



GUTHRIE
THEATER

Play Guide

2023-2024 SEASON



For the PEOPLE

by TY DEFOE and LARISSA FASTHORSE

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For the People

by **TY DEFOE** and **LARISSA FASTHORSE**

directed by **MICHAEL JOHN GARCÉS**

October 7 - November 12, 2023

McGuire Proscenium Stage



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**GUTHRIE
THEATER**

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The Guthrie creates transformative theater experiences that ignite the imagination, stir the heart, open the mind and build community through the illumination of our common humanity.

Guthrie Theater Play Guide

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The Guthrie Theater receives support from the National Endowment for the Arts. This activity is made possible in part by the Minnesota State Arts Board, through an appropriation by the Minnesota State Legislature. The Minnesota State Arts Board received additional funds to support this activity from the National Endowment for the Arts.



“We disagree. We argue. We digress. But when it’s time to come together for each other we’re there. That’s why Franklin Avenue has survived for so long.”

- Commissioner Bobbie Grey in *For the People*

PHOTO: KALANI QUEYPO, ADRIENNE ZIMIGA-JANUARY AND ERNEST BRIGGS (JAIDA GREY EAGLE)

About This Guide

This play guide is designed to fuel your curiosity and deepen your understanding of a show’s history, meaning and cultural relevance so you can make the most of your theatergoing experience. You might be reading this because you fell in love with a show you saw at the Guthrie. Maybe you want to read up on a play before you see it onstage. Or perhaps you’re a fellow theater company doing research for an upcoming production. We’re glad you found your way here, and we encourage you to dig in and mine the depths of this extraordinary story.

NOTE: Sections of this play guide may evolve throughout the run of the show, so check back often for more information.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Thanks for your interest in *For the People*. Please direct literary inquiries to Resident Dramaturg Carla Steen at carlas@guthrietheater.org.



PHOTO: ADRIENNE ZIMIGA-JANUARY, SHERI FOSTER BLAKE, WES STUDI, ERNEST BRIGGS AND KATIE ANVIL RICH (JAIDA GREY EAGLE)

Synopsis

Twenty-something April Dakota has returned to her hometown of Minneapolis after a few years away finding herself in Malibu and France. Now on Franklin Avenue, the heart of the urban Native American community in the Twin Cities, she dreams of opening the For the People Wellness Center — a business that fuses the traditional and contemporary to serve the Indigenous community. All she needs is a grant from the Urban All Nations Hybrid-Intertribal Franklin Avenue Task Force headed by Commissioner Bobbie Grey. But competition for the grant is fierce, with two Task Force members — Levi Mitchell and April’s father, Robert Dakota — submitting proposals of their own.

When April’s proposal doesn’t pass the scrutiny of the Task Force, she partners with Esme, a non-Indigenous woman interested in “uptowning” urban communities. However, April’s revolutionary solution — to create a new tribe that embraces everything she values about being a proud, urban, contemporary Indian — soon backfires. With people and forces beyond her control set to ruin everything she loves, April turns to the Task Force to help save their beloved Franklin Avenue. [G](#)

CHARACTERS

April Dakota (Dakota), a young Native woman with plans to open a business on Franklin Avenue

Robert Dakota (Dakota), her father, runs a Native casino in Dalbo, Minnesota, Task Force member

Commissioner Bobbie Grey (Dakota), commissioner for District 4, Task Force member

Sage Piewannakwat (Anishinaabe), administrator for District 4, Task Force member

Levi Mitchell (Dakota), Task Force member

Herb O’Geezhik (Ojibwe), Task Force member, an elder

Daisy Childs (Dakota), Task Force member, an elder

Esme Williams, a young businesswoman

SETTING

A little in the future. Locations on and around Franklin Avenue, Minneapolis. Some are real; some are fictional.

For the People, by the People

Unlike many new plays, *For the People* didn't begin with written words on a page. It began with stories spoken in community circles. Over several years, those conversations became the source material for a script, which became the world premiere play onstage now. See how the playwrights, the director, the Twin Cities Native community and the Guthrie came together to make *For the People* possible.

STORY CIRCLES AND DRAFTING

NOVEMBER 2019

The Guthrie commissions Ty Defoe and Larissa FastHorse to create a theater project that centers stories from the Twin Cities Native community. The project is made possible by a generous grant from The Joyce Foundation.

2019/2020

Defoe and FastHorse hold story circles with the local Native community and write the first draft of a play based on these conversations.



PHOTO: THE CAST OF FOR THE PEOPLE (JOSHUA CUMMINS)

2023

REHEARSAL TO PRODUCTION


SPRING/SUMMER 2023

The Guthrie announces *For the People* as part of its upcoming 2023–2024 Season. The Joyce Foundation awards the Guthrie a third grant to support the hiring of two Native muralists for the scenic design and an Indigenous Music Consultant.

SEPTEMBER 2023

The company of *For the People* begins rehearsals at the Guthrie, with the entire cast (featuring seven Native actors and one non-Native actor) making their Guthrie mainstage debuts.

OCTOBER 2023

For the People begins performances on the McGuire Proscenium Stage. 

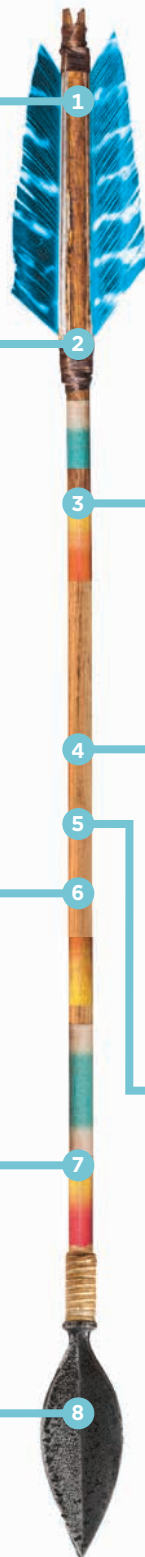


PHOTO: THOMAS DRASKOVIC, OOGIE PUSH, INEZ DeCOTEAU, ROYA TAYLOR, ADRIENNE ZIMIGAJANUARY, ERNEST BRIGGS, NATHANIEL TWOBEAR, ISABELLA STAR LaBLANC (ADDIE GORLIN-HAN)

WORKSHOPS AND READINGS

DECEMBER 2021

To test out script ideas, Defoe holds a two-day workshop at the Guthrie with an ensemble of local actors, including members of the Guthrie's Native Advisory Council. Defoe and FastHorse incorporate the collective learnings.

MAY/JUNE 2022

Director Michael John Garcés joins the creative team and leads a five-day workshop of the now-titled *For the People*, culminating in a reading at the Minneapolis American Indian Center. The week of theatermaking includes a story circle with Little Earth community members, a tour of Franklin Avenue and a dinner at Owamni restaurant.

FALL/WINTER 2022

Defoe, FastHorse and Garcés gather in the Dowling Studio for a three-day workshop to further refine the play. The Guthrie receives a second grant from The Joyce Foundation to support a mainstage production of *For the People*.

Playwright Ty Defoe

(Citizen of the Anishinaabe and Oneida Nations)




A Grammy Award-winning interdisciplinary artist and sovereign story trickster, Ty Defoe aspires to an interweaving and glitterizing approach to artistic projects with social justice, indiqueer and environmental lenses.

He has earned fellowships from Robert Rauschenberg, MacDowell, Sundance Institute, First Peoples and The Kennedy Center's Next 50. Defoe creates work with rural communities, Broadway productions and the digital metaverse in VR/XR, fostering relations for Indigenous and decolonial futures. Works created and authored include *Copper Horns in Water*, *Our Words Are Seeds*, *Trail and Tears* (with Dawn Avery), *Ajjaak on Turtle Island*, *The Lesson* (with Avi Amon and Nolan Doran), *Firebird Tattoo*, *ANAKWAD* (with Dov Heichemer and alpha_rats), *CIRCLE*, *Strong Like Flower* (with Katherine Freer) and *Revolving Sky* (Under the Radar Festival at The Public Theater/All My Relations Collective).

Defoe has presented work at The Momentary at Crystal Bridges, Lincoln Center, O'Neill National Puppetry Conference, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Carnegie Hall, Hayden Planetarium and Park Avenue Armory. In addition to working on global cultural art projects, he frequents his own communities where he learned to hoop and eagle dance and play a variety of wooden flutes (mentored by Kevin Locke), which earned him one of his favorite roles in the Netflix animated series "Spirit Rangers."

It has taken many years to develop a new play like this, and while we celebrate, we recognize the work ahead of us. We still live in a country that hides Indigeneity in film, media and on American stages. What a prolific moment it is to resist that by bringing joy in the form of a comedy and bringing everybody together.

- Ty Defoe

His publications can be read in *Thorny Locust* magazine, HowlRound Theatre Commons, Routledge Press and Bloomsbury. Other notable mentions include the Helen Merrill Playwriting and Jonathan Larson Awards (for book and lyrics). He has earned degrees from CalArts (B.F.A.), Goddard College (M.F.A.) and NYU Tisch School of the Arts (M.F.A.). Defoe leads Indigenous Direction with Larissa FastHorse and is a professor of practice in Medieval and Renaissance Studies at Arizona State University. Additionally, his favorite color is clear. He lives in New York City. Learn more at www.tydefoe.com or www.allmyrelations.earth. 

Playwright Larissa FastHorse

(Sicangu Lakota Nation)




PHOTO: JOHN D. & CATHERINE T. MacARTHUR FOUNDATION

Larissa FastHorse is an award-winning writer and 2020–2025 MacArthur Fellow. Her satirical comedy *The Thanksgiving Play* made her the first known female Native American playwright on Broadway at the Helen Hayes Theater under the direction of Rachel Chavkin.

Her new plays in 2023 are *Wicoun* (Cornerstone Theater Company), *The Democracy Project* (Federal Hall Conservancy), *Fake It Until You Make It* (Center Theatre Group/Mark Taper Forum), *For the People* (Guthrie Theater) and the national tour of *Peter Pan* (Networks). Selected past plays include *What Would Crazy Horse Do?* (KCRep), *Landless* and *Cow Pie Bingo* (Alter Theater), *Average Family* (Children’s Theatre Company) and *Teaching Disco Squaredancing to Our Elders: A Class Presentation* (Native Voices at the Autry) as well as numerous productions of *The Thanksgiving Play*, making it one of the most-produced plays in America.

FastHorse also created the nationally recognized trilogy of community-engaged theatrical experiences with Cornerstone Theater Company and collaborator Michael John Garcés: *Urban Rez*, *Native Nation* and *Wicoun*. These projects earned them national funding and an appointment to Arizona State University, where she is a professor of practice (Literature) in the English Department.

Together, FastHorse and Ty Defoe lead Indigenous Direction, and they recently produced the first land acknowledgment on national television for the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade on NBC. They continue to do consulting work with Macy’s as well as some of the largest theater organizations in the country.

FastHorse also writes in film and television, most recently as a creator for NBC, Disney Channel, DreamWorks, Muse, Netflix and others. She is based in Los Angeles with her husband, the sculptor Edd Hogan, and is represented by Jonathan Mills at Paradigm in New York City. She is especially honored to follow in the footsteps of the last known Native American playwright on Broadway, Lynn Riggs. Learn more at www.hoganhorsestudio.com. 

After many conversations with members of the local Native community, we realized [*For the People*] had to be funny because comedy and laughter are at the core of Indigenous culture. I’m thrilled to co-write this show featuring Native voices and thrilled to do it at the Guthrie.

– Larissa FastHorse

Director Michael John Garcés



Michael John Garcés is a playwright, a director and the former Artistic Director of Cornerstone Theater Company, a community-engaged, ensemble-based theater in Los Angeles, where he served for the past 17 years.

In addition to directing plays by Larissa FastHorse, including *Urban Rez*, *Native Nation* and *Wicoun*, other selected directing credits include *The Royale* (Arizona Theatre Company), *The Just and the Blind* (Carnegie Hall/The Kennedy Center), *Epic* (Great Plains Theatre Conference), *What Happens Next* (La Jolla Playhouse), *The Arsonists* (Woolly Mammoth) and *Wrestling Jerusalem* (various venues, including the Guthrie Theater, Cleveland Public Theatre and Philadelphia Theatre Company). He also co-directed *The Falls* at the Guthrie in 2006.

Garcés is a recipient of the Doris Duke Artist Award, Princess Grace Statue Award and Alan Schneider Director Award. He currently serves as Executive Vice President for the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society. [G](#)

IN REHEARSAL



PHOTOS: LEFT: MICHAEL JOHN GARCÉS AND KALANI QUEYPO; MIDDLE: WES STUDI; RIGHT: SHERI FOSTER BLACK AND NATHANIEL TWOBEAR (JOSHUA CUMMINS)



PHOTO: NATHANIEL TWOBEAR, KATIE ANVIL RICH AND ADRIENNE ZIMIGA-JANUARY (JAIDA GREY EAGLE)

Discussion Questions and Classroom Activities

WHOSE LAND IS IT ANYWAY?

“Before you know it, the small stores are all owned by outsiders and our ‘personality’ is nothing more than interpretive signs.”

– Commissioner Bobbie Grey in *For the People*

Context

For the People is set in Minneapolis, Minnesota, specifically on Franklin Avenue, which once delineated the southern city limits of Minneapolis. In 1968, the American Indian Movement (AIM) started in Minneapolis with the initial goal of offering neighborhood patrols to combat police brutality experienced by Indigenous populations. Before that, Franklin Avenue was rich farmland stewarded by the Dakota people. Today, this land represents many things to many people. On a larger scale, NDN Collective has organized LANDBACK — a movement and political framework working to get Indigenous lands back into Indigenous hands and achieve justice for Indigenous people.

Discussion Questions

- Native peoples were displaced when the land was colonized. What does the land you are on right now mean to you? How can we be better stewards of this land and show respect toward the land itself and its Indigenous origins?
- What actions can individuals take to support Indigenous communities? How can small actions begin to catalyze large-scale change?

- In *For the People*, Levi asks, “Is it living in the past to want to make Dakota people legal on their own land?” The concept of “land ownership” came from colonizers. Should we own land? Do you think land can belong to a person or group of people? If so, who gets to decide who the land belongs to? Is there an equitable and/or moral way to assign ownership of land?
- Many locations referenced in the play are real places in Minneapolis. However, the play also incorporates fictionalized settings within the realm of the story. How does interweaving reality and inspired truths support the story? What significance does the land have to the characters in *For the People*? What significance does your hometown have to your own community?

Classroom Activity: Land Acknowledgment

- **Step One:** In small groups, have the students discuss where they and/or their family comes from. Invite them to pick a city/region of meaning to them or their family and use their devices to research the Native/Indigenous origins of the land they chose (using native-land.ca as a resource).
- **Step Two:** Share that some organizations create land acknowledgments to recognize and thank the Indigenous inhabitants of the land on which they live and work. Review the following examples:
 - Guthrie Theater: www.guthrietheater.org/land-acknowledgment
 - Northwestern University: www.northwestern.edu/native-american-and-indigenous-peoples
 - Data & Society: www.datasociety.net/digital-land-acknowledgement
 - Native Governance Center: www.nativegov.org/about/our-land-acknowledgement-statement
- **Step Three:** As a group, invite the students to consider what a land acknowledgment for your school would include, and start to brainstorm ideas.
- **Step Four:** Together with the students, begin crafting a land acknowledgment for your school using the Native Governance Center’s guide and reflection questions below for inspiration. The goal is not to write something perfect or “right” but to consider your relationship to the land you are on and what actions can be taken to respect the land and the peoples who inhabit it.
 - A Guide to Indigenous Land Acknowledgment: www.nativegov.org/news/a-guide-to-indigenous-land-acknowledgment
 - Reflection Questions
 - Why are we doing this land acknowledgment? (If you hope to inspire others to take action to support Indigenous communities, you’re on the right track.)
 - What is our end goal? What do you hope listeners will do after hearing the acknowledgment?
 - When and where will this have the largest impact? (Think about your timing and audience, specifically.)

MONEY, MONEY, MONEY

“Imagine how much good we can do with that kind of money and power.”

– Esme Williams in *For the People*

Context

In *For the People*, we learn that the Urban All Nations Hybrid-Intertribal Franklin Avenue Task Force has been awarded a grant. Then multiple characters propose what they would do with the money to better their community: Levi wants to create a Fort Snelling Reenactment Reversal, Robert wants to build a statue-fountain-sculpture and April yearns to further develop the wellness center. These presentations bring out the best (and worst) in each character as the entire Task Force must vote to decide who receives part of the funds.

Discussion Questions

- What is the relationship between money and power? Does having more money automatically mean you have more power and influence in a room?

- How much money is necessary to make positive change in your community? Can that kind of change be purchased with money?
- Consider what Sage says in the play: “I don’t want to be rich; I just want to be even. On a level playing field with everyone else.” Why do you think Sage feels parity is more important than wealth? What are the benefits of being on a level playing field in terms of money?

Classroom Activity: \$20,000 Grant

- **Step One:** Have students get into groups of four or five.
- **Step Two:** In *For the People*, the Task Force proposes various ways to utilize grant money and maximize its impact on Franklin Avenue. While the play does not specify how much money they receive, it is likely a substantial amount. Have the students pretend they were awarded \$20,000 to execute a dream project that would positively impact their community, and ask them to write down their dream project on a piece of paper.
- **Step Three:** Have the students take turns sharing their dream projects in their groups.
- **Step Four:** Next, tell the students that the \$20,000 doesn’t belong to just them and they must try to reach a consensus about how the \$20,000 will be spent as a group. Have the students consider the following questions before making a plan of action:
 - Will you find a way for as many people as possible to fulfill a portion of their project?
 - Will some agree to forfeit their project completely for the sake of other members’ dreams?
 - Does one person’s project accomplish what others want as well? Can you combine projects?
- **Step Five:** Have each group share what they decided with the class. Then answer the following reflection questions:
 - How easy or difficult was it to decide how you, individually, wanted to spend the \$20,000?
 - What was it like having to take other people’s personal aspirations into consideration?
 - Did your group come to an agreement? If so, how? If not, what were the roadblocks?

NEW VS. OLD

“I’m going to make my center a place for modern Natives like me to belong and never feel like they aren’t enough or stuck in the past again.”

- April Dakota in *For the People*

Context

Each member of the Urban All Nations Hybrid-Intertribal Franklin Avenue Task Force wants to see Franklin Avenue improve, but all have different ideas about what that looks like. April wants to move into the modern age and reach a wider audience while the elders propose more traditional methods. When the characters are prompted to share why they want to keep things the same or change them, they struggle to articulate how their ideas will best serve the community.

Discussion Questions

- A central conflict in the play lies between the elders’ concept of tradition and April’s desire for progress. Which side of the argument do you agree with? Consider both points of view and how these seemingly opposite views may benefit each other.
- A big conversation in the play is about gentrification or “uptowning,” which is a process of neighborhood change that includes economic change in a historically disinvested neighborhood. What is the difference between restoring and gentrifying a neighborhood?
- In the play, Esme helps April create a new tribe. She plays the part of an ally, but she appropriates the culture of the Indigenous community on Franklin Avenue to her benefit, twisting their culture and speaking over the Task Force. How does performative allyship affect people in marginalized communities? How can we be true allies instead?

Classroom Activity: Mock Town Hall Debate

- **Step One:** Share the following scenario with the class: A large corporation (think Target or a big, fancy apartment building) wants to build in the center of a small town.
- **Step Two:** Tell the class you will hold a mock town hall meeting to debate the introduction of this large corporation into the community. Educators will play the meeting facilitator, and students will play different community members. Randomly assign each student one of the following roles, creating additional roles or doubling up as needed:
 - Representative from the corporation
 - Chair of the city council
 - Someone living in the building that would be torn down
 - Someone living in town who wouldn't be affected by the construction
 - Young person
 - Community elder
 - Someone who just moved to town
 - Someone whose family has lived in town for generations
 - New parent
 - Small business owner
- **Step Three:** As the facilitator, give the context for the town hall meeting and ask the following questions to get the conversation started:
 - Would the new building bring in new money?
 - How disruptive would the construction be?
 - Would we be investing in the future or erasing our past?
 - What are the pros and cons for allowing this building project to happen in our town?
- **Step Four:** Spend 20 minutes holding the town hall meeting. It's okay if a decision is not reached.
- **Step Five:** Have the students reflect on the activity by asking the following questions:
 - How did the role you played affect how you participated in the discussion?
 - If you were playing yourself, rather than an assigned role, would you have contributed differently?
 - Did anyone make points that swayed your opinion? If yes, what changed your mind? 🗣️



PHOTO: KENDALL KENT AND KATIE ANVIL RICH (JAIDA GREY EAGLE)



PHOTO: KALANI QUEYPO AND NATHANIEL TWOBARS (JAIDA GREY EAGLE)



PHOTO: THE CAST OF FOR THE PEOPLE (JAIDA GREY EAGLE)

For Further Reading and Understanding

ARTICLES

“In *Thanksgiving Play*, the Pageantry of ‘Well-Meaning’ White People” by Julia Jacobs. *The New York Times*, April 5, 2023.

www.nytimes.com/2023/04/05/theater/thanksgiving-play-larissa-fasthorse-broadway.html

“How Two-Spirit Fits Into LGBTQ America” by Ty Defoe. *Fader*, September 8, 2016.

www.thefader.com/2016/09/08/two-spirit-america-ty-defoe

VIDEO

“Larissa FastHorse Presents at the 2019 Creative Capital Artist Retreat,” posted on YouTube by Creative Capital. This TED-style video features Larissa FastHorse explaining her creative process, which is very similar to the creative process behind *For the People*. 11 minutes.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=XYsrwxAL51o

RADIO

“*Urban Rez* Explores What It Means To Be Native American” on *All Things Considered*. National Public Radio, April 20, 2016.

www.npr.org/2016/04/30/476306720/-urban-rez-explores-what-it-means-to-be-native-american

“Native Americans, The KKK and Keeping the ‘Blood Pure’” on *Weekend Edition Sunday*. National Public Radio, May 7, 2017.

www.npr.org/2017/05/07/527250375/native-americans-the-kkk-and-keeping-the-blood-pure

WEBSITES

Indigenous Direction. This consulting firm co-founded by Ty Defoe and Larissa FastHorse works with companies and artists who want to create accurate work about, for and with Indigenous peoples. Learn more about their mission and past initiatives, including *Water Is Sacred* and *Stories From the Drum* at the Guthrie.

www.indigenousdirection.com

HoganHorse Studio. The joint website of playwright/choreographer Larissa FastHorse and her husband, the sculptor Edd Hogan. FastHorse’s page includes details about *The Thanksgiving Play* and her acclaimed trilogy of plays with Cornerstone Theater Company and Michael John Garcés.

www.hoganhorsestudio.com

Ty Defoe. The professional website for writer, actor and interdisciplinary artist Ty Defoe, featuring recent news, articles and a wide range of artistic initiatives.

www.tydefoe.com

All My Relations Collective. This art, theater, film and design collective is committed to making new work that uplifts the interconnectedness of all living things past, present and future. Core collaborators include Ty Defoe, Lux Haac (Costume Designer on *For the People*) and Katherine Freer.

www.allmyrelations.earth

Native Nation Tour. Photos, videos and other resources related to the community-engaged play that Larissa FastHorse and Michael John Garcés collaborated on at Cornerstone Theater Company.

www.cornerstonetheater.org/projects/native-nation-touring