

# ARENA'S PAGE

STUDY GUIDE



the mead center  
for american theater

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## THE PLAY

*Be sure to Ride The Cyclone!*

When a choir from Uranium City, Canada arrives in limbo (the state between life and the afterlife) they are greeted by a fortune-telling machine named **The Amazing Karnak**. Karnak was originally designed to tell people the exact date and time of their deaths, but now is set to "Family Fun Mode." The Amazing Karnak sits in front of "The Cyclone," the infamous roller coaster that malfunctioned and ended the lives of the six choir members.

The Amazing Karnak presents the six departed children with a game—one unlike any other at an amusement park. The group must choose one person to be sent back to life. The rest will continue into the afterlife. Time is ticking as The Amazing Karnak will be destroyed by a wire-eating rat named **Virgil**. Who will the group choose to get a second chance at life? Who will move on to the afterlife? Can they come to a consensus before time runs out?

A promotional image for the musical "Ride the Cyclone". It features a large, stylized illustration of a man with a mustache and a goatee, wearing a black top hat and a dark suit, looking directly at the viewer. Below him, a group of six children, three boys and three girls, are shown in a similar style, looking upwards with expressions of hope and anticipation. In the background, the blue steel structure of a roller coaster is visible against a yellow and orange sky. The text "A CO-PRODUCTION WITH MCCARTER THEATRE CENTER" is written in white above the title "RIDE THE CYCLONE", which is in large, bold, white letters. Below the title, the credits for the book, music, and lyrics by Jacob Richmond and Brooke Maxwell, directed by Sarah Rasmussen, and original choreography by Jim Lichtscheidl and additional choreography by Tiger Brown are listed. The performance dates and location, "KREEGER THEATER | JANUARY 13 – FEBRUARY 19, 2023", are also included. At the bottom, there is a quote from a review and a small logo for the National Endowment for the Arts.

BOOK, MUSIC & LYRICS BY  
**JACOB RICHMOND AND BROOKE MAXWELL**  
DIRECTED BY **SARAH RASMUSSEN**  
ORIGINAL CHOREOGRAPHY **JIM LICHTSCHEIDL**  
ADDITIONAL CHOREOGRAPHY **TIGER BROWN**  
KREEGER THEATER | **JANUARY 13 – FEBRUARY 19, 2023**

Support for *Ride the Cyclone* is provided by Ilene and Steven Rosenthal.  
The D.C. Ticket Partnership is generously sponsored by the NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS

**"And the world will keep on spinning // with no ending or  
beginning // So just take a look around"**

— "It's Just a Ride," *Ride The Cylcone*

## MEET THE COMPOSERS AND LYRICISTS:

### JACOB RICHMOND

“The initial seed for writing *Ride the Cyclone* was our desire to dramatize the undramatize-able.”  
— Jacob Richmond

Jacob Richmond was born in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada. He attended Concordia University in Montreal and double majored in history and performance. He is the co-founder of Atomic Vaudeville in Victoria, British Columbia, a performance company where the world premiere of *Ride the Cyclone* took place. In addition to *Ride the Cyclone*, Richmond has also written several plays.



### BROOKE MAXWELL

“...it’s a comedy. Sounds dark, but it’s pretty much a celebration of life.” — Brooke Maxwell

Brooke Maxwell lives and works in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada as an educator, musician and composer. He was a middle school music teacher for ten years and knows how to play a myriad of instruments including the piano and saxophone. His background is in acoustic jazz, so learning how to compose pop music was one of his challenges for *Ride the Cyclone*. *Ride the Cyclone*’s musical score has gone through many drafts, and the very first was recorded in Maxwell’s home studio.



When Richmond started a cabaret series at Atomic Vaudeville, Maxwell was hired to compose songs for it. Richmond was impressed with Maxwell’s ability to combine a multitude of genres into one song, calling him “a style beast.” Eventually, Richmond asked Maxwell to join him in the creation of *Ride the Cyclone*. When they first started writing, neither of them knew much about musicals, so each step was a learning process. Not only did Richmond and Maxwell collaborate on the composition, lyrics and script, but they were also part of the performance. On the World Premiere Cast Recording, Richmond is The Amazing Karnak and Maxwell’s voice is on a couple bonus tracks.



### FROM THE DIRECTOR’S NOTEBOOK

Director Sarah Rasmussen fell in love with *Ride the Cyclone* six years ago when she first saw it and fought hard to have the opportunity to work on it. In 2019, she finally received the chance to direct the musical at Jungle Theater in Minneapolis.

Earlier this year while working on this production, she reflected on what the show meant to her: “This musical, it doesn’t have easy answers, but I think it keeps intently whispering, ‘Pay attention. Take it in. Be with the inevitable discomfort of being human, but also be with the possibility. And be with the wonder and beauty of it too.’”

## MEET THE CHARACTERS

Welcome to the profile of The Saint Cassian Chamber Choir of Uranium City, Saskatchewan. Meet our members! Along with their age, voice type and zodiac, each character has a signature song style.

#### OCEAN:

An ambitious overachiever.

17. Belter, Mezzo-Soprano. Capricorn.  
Music Genre: Mall Pop.



SHINAH HEY

#### MISCHA:

An adoptee from Ukraine.

18. Baritone. Leo.  
Music Genre: Rap/Folk.



ELI MAYER

#### NOEL:

An aspiring novelist and romantic.

17. Tenor. Pisces.  
Music Genre: Cabaret.



NICK MARTINEZ

#### RICKY:

A mute boy with a huge imagination.

17. Baritone. Gemini.  
Music Genre: Rock.

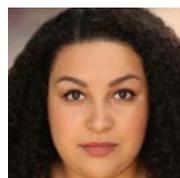


MATTHEW BOYD SNYDER

#### CONSTANCE:

Ocean’s over-shadowed best friend.

17. Scorpio. Alto.  
Music Genre: Pop.



GABRIELLE DOMINIQUE

#### JANE DOE:

An unidentified girl found at the scene of the accident.

Age unknown. Operatic voice, Soprano. Zodiac unknown.  
Music Genre: Classical Ballad/  
New Orleans Swing.



ASHLYN MADDOX

# THE WORLD OF THE PLAY

The choir's hometown, Uranium City, is a real place in Saskatchewan, Canada. In 1949, S. Kaiman discovered that the area was full of uranium ore, a silver metal that has radioactive properties. Uranium is mainly used to make nuclear reactor fuels often for heat and electricity. In 1952, Uranium City was built, dedicated to mining uranium with most residents initially living in tents. Mining companies relocated to Uranium City, like Eldorado Mining and Refining Company (now named Eldorado Nuclear Limited). In 1982, when Eldorado packed up and left Uranium City, many residents followed, turning Uranium City into an almost-ghost-town. In 2021, the Canadian Census recorded a population of only 91 people in Uranium City.

Photo of Ashlyn Maddox in *Ride the Cyclone* at McCarter Theatre Center by Dr. Charles Erickson Photography

## THE MUSIC

This musical has two unique qualities: a wide range of musical genres (styles) and a band that is part of the cast! Many composers stick with one type of music in a show, like rock or opera. Each character in *Ride the Cyclone* has their own number in a music style specific to their personality, sort of like their own personal theme song. This helps highlight each character's uniqueness. This gives the band the exciting challenge of switching musical techniques throughout the show.

During musicals, the band or orchestra is often found performing in the pit. The pit is usually located in front of or underneath the stage with the conductor placed so that they can view the stage and the performers can see the conductor. If there is no pit in the theater, the band/orchestra could be backstage using monitors so the performers and conductor can still see and hear each other. In this musical, the band will be in the pit.

The members of The Saint Cassian Chamber Choir were each assigned a vocal part based on how high and low they can sing. The voice parts are arranged from highest to lowest.

- **Soprano:** Can sing the highest
- **Mezzo-Soprano**
- **Alto**
- **Contralto/Countertenor**
- **Tenor**
- **Baritone**
- **Bass:** Can sing the lowest



## BUILDING THE SET TIMELAPSE

*Ride the Cyclone* is a co-production, and it began at McCarter Theatre Center in New Jersey. Watch the McCarter set crew build their set in this two-minute timelapse.

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=0JBDr7rYUEM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0JBDr7rYUEM)

## FORTUNETELLER MACHINE HISTORY

Generally located in amusement parks and penny arcades, fortuneteller machines gained popularity in the 1930s. With the insertion of a coin, a robot in a glass case would activate and tell the participant their fortune. This fortune could be revealed in a variety of ways such as spoken via a telephone connected to the machine or written on a dispensed card. The robot fortunetellers could be any character considered magical, ranging from mummies to grandmas. Like in *Ride the Cyclone*, some machines required personal information, such as the zodiac sign. One of the most famous machines was the Zoltan Fortune Teller. This machine required the user to insert a coin, pick up the attached telephone, press a button with their zodiac sign on it, and watch as the crystal ball lit up and worked its magic. The user would then hear their fortune through the telephone. The market for these machines increased in 1988 when the film *Big* premiered. In the film, the fortuneteller machine named Zoltar (inspired by Zoltan) turns a 13-year-old boy into 30-year-old Tom Hanks.

## FRENCH NEW WAVE CINEMA

Noel wishes to live a life dedicated to the rebellious style of French New Wave Cinema. This new kind of cinema arose in the 1950s when directors wanted their films to provoke thought and ask complex questions rather than simply to entertain. The hallmarks of this type of cinema are lots of improvisation, speaking straight to the camera, jump cuts, close ups on faces, hand-held cameras, natural lighting, sound, and backgrounds. Themes explored were generally religion, sexuality, adolescence, and class conflict.

## A CULT MUSICAL

"Cult Musicals" are musicals that stray from the mainstream and have a dedicated following. Earlier this year *Ride the Cyclone* went viral on TikTok as videos of cosplay, fanfiction, covers of songs, and video edits circulated on the platform. Its fans are dedicated to the musical, constantly finding their own angles on the storylines and tiny details in the plot that most would never notice. Brooke Maxwell describes his love for the fanbase in an interview with CurtainCall: "... the human network that has made it popular currently is a little like a spider web. It's something that is very delicate and only nature knows how it works."



# SPOTLIGHT ON SOUND

How does a stage become another place in a different time? Costumes, lights, sound, props, and sets: all of these production elements work together to create the world and tell the story of a play. The Production Department at Arena Stage is made up of all the teams that create these elements. Learn more about how one of these teams, the Sound Team, uses an amazing range of skills, creativity, problem-solving, artistry, and teamwork to help make some of the theater magic you see (and hear) on stage.

**MEET THE SOUND TEAM FOR *RISE THE CYCLONE***  
 (Left to Right) Brian Burchett, Drew Moberley, and Lex Allenbaugh

## PAPERWORK

As Arena's Sound and Video supervisor, Brian Burchett begins the process by connecting with the sound designer for the production. He learns the designer's vision and starts working on how it can be realized. After discussing the space and finalizing the equipment within the given budget, he creates paperwork to be passed to the A1 (Primary Audio Engineer), Drew Moberley. The paperwork can consist of line diagrams or spreadsheets that describe which microphone (mic) will be used, and where and what it gets plugged into.

Holiday - Arena Stage

MIDI CHANNELS		OUTPUTS	
1	Channel 1	1	1
2	Channel 2	2	2
3	Channel 3	3	3
4	Channel 4	4	4
5	Channel 5	5	5
6	Channel 6	6	6
7	Channel 7	7	7
8	Channel 8	8	8
9	Channel 9	9	9
10	Channel 10	10	10
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93	Channel 93	93	93
94	Channel 94	94	94
95	Channel 95	95	95
96	Channel 96	96	96
97	Channel 97	97	97
98	Channel 98	98	98
99	Channel 99	99	99
100	Channel 100	100	100

This paperwork (above) is from our first show of the season, *Holiday*. Using the paperwork, the sound department begins installing speakers, wires, and mics. After all the sound components are in place, it is time to prepare the actors.

## RIGGING

For the actors to be heard, they need microphones. As the A2 (Secondary Audio Engineer), Lex Allenbaugh oversees each actor's mic by keeping them fully charged and troubleshooting any problems that occur during the run. One of her biggest

tasks is making sure that the actors have the microphones properly placed on their bodies, a process known as rigging. She ensures that the microphone, its pack, and the wires are in a position on the actor



where they are most comfortable, hidden, and secure throughout the entire production. The most common places to rig are over the ear or on the forehead. However, sometimes, depending on the actor, the costume, or blocking, Lex may have to invent new ways to rig the microphone. When Drew was an A2, he once had to rig a mic along the frame of the actor's glasses! Once the actors have microphones, the team will be able to control the levels of their sound.



A lavalier microphone used at Arena Stage

## HISTORY OF SOUND IN THEATER

Sound has always been important in theater and includes the spoken words of the play, sound effects, and music. These elements combine to help tell the story of the play and create setting and mood.

However, sound was not always produced on stage as it is today. Actors did not always have microphones and sound systems to amplify their voices. Instead, they had to project (speak loudly) to be heard. Sound effects were created backstage by crew members for every performance. Music used during productions was live. With time came technology that changed sound in theater. Microphones were invented to amplify sound. Mixing boards allowed engineers to balance live singing with live instruments. Recorded music and sound effects could also support the storytelling on stage.

# MIXING

The sound board is what controls the sound levels, and, as the A1, Drew controls it. Beginning in tech rehearsals, Drew listens to the audio of the show and balances microphones to the correct levels, focusing on the shape and flow of the audio—a process known as mixing. In his notebook, he marks where each dial and slider should be during different points of the show to maintain the perfect mix of sounds. While these notes are his guide, anything can happen during the show.



Drew may need to raise an actor's mic because they have a cold or may need to turn down a drummer's mic because she got really into a certain song and played louder than usual. The A1 needs to be ready to quickly turn a dial or move a slider at any point in the show, continuously performing a balancing act with the sound. If something becomes unbalanced, there is a chance of feedback: a loud, high-pitched noise that emits from the speakers. Brian Burchett describes the team's marker for success during the production: "Not being noticed during rehearsals or the show is the best compliment our sound team could receive."



Arena Sound Room

# SKILLS

## Communication

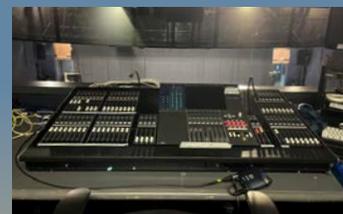
Working in sound in theater requires collaboration. The sound team is constantly using their communication skills, whether that be with actors, crew, or sound designers. Because the technical side of sound can be complicated, the team needs to be sure they explain the process and use terms in ways that everyone can understand. Lex, being the A2 and therefore the person working closest with actors, has learned how to build relationships and allow people to feel comfortable communicating their needs, wants, or concerns with her.

## Adaptability

Another large part of working in sound is adjusting to changes, applying what has already been learned on past shows and devising new solutions. It is about figuring out how to do the unique requirements of each show, whether that be hiding a microphone rig in a tall, fancy wig or figuring out how to avoid microphone feedback due to an actor's metal costume. Drew says, "Some shows are easy, and some shows are entirely new, but every time the sound is different in some way."

# SOUND IN A MUSICAL

Musicals require more work for the sound team than a regular play. There is usually additional equipment needed for the music, as well as challenges that come with having a band. The best way for the team to control sound in a show is when it is released through speakers. If the band is in a completely different room from the production, that is the easiest situation for the sound team since all the sound will be coming from the speakers. If the band is in a pit, the team must juggle the sound coming through not only the speakers, but some sound coming from the air as well. If the band is on stage, that is the most difficult situation to control because the music is being played right across from the audience.



# SOUND DESIGNERS

Sound designers are in charge of what the audience hears on the stage. The elements of sound design in a play are music, sound effects, and live voices. A sound designer will collaborate with the director to help create and balance sound elements, creating the aural (heard) world for the play or musical. The sound team are the ones who take the sound designer's ideas and accomplish that desired atmosphere.

# CHALLENGE ACCEPTED TURN IT UP!

Be a sound designer and support a story with sound. Watch this short film by Dolby on mute. Take a section of the video and create a plan for the sound. What sound effects, music, or spoken words would you add? When done with the exercise, play the film back with volume and reflect on the power of sound in storytelling.

## Silent

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KA6azZALMIE>

**LEARN MORE:** From creating thunder by rolling cannonballs down chutes to crash boxes to introducing recorded sound effects, learn more about how sound works and the history of sound in theater from the Theatrical Sound Designers and Composers Association: <https://tsdca.org/history/>



The set of *Ride the Cyclone* designed by Scott Davis at McCarter Theatre Center. Photo by T. Charles Erickson Photography.

# THREE BIG QUESTIONS

1

What gives a life meaning?

2

How would you sum up your life in a song?

3

What is the power of music to tell a story?

## RESOURCES

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## HELPFUL HINTS FOR THEATER AUDIENCES

As an audience member at the theater, YOU are part of the show! Just as you see and hear the actors onstage, they can see and hear you in the audience.

To help the performers do their best, please remember the following:

- Arrive early.
- Visit the restroom before the show starts.
- Sit in the seat indicated on your ticket.
- Ushers are there to help you!
- Before the show begins, turn off your phone, watch alarms, and any other electronic devices. If anything rings by accident, turn it off immediately.
- Do not use your phone for texts, calls, games, or pictures.
- You cannot take pictures or make recordings in the theater, even before or after the play.
- There is no food allowed in the theater.
- If you must leave, wait for a scene change and exit quietly and quickly.
- Respond to the show; you can laugh, cry and gasp. However, don't talk to the performers on stage.
- Be sure to applaud at the end! During a musical, audiences sometimes clap after a song or dance. If you love the show or a performer, you can give a standing ovation. The actors bow to thank you.



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Visit [www.arenastage.org](http://www.arenastage.org) for more information on Arena Stage productions and educational opportunities.

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