

## POTUS, Or Behind Every Great Dumbass Are Seven Women Trying to Keep Him Alive

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# NOTES FROM LEADERSHIP & DIRECTOR

## LEADERSHIP

As we end one season and welcome another, we find ourselves in a time of change. This summer we made some bold announcements, including the sale of our building. And while there are sentiments out there that would look at that news and see fear, we see opportunities for growth and positive change; shifts that bring us in alignment with our highest potential.

I have always been fascinated by the change a caterpillar goes through in the chrysalis. Everything that the caterpillar has ever known is wholly stripped away, reduced to ooze as it slowly reforms. For some that change could seem scary. To a caterpillar, it is a simple progression. Curious is in that stage in the chrysalis, redefining, rebuilding, and wholly transforming into "a beautiful butterfly" in the words of Eric Carle. A progression that doesn't mean letting go of what has served us and made us who we are today but truly a progression that builds upon the richness of what has come before.

Native Americans have considered butterflies as symbols of transformation and hope. Our hope for this season is that you have theatre-going experiences that transforms you. From a chaotically funny political romp, to an unpacking of parallel experiences of institutional racism, to a search for hope and human connection, to a playwright who asks us through his play, "...who we are willing to extend ourselves to...give compassion to? Or tolerate?" and ending with a one-woman powerhouse of a show that tells the story of Iris, an African American woman who recalls pieces of her childhood as she integrated a school in Muskogee, Oklahoma. A fresh, incendiary, and high-voltage season indeed!

As friends, advocates, and supporters who believe in the transformative power of theatre, we welcome you to Season 27! Enjoy!



**Jada Suzanne Dixon**

**Artistic Director**

## DIRECTOR

In talking about her plays, Playwright Selina Fillinger said, "I am fascinated at the ways in which we uphold patriarchy even when a man's body is not in the room." This is a play about white patriarchal governance that is never present or seen but certainly is felt, and as one four-letter word rocks this White House, we watch as this play turns into a #\$\$@!% good time.

This play is one of the hottest among prominent regional theatres, making it one of the top 10 most-produced plays of the 2023-24 season. A play that provides an outlet of comic relief as we continue to grapple with day-to-day American politics, government, and political discourse. Yes, it's political, but without being red vs. blue. A play that lets women be bold, brassy, and bawdy...how could we say no? This play is relentlessly funny as we observe these fierce women work hard to keep their world spinning on its axis.

It is a farce. Farce, as defined by Britannica Encyclopedia, is "a comic dramatic piece that uses highly improbable situations, stereotyped characters, extravagant exaggerations, and violent horseplay." It's coarse humor. Think *Blazing Saddles* (a favorite of my dad), *The Birdcage*, *Bridesmaids*, or going old school, *The Three Stooges*, or *Pink Panther* with Peter Sellers (one of my favorites). Onstage we have to work smart to create chaos on a stage. This means a laser focus on physicality and timing.

During rehearsals, we laughed a lot, gained some bumps and bruises along the way, and created a community of artists who with a resounding "HECK ya" rallied together to create this show that you are about to experience. It has been joyful and crazy in all the right ways. We are glad you could join us as we kick off Season 27 with this chaotically funny show. Enjoy the ride!



**Jada Suzanne Dixon**

**Director**

Curious Theatre Company

Presents

**POTUS or, Behind Every Great Dumbass are Seven  
Women Trying to Keep Him Alive**

by

Selina Fillinger

Directed by **Jada Suzanne Dixon†**

**SETTING:**

The White House.

**CAST**

(in order of emotional proximity to POTUS)

HARRIET, his chief of staff.....Tara Falk\*  
JEAN, his press secretary..... C. Kelly Leo  
STEPHANIE, his secretary.....Leslie O'Carroll\*  
DUSTY, his dalliance.....Rhianna DeVries  
BERNADETTE, his sister.....MacKenzie Beyer  
CHRIS, a journalist.....Kristina Fountaine\*  
MARGARET, his wife. The First Lady.....Natalie Oliver-Atherton

**PRODUCTION TEAM**

Scenic Designer.....Tina Anderson  
Costume Designer.....Brynn Starr Coplan Sater  
Lighting Designer.....Emily A. Maddox  
Sound Designer.....Dani Taylor-Moxon  
Properties Artisan.....**Annette Westerby**  
Stage Manager.....Rachel Ducat\*  
Assistant Stage Manager.....Amie Benjamin  
Scenic Coordinator.....Steven McDonald  
Fight Choreographer.....Amy Arpan

**SPECIAL THANKS:** Thunder River Theatre Company

**POTUS will be performed with a 15 minute intermission**

**BOLD** = Curious Artistic Company Member

\* = Appearing through an Agreement between this theatre, Curious Theatre Company, and Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

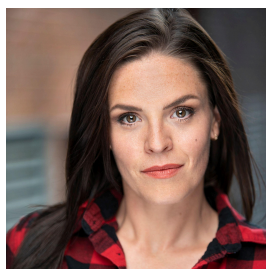
† = Director is a Member of the Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers Society, a national theatrical labor union



The Director is an Associate Member of  
STAGE DIRECTORS AND CHOREOGRAPHERS  
SOCIETY, a national theatrical labor union.



# ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES



**MacKenzie Beyer, she/her (Bernadette)** MacKenzie is honored to be making her first appearance at Curious Theatre Company – a longtime dream. She has worked with many companies and numerous talented theatre professionals across Colorado including Boulder Ensemble Theatre Company where she was an ensemble member, Miners Alley Playhouse, Theatreworks, Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, Stories on Stage, and the Colorado Shakespeare Theatre Company. In addition to being an audiobook narrator and actor, she is pursuing a secondary degree in

Interior Architecture and Design. She holds an MFA in Acting from the Academy of Classical Acting at The Shakespeare Theatre Company in Washington DC and is represented by Radical Artists Agency.



**Rhianna DeVries, they/them+ (Dusty)** is thrilled to be returning to the Curious Theatre Company stage! As a multi-medium creator with passions in acting, directing, and producing, Rhianna's stage credits include THE WASTE LAND with Denver Theatre Ensemble, RODGERS AND HAMMERSTEIN'S CINDERELLA at the Fine Arts Center, ROMEO AND JULIET/THE TEMPEST with the Colorado Shakespeare Festival School Tour, APPROPRIATE with Curious Theatre Company, THE MISANTHROPE and

CRADLE TWO GRAVE (Drama Ensemble Best Actress Winner) at the University of Denver, and the titular role in ANTIGONE (Broadway World Best Actress Nominee) with Fearless Theatre Company. Rhianna is also in film and video games, most notably as the lead motion capture and voiceover actor for Chloe Price in the BAFTA-nominated game, LIFE IS STRANGE: BEFORE THE STORM

[www.RhiannaDeVries.com](http://www.RhiannaDeVries.com)



**Tara Falk, she/her (Harriet)** Broadway: METAMORPHOSES, THE CONSTANT WIFE, and ENCHANTED APRIL Off-Broadway: This Is Our Youth, There's The Story. Regional: Curious Theater Company, Denver Center Theater Company, McCarter Theater, Long Wharf Theater, Hartford Stage, Eugene O'Neill, Cleveland Playhouse, Rep. Theater of St. Louis, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, Alabama Shakespeare Festival, and more. Numerous TV and Voice Over credits. Training: B.F.A. Boston University

College of Fine Arts and British American Dramatic Academy. Teaching: DCPA, Athena Project Girls' Write and Denver University Prison Arts Initiative.



**Kristina Fountaine, she/her (Chris)** A Denver-native, she was last seen as Ainee in CULLUD WATTAH at Curious Theatre. Other credits include: Chris in AMERIKIN (Curious Theatre), David in THEATRE OF THE MIND (DCPA Off-Center), Cheryl in STICKFLY (Arvada Center), Isabelle/Sabine in THE LIAR (Arvada Center), Muriel/Minorca in ANIMAL FARM (Arvada Center), Vanessa in FAIRFIELD (Miners Alley Playhouse), Shanita in SKELETON CREW (Curious Theatre), Lisa in CORDUROY (DCPA Theatre Company), Nessa in

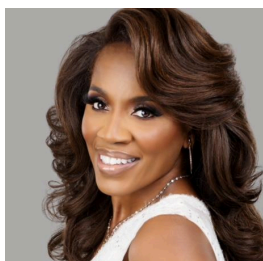
DISTRICT MERCHANTS (Henry Award Nominee, Best Supporting Actress) (Miners Alley Playhouse) and THE SOCIAL DILEMMA (Netflix). She holds a BFA from SUNY Purchase College.



**C. Kelly Leo, she/her (Jean)** has appeared at Curious as Diane Dahner in RANCHO MIRAGE, Betsy/Lindsey in CLYBOURNE PARK, Jenna/Ellen in MAPLE AND VINE, Hermia in DEAD MAN'S CELL PHONE, Claire in PROOF, and Lil' Bit in HOW I LEARNED TO DRIVE. Other favorite roles include Nurse in MEDEA (The Edge), Elizabeth Proctor in THE CRUCIBLE (Arvada Center), Babe in CRIMES OF THE HEART (Littleton Town Hall), Viola in TWELFTH NIGHT (Phoenix Theatre), Antigone in ANTIGONE (Germinal Stage) and Marigold in THE COMMON PURSUIT (CityStage Ensemble). Her work has been recognized by The Colorado Theatre Guild Henry Awards, BacksStage West Magazine, Best of Westword, The Denver Post Ovation Awards, Out Front Colorado's Marlowe awards, and the Denver Drama Critics Circle. Leo received her B.F.A in Theatre from the University of Colorado, Boulder.



**Leslie O'Carroll, she/her (Stephanie)** Leslie O'Carroll (Stephanie) is delighted to return to Curious having previously been seen in THE SECRETARY and GOOD PEOPLE. Leslie most recently played Selsdon in NOISES OFF at the Arvada Center. Other Arvada credits include: BEAUTIFUL, INTO THE WOODS, TARTUFFE, MRS. MANNERLY, BLITHE SPIRIT, THE CRUCIBLE, MOONLIGHT AND MAGNOLIAS. Additionally: 23 seasons at the Denver Center including A CHRISTMAS CAROL, A DOLL'S HOUSE, A DOLL'S HOUSE PART 2, BENEDICTION, WHEN WE WERE MARRIED, EVENTIDE, PLAINSONG; THE HALF LIFE OF MARIE CURIE, MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING, GRAPES OF WRATH (Theatreworks); THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST (Breckenridge Backstage Theatre); THE WINTER'S TALE; ONE MAN TWO GUVNORS, MIDSUMMER, AS YOU LIKE IT, YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU, NOISES OFF, ROMEO AND JULIET (Colorado Shakespeare Festival); PRIDE & PREJUDICE, SILENT SKY (BETC); PARALLEL LIVES (FAC Colorado Springs); THE ONE ACT PLAY THAT GOES WRONG (Vintage). TV/ Film: BREAKING BAD, LONGMIRE, FOOTLOOSE. Awards/Training: Best of Westword, True West, Denver Post Ovation Award; M.F.A. (National Theatre Conservatory).



**Natalie Oliver-Atherton, she/her (Margaret)** Mrs. Centennial 2023 & Mrs. Colorado American 2023, Currently Ms. Louisiana Senior America vying for the title of Ms Senior America on Oct 3rd has spent 20+ years as Music Director & Conductor of the internationally known vocal ensemble S.T.A.R.S. (Singers Taking Action Reaching Souls) and has spent years touring the world. As a singer/actress her most notable performance credits include the roles of the Gypsy Acid Queen in two international tours of the Who's TOMMY(Germany/Canada); Constance in David Merrick's OH, KAY!; Andrea Devereaux in ONCE ON THIS ISLAND; A BRIEF HISTORY OF WHITE MUSIC. She can be seen in the feature films: MISSISSIPPI MASALA (opposite Oscar winner Denzel Washington) and AMAZING GRACE & CHUCK (with Jamie Lee Curtis and Gregory Peck). Regionally, she was Mary Magdalene in JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR; Ronnette in LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS, Annie in PORGY & BESS and Mayme in INTIMATE APPAREL, for which she received a Denver Post Ovation Award nomination for best supporting actress in a musical. Most recently, she made her debut at

Town Hall Arts Center as Tryshia in THE LAST SESSION. At Arvada Center she starred in the new musical TRAV'LIN with Broadway veteran Milton Craig Nealy for which she received A True West Award.

**Tina Anderson, she/her (Scenic Designer)** Tina is thrilled to be back at Curious Theatre. Her last design was CULLUD WATTAH. Some of her most recent designs are THE LARAMIE PROJECT for the Arvada Center. For Cherry Creek Theatre, HEARTBEAT OF THE SUN, SONDHEIM ON SONDHEIM, HEADLINERS, MOON FOR THE MISBEGOTTEN. BETC are WHAT THE CONSTITUTION MEANS TO ME, COAL COUNTRY (True West Award), EDEN PRAIRIE, 1971, (nominated for a Henry Award). MS. HOLMES & MS. WATSON APT, THE ROYALE, FOURTEEN FUNERALS. For Benchmark, THE ROAD TO LETHE. And for Thunder River Theatre Company, POTUS OR, BEHIND EVERY DUMBASS ARE SEVEN WOMEN TRYING TO KEEP HIM ALIVE and HURRICANE DIANE. Tina is always grateful for designing for Curious.

**Amy Arpan, she/her (Fight Choreographer)** When Amy was a kid, she wanted to be Zorro when she grew up. Instead, she studied with the Society of American Fight Directors and has followed a somewhat different career path. POTUS is her first fight collaboration with Curious Theatre. Other Colorado fight choreography credits include: THE MOUSETRAP - Lone Tree Arts Center; GUADALUPE IN THE GUESTROOM- Firehouse Theater; ART - The Aurora Fox; MISERY, I HATE HAMLET, A CHRISTMAS STORY, FAIRFIELD, & MOON OVER BUFFALO - Miners Alley Performing Arts Center; & TARZAN - Candlelight Dinner Theater.

**Amie Benjamin, they/them (Assistant Stage Manager)** Amie Benjamin is an Indigenous Stage Manager from the Denver Metro Area. They are committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion as a theatre artist. Amie's theatre career started in middle school, where they acted in two different productions, one of which was THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS, for which they played Tiger Lily. In high school, Amie joined theatre as a Lighting Technician and Stage Crew member. In their senior year, they acted in their school's production of RADIUM GIRLS. Following high school, Amie was accepted to University of Northern Colorado to major in Theatre Studies with a concentration in lighting design, and a Minor in Gender Studies. In their sophomore year, they took a stage management class and fell in love with the craft. They immediately switched their concentration to stage management, and in the spring, they stage managed two student productions before moving on to work with UNC's MainStage productions in their Junior and Senior Year. Amie graduated from UNC in August, and they are so excited to be working with such talented people at the Curious Theatre Company.

**Jada Suzanne Dixon, she/her (Director)** is an actress, director, and playwright, a member of the Curious Artistic Company and serves as Curious' Artistic Director. She began her directing career with the development of new plays with Athena Arts Projects Plays in Progress (PIP) series. She served as assistant/associate director for APPROPRIATE, SKELETON CREW, and GLORIA at Curious Theatre Company. Directing credits include AMERICAN SON and AMERIKIN, Curious Theatre Company; FAIRFIELD, Miners Alley Playhouse; BLOOMSDAY and THE ROYALE, BETC; STICKFLY, Arvada Center for the Arts and Humanities; THE REVOLUTIONISTS, Little Theatre of the Rockies. Jada is a four-time recipient of the True West Award (including 2022 Colorado

Theatre Person of the Year), a 2022/23 Colorado Theatre Guild Henry Award Winner (ROYALE; Outstanding Play, Ensemble, Best Director), member of AEA, and a 2021 commissioned playwright for StageOne Family Theatre's Program, Theatre for Everywhere. Additionally, she was accepted into the 2019 Lincoln Center Theater Directors Lab; Models of Collaboration. Jada is also an Associate Artist with Local Theatre.

**Rachel Ducat, she/her (Stage Manager)** Rachel Ducat is happy to return to Curious Theatre, her long-time creative home. Currently, Rachel is an Executive Assistant and Business Manager at DCPA and has been at the DCPA for over 10 seasons as a resident Stage Manager working on shows in all the DCPA Theatre Company spaces including the Galleria and most recently Off Center's production of THEATER OF THE MIND. Her work has also brought her to Aurora Fox, Colorado Shakespeare Festival, Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, Cleveland Playhouse, and Hope Summer Repertory Theatre, as well as touring shows WICKED, JERSEY BOYS, BEAUTIFUL THE CAROLE KING MUSICAL and DIRTY DANCING. She holds an MBA from University of Denver and BA in Theatre Production from the University of Delaware.

**Emily A. Maddox, she/her (Lighting Designer)** This is Emily's 3rd production with Curious Theatre. Emily attended the University of Oklahoma where she received her BFA in drama in 2014. She has had the privilege of working in 54 different theatres and performance spaces throughout Colorado in her time here. Her recent designs include THE PILLOWMAN (Miscreant Theatre Collective), OHELLO 2024 & THESE SHINING LIVES (Firehouse Theater Company), CULLUD WATTAH (Curious Theatre Company), HEARTBEAT OF THE SUN (Cherry Creek Theatre), A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM (Lamont Opera Theatre), THE BOTTLE TREE (Community College of Aurora), MISS HOLMES (Phamaly Theatre Company), ANON(YMOUS) (University of Colorado Boulder), THE LAST SESSION (Town Hall Arts Center), CABARET (Vintage Theatre). Emily was the recipient of a 2023 Henry Award for her work on THE ROYALE (Butterfly Effect Theatre of Colorado) and a 2023 Onstage Colorado Award for her work on SONDHEIM ON SONDHEIM (Cherry Creek Theatre).

**Dani Taylor-Moxon, she/her (Sound Designer)** Dani Taylor-Moxon is the Managing Director for Thunder River Theatre Company and SOL Theatre Company in Carbondale, CO. Originally from the suburbs of Chicago, she was the General Manager at Theatre Aspen, Director of Production at Des Moines Metro Opera, the Resident Stage Manager for the Rose Theatre in Omaha, NE. She also has experience as the Production Stage Manager for the national tours of BYE BYE BIRDIE, CABARET, and ALTERBOYZ. Dani received her BA in Technical Theatre from Purdue University and her MFA in Production Management and Arts Administration from Boston University.

**Brynn Starr Coplan Sater, she/her (Costume Designer)** Brynn Starr Sater designed costumes for THE MINUTES last season, the final 4 productions of DENVER STORIES, FROZEN, and FOR BETTER for Curious Theatre Company. Brynn has previously designed costumes for the Aurora Fox Arts Center, the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, The Town Hall Arts Center, The Edge Theatre and was the Resident Costume Designer for Paragon Theatre for 9 seasons. Brynn has worked in various roles for the Colorado Shakespeare Festival, Santa Fe Opera, Opera Colorado and Lees McRae Summer Theatre.



**Annette Westerby, she/her (Props Artisan)** Annette is an Artistic Company Member. She has made blood effects, trained live animals, painted 50 matching violins, and created props and/or costumes for over 25 Curious productions. In New York, she designed costumes for several Off-Off-Broadway productions and was a studio sewing assistant to contemporary artist Marie Watt.

**Actors' Equity Association ("AEA" or "Actors' Equity")**, founded in 1913, represents more than 49,000 actors and stage managers in the United States. Equity seeks to advance, promote and foster the art of live theatre as an essential component of our society. Equity negotiates wages and working conditions, providing a wide range of benefits, including health and pension plans. AEA is a member of the AFL-CIO, and is affiliated with FIA, an international organization of performing arts unions. The Equity emblem is our mark of excellence. [www.actorsequity.org](http://www.actorsequity.org)

**University of Denver Theatre Tech Intern Program.** The Theatre Technical Internship Program provides DU students with paid opportunities to work with professional companies and designers in a supportive setting that prepares them for work in the entertainment industry. During the build process, students are engaged in the construction shop with working professionals, and then experience the challenges of moving the show elements to a professional venue, working with the theatre company's team to install and present the show.

Between July 2023 and July 2024, the Tech Interns have built fourteen productions for professional companies across Colorado.

Projects for Curious include *Confederates*, *Cullud Wattah*, *Truth Be Told*, *The Minutes*, *Letters of Suresh*, *On The Exhale*, *Alma*, *Heroes of the Fourth Turning*, and *American Son*.

Other projects include *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for Phamaly Theatre Company (in the Kilstrom Theatre at DCPA), *Legally Blonde*, *School of Rock*, *Escape to Margaritaville*, *Sound of Music*, *Footloose*, *Matilda*, and *The Full Monty* for Parker Arts, *Enemy of the People*, *Holly Alaska!*, *Coal Country*, *The Children* and two seasons of the Summer Theatre Truck with BETC, *Acts of Faith* and *Stockade* for Local, *Box* at the Edinburgh Fringe, *The Paul Reiser Big Font Tour* (video), *Reunion* for NYC-based Creative Endeavor, and three full productions for Lamont Opera Theatre.

# Go Deeper: POTUS

Compiled by Christy Montour-Larson

## A NOTE FROM SELENA FILLINGER



*Selina Fillinger is an Oregon-based writer and performer. Her feminist farce, POTUS: Or, Behind Every Great Dumbass are Seven Women Trying to Keep Him Alive, garnered three Tony nominations and made Fillinger, at 28, one of the youngest female playwrights ever produced on Broadway. Fillinger was named to the 2024 Forbes 30 Under 30 list for Hollywood/Entertainment.*

In 2016, the soon-to-be 45th President of the United States was heard bragging about grabbing women by their genitals. I, in turn, sat down to write a farce. I wrote the first act in two weeks. The second act took me a year. After Trump was elected and the data revealed how many white women had voted for him, what began as a screed coalesced into a contemplation on culpability: the ways in which we are complicit in our own subjugation and the subjugation of others. Many regional theatres felt that my crass play about femme rage was too provocative for their audiences, and it sat dormant for several years. But in 2022, well into Biden's first term, POTUS premiered on Broadway.

Not long after we opened, Justice Alito's draft opinion foretelling the end of *Roe v. Wade* was leaked to the press. Suddenly, I was inundated with people telling me my play was "newly relevant." I had to fight the urge to scream in response. The erosion of bodily autonomy was neither new nor unpredictable. Countless poor women, queer people, trans people, and women of color were already facing and fighting for healthcare long before the Supreme Court ruling. Much has changed, domestically and globally, in the year since the Broadway production, but I continue to find myself in the same conversation: a political crisis ensues, a headline emerges, an election looms, and suddenly people hear an old line in a new light. "It hits differently!" they tell me, shaking their heads, as if the lines I wrote six years ago about white patriarchal governance were mere shots in the dark.

People love to say that we are living through unprecedented times. Unprecedented, perhaps—but surprising? Scientists and historians and artists have been telling us where things might lead for a very long time. I think it's time that we stop being surprised. We cannot keep navigating our present crises with the well-worn methods that got us here. Unprecedented times require unprecedented courage. I started working on POTUS when I was a very scared, very sad 23-year-old woman who needed to laugh. I wrote this play to give myself joy and catharsis and courage. I hope it offers you the same.

## THE ART OF FARCE

In the world of theatre, few genres have captured the hearts and minds of audiences quite like farce. With its fast-paced humor, exaggerated characters, and outrageous situations, farce has become a staple of comedic performances around the world.

### The Origins of Farce

The term "farce" comes from the French word "farceur," which means "jester" or "clown." Farce originated in ancient Greek theatre, where it was used as a form of comic relief between the tragedies. However, it was during the Renaissance that farce began to take on its modern form, with plays featuring stock characters, physical humor, and rapid-fire dialogue.

### Characteristics of Farce

At its core, farce is all about comedy. Whether it's through physical humor, witty dialogue, or outrageous situations, farce is designed to make audiences laugh. Here are some of the key characteristics of farce:

- Exaggerated characters: Farce often features larger-than-life characters, such as bumbling fools, conniving schemers, and overbearing parents.
- Misunderstandings and mistaken identities: One of the hallmarks of farce is the use of misunderstandings and mistaken identities to create confusion and chaos.
- Physical humor: From slapstick falls to exaggerated gestures, physical humor is a key component of farce.
- Rapid-fire dialogue: Farce often features quick-witted characters engaged in fast-paced dialogue, with jokes and one-liners flying back and forth.
- Far-fetched situations: Farce is all about taking situations to their most absurd extremes, creating hilariously improbable scenarios that keep audiences laughing.

### The Modern Farce

Despite its ancient roots, farce remains a popular theatrical genre today. From classic plays like "Noises Off" to modern films like "Bridesmaids," farce continues to captivate audiences with its mix of humor and absurdity. In fact, farce has even evolved to reflect modern sensibilities. Many contemporary farces, like POTUS, address issues such as gender roles, sexuality, and social class, using humor to shed light on serious topics.

SOURCE: <https://www.theatrehaus.com/2023/04/the-art-of-farce/>

## WOMEN IN THE WHITE HOUSE

While there has yet to be a female president, women have played an integral role in shaping the White House and its history. From first ladies and hostesses to demonstrators and enslaved workers, women have been intricately involved with the White House since its inception.

### Betty Ford: Activist First Lady



*Betty Ford lobbying for the Equal Rights Amendment from her personal desk in the White House*

Immediately after moving in, Betty Ford situated herself as a unique White House occupant. Betty was outspoken and unafraid to be herself, declaring "Okay, I'll move to the White House, do the best I can, and if they don't like it, they can kick me out, but they can't make me somebody I'm not." Even more unusual than her self-proclaimed independence, Betty Ford often disagreed with her husband's political positions, despite being a Republican herself. [Read more HERE.](#)

### Prominent African-American Women and the White House



*Sojourner Truth and Abraham Lincoln*

Although Michelle Obama was the first African-American first lady of the United States, African Americans have been integrally involved in the history of the White House from its initial construction in 1792. Notable African-American women activists such as Sojourner Truth, Rosa Parks, and Maya Angelou, have affected the national trajectory, pushing the country toward greater collective progress. [Read More HERE.](#)

### **Picketing the White House: The Suffragist Movement**



*Suffrage picketers marching along Pennsylvania Avenue on March 4, 1917.*

The national struggle for women's suffrage mobilized on March 3, 1913, the day before Woodrow Wilson's inauguration in Washington, D.C. The National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), in collaboration with activists Alice Paul and Lucy Burns, organized a suffrage parade down Pennsylvania Avenue. Over 5,000 women marched for suffrage but their peaceful procession was disrupted by a "surging mass of humanity that completely defied the Washington police." [Read more HERE.](#)

## JOB DESCRIPTIONS: WHO'S WHO IN THE WHITE HOUSE

### **White House Chief of Staff**

The chief of staff position is enormously influential and involves supervising staff, controlling access to the President, and coordinating with other White House offices such as the Council of Economic Advisors, the national security staff, and the Vice President. The job was created by President Franklin D. Roosevelt during his second administration in 1939. None of the 31 people to hold this position have been women.

### **White House Press Secretary**

The press secretary is the spokesperson for the president and is responsible for relations with the media. The press secretary typically holds briefings with the White House press corps. Those holding the job in the Trump administration such as Sean Spicer and Sarah Huckabee Sanders became well known for their handling of the president's communications and the media. In 1994, Dee-Dee Myers was the first woman to hold the position. Karine Jean-Pierre is the current press secretary. She is the first black person and the first openly LGBT person to serve in the position.



*Karine Jean-Pierre*

### **President's Personal Secretary**

The job of personal secretary to the president is one of the oldest in the White House, and the first to hold the position were family members such as the sons of President Martin Van Buren and President Millard Fillmore. The job requires coordinating calls and visitors, overseeing appointments, and traveling with the president. The character of Mrs. Landingham, secretary to fictional President Josiah Bartlet, was a sentimental favorite on television's "The West Wing." Since Missy LeHand, the personal secretary for FDR, all people who have held the position have been women.



*Missy LeHand*

### **White House Journalist**

Hundreds of journalists cover the White House on a daily basis. The White House press corps is the group of journalists, correspondents, and members of the media usually assigned to the White House to cover the president of the United States, White House events, and news briefings. Its offices are located in the West Wing. The pool system evolved to allow a limited number of people to represent the full press corps. On campus at the White House, that's typically a group of 20 correspondents from wire services, print outlets, TV and radio, along with photojournalists and sound operators. Helen Thomas was the first female member of the White House Press Corps.



*Helen Thomas*

### **The First Lady**

The spouse of the President is not elected to serve and yet, public service is inherent to the role. First Ladies were often the most famous women in America, and were able to influence, or at least were perceived to be able to influence, the President. First Ladies sponsored national and international causes such as environmentalism, volunteerism, women's rights, treatment for drug dependency, healthcare, literacy, healthy eating and exercise. After President Wilson suffered a series of strokes, and for all intents and purposes, his wife, Edith was fulfilling the role of president in her ill husband's absence. She is considered by some to have been the first unofficial woman president.



*Edith Wilson*

## **The President's Sibling**

Every aspect of the American Presidency comes under intense scrutiny, but few parts of a president's life contain as many amusing, slightly sordid anecdotes as their siblings' behavior. Richard Nixon ordered wiretaps on his brother's phone. Lyndon B. Johnson supposedly ordered the Secret Service to keep his brother as a virtual White House prisoner, to reel in his drunken cavorting. George W. Bush's younger brother Neil was the director of Silverado Savings and Loan, a Colorado bank that collapsed in 1988 at a cost to taxpayers of \$1 billion. Bill Clinton's half-brother Roger's Secret Service Code was "Headache". Truly the standard by which all other presidential siblings' antics are judged, Billy Carter burst onto the national scene as the boisterous, hard-drinking counterpoint to his pious, reserved brother Jimmy.



*Billy Carter*

## **The President's Dalliance**

From Thomas Jefferson to John F. Kennedy to Bill Clinton, the list of womanizing presidents is lengthy. Throughout most of our country's history, presidential transgressions were known about by some but not talked about by many and they were well hidden from the majority of the public. Grover Cleveland fathered a child out of wedlock before his first term as president in the 1880s. FDR had a longstanding relationship with his wife's social secretary. Warren Harding, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Lyndon B. Johnson and George H.W. Bush all had affairs, either confirmed or rumored. It's been widely reported that while Jaqueline Kennedy was giving a French reporter a tour of the presidential home, she passed by one of the secretaries' desks and said in French: "This is the girl who supposedly is sleeping with my husband."



*Monica Lewinsky and Bill Clinton*



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you think of the title? If you could give the play a new title, what would it be?
2. There are many films, television series and plays that look at life behind the scenes at the White House. How does seeing this world through the lens of women inform your understanding?
3. A farce often uses elements of absurdity, ridiculous situations, physical humor, rude or lewd jokes, and/or stereotypical characters. Where do you see elements of farce in POTUS?
4. Which of the characters could you relate to the most? Did your feelings about the characters ever shift and change? Why? or Why not?
5. What is your answer to the question often posed in the play: "Why isn't SHE president?" Do you think the United States is ready for a female President? Why or why not?
6. The play starts with a four-lettered word. How did it make you feel? Did your opinion change about the word by the end of the play?
7. How did you feel the set, lights, costumes and sound added to your experience of the play?
8. What song is a must on your Bitch Beats playlist? (A song that empowers you and gives you confidence to face any challenge)

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*Thank you to our founding Artistic Company Members whose dedication, hard work and artistic vision has helped make Curious the amazing theatre it is today.*

Dee Covington

Chip Walton