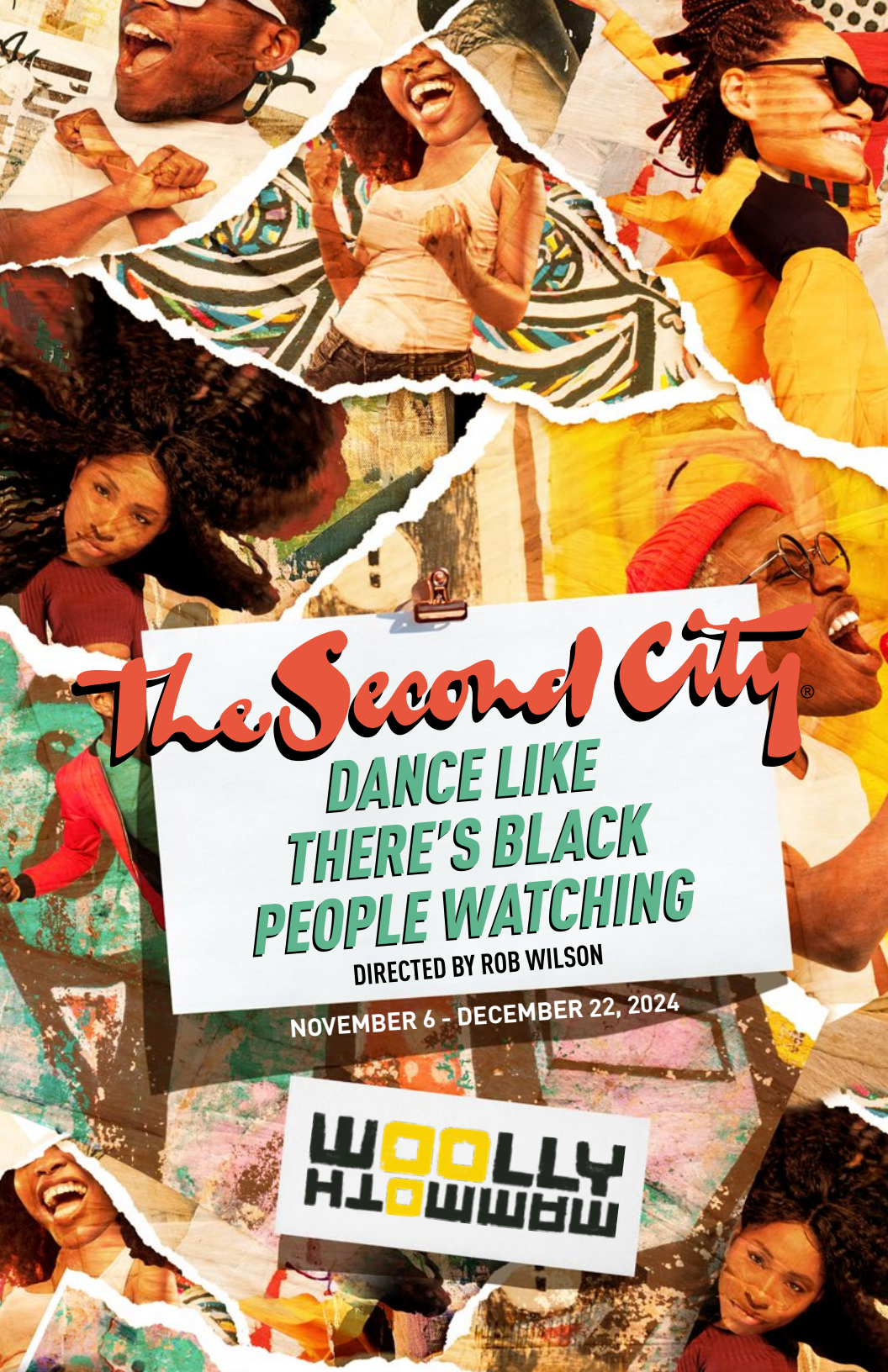
The Second City®
DANCE LIKE THERE'S BLACK PEOPLE WATCHING
DIRECTED BY ROB WILSON
NOVEMBER 6 - DECEMBER 22, 2024
WOOLLY MAMMOTH

WOOLLY MAMMOTH THEATRE COMPANY

MARIA MANUELA GOYANES
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

KIMBERLY E. DOUGLAS
MANAGING DIRECTOR

PRESENTS

The Second City®
DANCE LIKE THERE'S BLACK PEOPLE WATCHING

DIRECTED BY **ROB WILSON**

ENSEMBLE

BREON ARZELL*
TAMIEKA CHAVIS*
JILLIAN EBANKS
ARLIETA HALL
MAX THOMAS*
JULIUS SHANKS II

VP OF CREATIVE
JEN ELLISON

PRODUCER
JEREMY SMITH

STAGE MANAGER
DEVONTE E. WASHINGTON*

SCENIC & LIGHTING DESIGNER
COLIN K. BILLS+

SOUND DESIGNER
TONY BELSITO

WARDROBE STYLIST
CHELSEY CARTER-SANDERS

CAST

UNDERSTUDIES

Cynthia Davis — Raymond J.
Joseph Griffin II — Pauline Lamb

CREW & PRODUCTION TEAM

Technical Director, The Second City.....John Kelly
Assistant to the Director.....Nayanna Simone
Production Assistant.....Fe Miranda
Associate Lighting Designer.....Ian Claar
Lighting Programmer.....Susannah Cai
Sound Programmer.....Sayf Turkomani
Scenic Charge.....Megan Holden, Yaritza Pacheco
Carpenters...Lily Anglin, Mickey Cappiello, Ben French, Alex Lopez
Painters.....Rey Walker, Mrinali Thanwani
Electricians.....Isa Pelegero, Ainsley Priest, Mardelle Singleton, Chris Muska, Troy Johnson, Susannah Cai, Courtney Naughton, Max Abramovitz
Board Technician.....Sydney Bronaugh
Key Art Design.....Alexis LeBlanc (collage) + Piama Habibullah

(~) Recognizes representation by the Stage Directors & Choreographers Society (SDC), a national theatrical labor union.

(+) Recognizes representation by United Scenic Artists, Local USA-829 of the IATSE. (^) Recognizes representation by Make-up Artists & Hair Stylists, Local 798 of the IATSE.

(*) Appearing through an Agreement between this theatre, Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company, and Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

HISTORY OF THE SECOND CITY AT WOOLLY MAMMOTH

JUST WHAT WASHINGTON NEEDED

A CONVERSATION WITH HOWARD SHALWITZ

Our New Work Department sat down with Woolly's Founding Artistic Director Howard Shalwitz to talk about the history of comedy at Woolly, highlights from 45 seasons, and The Second City.

How did Woolly's relationship with The Second City start?

When we moved to this space in 2005, we suddenly had more time to fill because we had our own venue. We weren't prepared to produce a lot more plays than we had before, at least not right away. So, what were we going to do with the extra time?

She the People: The Resistance Continues! / 2019 / Photo by Timmy Metzner

Shortly after we moved into the space, I ran into BJ Jones, the longtime artistic director of Northlight Theatre in Chicago. He said there were two specific companies in Chicago I had to get to know. One was The Second City – I was not unfamiliar, of course, but hadn't seen their work – and the other was the Neo-Futurists. So I arranged a trip to Chicago and spent time with both companies. And I just loved them both. With producer Kelly Leonard at The Second City I got into a dialogue about what the opportunity to perform in Washington might mean for them and what they could bring specifically to Woolly Mammoth. What would it allow them to do that they weren't doing in Chicago? I think this great relationship is still going because we said to them, right from the beginning, "We are only interested in your most outrageous material." And they loved that. I think it's fair to say that The Second City has done some of their most original and most provocative work here at Woolly.

What is one of the most memorable experiences you've had working with The Second City?

There were so many memorable shows, but *Black Side of the Moon* stands out for me emotionally. The cast did two weeks of rehearsals in Chicago, and then flew here for a final week of rehearsals in DC. They arrived the day after the 2016 election, so it was like a morgue around here – at Woolly and throughout the city. They had put together some great material in Chicago, but now it seemed like the whole world had changed, and everyone was asking, "What do we do now?"

The day they got here we had planned a meet-and-greet in the lobby. We gathered all of The Second City's actors and artists and all of Woolly's staff, and we just went around the room and gave everyone a chance to speak. I can still remember the feeling of it. People were processing their shock, their horror, their grief. And there was a feeling from The Second City folks that it wouldn't be right just to do the show as they had planned it before the election. And everyone from Woolly said, "You do what you have to do, and we'll support you in every way we can."

Black Side of the Moon / 2016 / Photo by Teresa Castracane

In one week they re-wrote more than a third of the show. They came up with new material out of the seat of their pants. Normally, The Second City develops stuff by improv in front of an audience, but this time, they just wrote new sketches to meet the moment. We scheduled more dress rehearsals than usual and more feedback sessions. That was a great thing about The Second City. They loved having our feedback. It was this great relationship where they trusted us, we trusted them. And everyone just rose to the challenge and worked together. I'm grateful to The Second City – that they created that show at that time, and that they had the tools to respond quickly. The show was a complete sellout. And it was certainly very funny. But what was moving about the show was that it was just what Washington needed. It created a zone of solidarity at a moment where this city needed that.

I've heard about the impact of *Black Side of the Moon*. There's a lore about it in Woolly's history, about how funny and powerful it was. It also connects to a history of comedy centered around the Black experience at Woolly.

Yes, I think of playwrights like Robert O'Hara. His play *Bootycandy*, for example, was a series of short comic sketches that related in many ways to a Second City event. It was written from a specifically Black, gay perspective, mostly meant to make you laugh, but usually subverting stereotypes, turning around liberal expectations in shocking ways – all the stuff that Robert does so brilliantly. Jordan Cooper's *Ain't No Mo'* is a more recent example – a collection of surprising sketches around a set of interrelated themes.

Ain't No Mo' / 2022 / Photo by DJ Corey

There is a focus on comedy in Woolly's history that seems to have been an original impulse. Comedy enables a certain kind of provocation and risk-taking that feels integral to Woolly.

I went through Woolly's play history to remind myself how prevalent comedies are here. It really was our thing from the beginning – from absurdist works in the early years, to outrageous writers like Nicky Silver and Amy Freed and Robert O'Hara and Sheila Callaghan, and so many others up to today. And I was trying to ask myself, "Why? Was it just our taste?" But no, it's that comedy gives you license to be provocative without lecturing to an audience. If you're making an audience laugh, the material can be very grim, very provocative, and yet the laughter is convincing you that they're with you. As an actor, and also as a director, you crave the presence and energy of the audience during the event. So that may be why comedy was always at the center of our identity.

And that continues today. We just announced the second half of our season which includes a couple comedies in line with what you've described.

Comedy was a major feature of my tenure and has continued into Maria's – comic plays, comedy troupes like The Second City, and solo comedians like the incredible Alex Edelman or Julia Masli, whose *ha ha ha ha ha ha ha* just knocked me over this season.

And the *outrageous* thread, of course, always continues. It seems to be the thing that sets Woolly apart.