copy on his bookshelf; yet he admits in the same interview that the prospect of writing an album about *Penelope*, much less an entire musical, would not have occurred to him before the pandemic. But when he set out to process creatively what was happening, both in his own life and in the world, "that character [*Penelope*] was within arm's reach."

And when Bechtel found that the idea still spoke to him, even after having completed the album, he enlisted Eva Steinmetz, a Philadelphia-based theatremaker, and Grace McLean, notably of *Suffs* and *Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812*, to collaborate on the book. *Penelope*, the musical, premiered at the Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival. From there, it went to the Signature Theatre in Washington, DC, among other theatres; the musical also played in concert at Joe's Pub in New York City, starring McLean herself as Penelope. The show has proven a critical darling, with one critic referring to it as "a meditation on longing, memory, resilience, and the stories we tell ourselves when the person we love is far from reach."

Of course, if Bechtel and his collaborators have written a beloved spin on the *Odyssey*, then they are in good company for it: notable in the English language are James Joyce's *Ulysses* (which takes its title from the Latinized form of 'Odysseus'), and Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*. But *Penelope* (the musical) also seems to have arrived at a moment of particular renewed interest in the *Odyssey*: as of this writing, the release of Christopher Nolan's film adaptation is only months away. Nolan, for his part, cites a recent translation by the classicist Emily Wilson when describing his interest in the story. And Wilson, whose 2017 translation was noted for its accessibility to modern readers, sparked conversation, and not a little controversy, about the role of the translator.

But what is the role of the modern reader, if not to bring themselves to bear on the ancient text? Bechtel remarks that the classics are not worth our time "because we deem them quote-unquote important, but because we still identify with them really fundamentally." Indeed, perhaps it is our own experience, our own loves and anxieties and defeats, that continue to breathe life into these texts; it is the audience, the reader, who makes true Calvino's formulation that "a classic is a book that has never finished saying what it has to say."