

blank Presents
THEATRE COMPANY



Merrily
We Roll Along

June 23–July 23, 2023

The Reginald Vaughn Theatre

1106 W. Thorndale Ave.

Chicago, IL 60660

www.blanktheatrecompany.org

Blank Theatre Company Presents

MERRILY WE ROLL ALONG

Music and Lyrics By Stephen Sondheim

Book by George Furth

Orchestrations by Jonathan Tunick

Originally Directed on Broadway by Harold Prince

Originally Produced on Broadway by Lord Grade, Martin Starger, Robert Fryer
and Harold Prince in association with Ruth Mitchell and Howard Haines

Creative Team

Director: Danny Kapinos*

Musical Director: Aaron Kaplan

Lighting Designer: Benjamin Carne

Costume Designer: Cindy Moon

Scenic Designer: Adrian Luka Tirado

Stage Manager: Bobby Lee

Fight Choreographer: Tony Pellegrino

Assistant Director: Grant Carriker

Associate Music Director: Sachio Nang

* Denotes Blank Theatre Company Member

MERRILY WE ROLL ALONG is presented through special arrangement with
Music Theatre International (MTI). All authorized performance materials are
also supplied by MTI. www.mtishows.com

This production was made possible through the generous support of our
season sponsors, Michael and Mona Heath

CAST

Franlin Shepard	Christopher Johnson
Mary Flynn	Brittney Brown
Charley Kringas	Dustin Rothbart*
Gussie Carnegie	Brandy Miller
Beth Spencer	Justine Cameron
Joe Josephson.....	Aaron Mann*
Jerome/Ensemble	Nick Arceo
Scotty/Mrs. Spencer/Ensemble	Jodi Gage
Ru/Frank, Jr./Ensemble.....	Kyle Johnson
Terry/Mr. Spencer/Ensemble.....	Eddie Ledford
K.T./Ensemble	Sophie Murk
Dory/Ensemble	Sophie Smekens
Meg/Ensemble.....	Danielle Smith
Tyler/Ensemble.....	Evan B. Smith

Understudies

For Franklin Shepard: Nick Arceo

For Charley Kringas: Evan B. Smith

For Mary Flynn: Sophie Murk

For Gussie Carnegie: Rebecca MacTaggart

For Beth Spencer: Sophie Smekens

For Joe Josephson: Eddie Ledford

Swings: Nicholas Kinney, Rebecca MacTaggart, Halli Morgan, Mack Spotts

Understudies never substitute for the listed performers unless a specific announcement is made at the time of appearance

*Denotes Blank Theatre Company Member

ORCHESTRA

Keyboard/Conductor: Sachio Nang

Drums/Percussion: John McCreary

Flute/Clarinet/Alto Saxophone: Jocelyn Goodwin

Trumpet: Michael Leavens

Bass: Eric von Holst

SPECIAL THANKS

College of DuPage Theatre Department, Niles West Theatre, City Lit Theatre,
Unity Lutheran Church, Invictus Theatre

CAST BIOS

CHRISTOPHER JOHNSON (Franklin Shepard) is excited to join old friends and new with Blank Theatre Company for this wonderful production! He recently appeared in Kokandy Productions' Jeff Award winning production of *Sweeney Todd* as "Judge Turpin" and the understudy for the demon barber himself. Other recent credits: *Into the Woods*, "The Baker" (Big Noise Theatre); *Legally Blonde*, "Professor Callahan" & *Sister Act*, "Monsignor O'Hara" (Metropolis Performing Arts Centre). Off-stage, Christopher is an attorney with the nonprofit *Lawyers for the Creative Arts*. He is a graduate of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the Chicago-Kent College of Law. www.christopherhjohnson.com

BRITTNEY BROWN (Mary Flynn) is a Chicago based actor and director. Select Chicago acting credits include: Kokandy Productions' *Sweeney Todd* and *Bonnie and Clyde*, Theo Ubique's *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* and *Sweeney Todd*, Pride Films and Plays' *All That He Was* (Jeff Nomination—Best Performer in a Supporting Role), The Factory Theater's *The Kelly Girls* and *Last Night in Karaoke Town*, New American Folk Theatre's *Hot Pink or Ready to Blow* and *Scraps*, and Griffin Theatre's *Ragtime* and *Violet*. She was the director of Broken Nose Theatre's audio drama *Primer*, was a featured director in Broken Nose Theatre's *Bechdel Fest 7: Momentum*, and she directed a staged reading of *Artemis Books* and *The Well-Meaning Man* by Paul Michael Thomson at Avalanche Theatre. She was also the associate director of The Story Theatre's *Marie Antoinette and the Magical Negroes*, The Factory Theater's *May the Road Rise Up* and Exit 63's *Wolves*. She is a Literary Manager for Broken Nose Theatre and the Casting Director for Factory Theater.

DUSTIN ROTHBART (Charley Kringas) is one of the Co-Founding Artistic Directors of Blank Theatre Company. For Blank, Dustin has appeared on stage as "Burrs" in *The Wild Party* (Jeff Nomination – Best Ensemble), "The Chairman" in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* and "Georg" in *Spring Awakening*. Chicago: *Camelot* (Janus Concert Series); *Anyone Can Whistle*, *25th...Spelling Bee*, *Funny Girl* (Madkap Productions); *The History Boys* (Eclectic Theatre); *Lester's Dreadful Sweaters* (Lifeline Theatre); *The Little Mermaid*, *Man of La Mancha* (JPAC) *Oliver!* (Citadel Theatre) *The Wedding* (Red Theatre); *Hair*, *Ragtime* (Big Noise Theatre); *Cabaret* (Brightside Theatre); *The Rocky Horror Show* (Underscore Theatre Company) *Electra* (Mary-Arrchie Theatre Co). Regional: *Little Bits of Light* (Hampstead Stage Company); *A Year with Frog and Toad* (Canterbury Summer Theatre). Dustin is a graduate of the acting program at Illinois State University. www.DustinRothbart.com @dustinrothbart

BRANDY MILLER (Gussie Carnegie) is thrilled to be back at Blank! Previous roles include "Amalia" in Blank's *She Love's Me* (Jeff Nomination for Best Performer in a leading role), "Elizabeth Martin" in *Emma* (Chicago Shakespeare Theatre), "Kate" in *Avenue Q* (Music Theatre Works), and "Hope" in *Anything Goes* (Metropolis Performing Arts). She has also performed at Marriott (*Oliver*, *Madagascar*) and Theatre at the

Center (*Million Dollar Quartet*) and is represented by Stewart Talent. Much love to Blank Theatre, family, Kristina, and Dan. Enjoy the show!

JUSTINE CAMERON (Beth Spencer) is delighted to be working with Blank on this dream of a show! CHICAGO/REGIONAL: *Newsies* (“Katherine”, Paramount Theatre), *Sister Act* (“Sister Mary Robert”, Metropolis PAC), *New Faces Sing 1956* (Porchlight Music Theatre), *Measure for Measure* (“Mistress Overdone”, Powerhouse Theatre & New York Stage and Film), *Anything Goes* (“Reno”, CCPA), *Dogfight* (“Rose”, CCPA). WEB: *Up Next* (Monday Noise Co. & Mammoth Moon Media). BFA Musical Theater, Chicago College of Performing Arts at Roosevelt University. Justine is a Chicago-based artist, originally hailing from the beautiful city of Seattle. She is also a voiceover actor, a musician, an obsessive knitter, an aspiring interior designer, and a proud parent to her cat, Ellie. “Beyond grateful for my wonderful family. Immensely, intensely, absolutely.” IG: @justinekc | justinecameron.com

AARON MANN (Joe Josephson) Aaron has journeyed across the country, but happily calls Chicago home. For Blank, he has taken the stage as “Sipos” in the Jeff Award-nominated production of *She Loves Me*, and as “Durdles” in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. Additionally, Aaron has contributed to the national recordings of popular musicals like *Sweeney Todd*, *The Sound of Plaid*, and *Miss Saigon* for Music Theatre International (MTI). Other notable roles include “Mr. Boss” in *Slide* (Chicago Music Theater Festival), “Sir Robin” in *Spamalot* (WTC), and “Mr. Mushnik” in *Little Shop of Horrors* (WTC). Aaron's talents extend beyond acting, as he has also written and produced a popular Dungeons & Dragons podcast called "*That Big D&D Energy*" for all you fellow nerds out there. Aaron is a graduate of Nebraska Wesleyan University with a BFA in Theatre Studies.

NICK ARCEO (Jerome, Ensemble, U/S Frank) Nick is making his Blank “full production debut” after singing in *The Next Page* cabaret in 2019 and he’s ecstatic to do one of his alltime favorite shows! Chicagoland: *Aztec Human Sacrifice* (City Lit); *La Trout Lily* (New Moon Opera); *City of Angels* (BrightSide Theatre); *Celebrate Me Home* and *Island Song* (4 Chairs Theatre); *Plano* (First Floor Theater); *A Man of No Importance* (PrideArts); *A Funny Thing Happened...* (Metropolis PAC); *Grand Hotel* (Kokandy). Regional: *Plaid Tidings* (Towle Theater); *Pippin*, *Parade*, and *Funny Girl* (Revival Theatre Company). Nick dedicates his performance to Cameron Sullenberger who probably loved the “Write what you know” moment.

JODI GAGE (Scotty, Mrs. Spencer, Ensemble) is excited to make her Blank Theatre debut. As a Chicago-based actor she has worked with Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Milwaukee Rep, Theater Wit, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Dunes Summer Theater, The Shakespeare Project of Chicago, and Chicago Physical Theater Festival, among others. Before relocating to Chicago, she worked extensively in the Pittsburgh area with Pittsburgh CLO, PICT Classic Theatre, The REP Pittsburgh Playhouse, The Company of Pittsburgh, and Theatre Factory. She toured international with Theatre Lumina, where she is also a company member, in their production of *Song of Home: A theatrical meditation on global displacement*. TELEVISION: *Chicago Med* (NBC)

EDUCATION: MFA in Theatre, Point Park University; BM in Opera Performance, Oberlin Conservatory of Music. She is represented by Gray Talent. Jodigage.com

KYLE JOHNSON (Ru, Frank Jr., Ensemble) A New York state native and recent Chicago implant, Kyle is beyond honored to be joining Blank Theatre Company for their production of *Merrily We Roll Along!* His most recent performances being *Titanic: the Musical*, *As You Like It*, and *Murder on the Orient Express* at Milwaukee Repertory Theatre; as well as *La Cage Aux Folles* at Geva Theatre Center in Rochester, NY. Overall, he is extremely excited, this being his first Chicago performance, and hopes you enjoy the show!

EDDIE LEDFORD (Terry, Mr. Spencer, Ensemble, U/S Joe) is a Chicago-based actor, singer and comedian. He is a graduate of The Second City's Conservatory, an ensemble member of the queer comedy group Baby Wine, and has performed in theaters, festivals and digital projects around the city including The Annoyance, Rhino Fest, Chicago Sketch Fest, Ordinary Peepholes, Commercial Appeal and web series Guilty. He was last seen onstage in *Queer Eye the Musical Parody* at The Second City where he reprised the role of "Bobby", which he originated in the show's initial run at The Playground Theatre in 2019. He is thrilled and very grateful to be making his Blank Theatre debut with *Merrily*. Instagram: @_eddele

SOPHIE MURK (K.T., Ensemble, U/S Mary) Born-and-bred Chicagoan, Sophie is a local actor, teaching artist, and co-founder of Olde School Shakespeare Collective. She is a certified ASTEP fellow and certified in Brené Brown's Dare to Lead™ work. Recent credits: *Twelfth Night* (Olde School Shakes), *Titanic*, *As You Like It*, *Christmas Carol* (Milwaukee Repertory Theater), *Daddy Long Legs* (Awaken Theatre) *The Hundred Dresses*, *Say Something Do Something* (Metro Theater Co), *The Polar Express* (Rail Events Productions). BFA Webster Conservatory.

SOPHIE SMEKENS (Dory, Ensemble, U/S Beth) is so excited to be working with Blank Theatre Company! Sophie received a BFA in Musical Theatre at The Hartt School, and some of her favorite credits include "Maria" (*Sound Of Music*), "Svetlana" (*Chess*), "Sue Snell" (*Carrie*), and "Marjorie Taylor" (*Allegro*). Sophie is so thankful to her friends and family for their endless support! "Give thanks to the God of heaven, His love endures forever." sophiesmekens.com

DANIELLE SMITH (Meg, Ensemble) Danielle has just graduated from the Chicago College of Performing Arts with a BFA in Musical Theatre. Recent credits include "Blues Speak Woman" in *SPUNK* by Zora Neal Hurston and solo performer in a concert entitled *Broadway Rocks!* Which included numbers from *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Six* and more. This is her first production with Blank. She would like to thank them, her family and her friends for their support as she embarks on this new journey fresh out of college.

EVAN B. SMITH (Tyler, Ensemble, U/S Charley) is very excited to be working with Blank again after having performed at the theatre's most recent cabaret! Evan earned his BFA in Musical Theatre from The Chicago College of Performing Arts at Roosevelt University. You may have seen him onstage before as "J. Bowden Hapgood" in the Skokie Theatre's production of *Anyone Can Whistle*, and last fall he was part of the World Premier of *St. Sebastian* with Refracted Theatre Company here in Chicago. He would like to give special thanks to his Mom, Dad, and brother Ben for their continued love and support. Thanks for coming out, enjoy the show!

NICHOLAS FORD KINNEY (Swing) is thrilled to make his Blank Theatre Company debut in *Merrily We Roll Along!* Nick is a recent graduate from Northwestern, where he studied theatre and film. Chicago Credits: *Round Yon Virgin* (The Factory Theatre). Educational Credits: *The Aliens* (Evan), *Merrily We Roll Along* (Jerome), *Small Mouth Sounds* (Jan). Nick is also a freelance cellist and has played in several pit orchestras in the Chicago area. This summer when not performing, Nick enjoys working as a camp counselor in Evanston.

REBECCA MACTAGGART (U/S Gussie, Swing) Rebecca is delighted to be making her Blank Theatre debut. Rebecca is going into her senior year at The Chicago College of Performing Arts pursuing a BFA in Musical Theater. Favorite past Productions include *Jerry's Girls* ("Ensemble") Incline Theatre, *The Sound of Music* ("Sister Margaretta"/ US "Maria") La Comedia Dinner Theatre, *Mamma Mia!* (Sophie) IHTC, *Urinetown* (Little Sally) Footlighters Theater. Rebecca thanks her family and friends for all their support and encouragement.

HALLI MORGAN (Swing) is so excited to be working at Blank on her favorite musical of all time. Most recently seen at Beverly Theatre Guild in *Legally Blonde* ("Enid Hoopes"), she has also performed at Chicago Shakespeare Theatre (*Peter Pan*), Music Theatre Works (*How to Succeed... Trying, Pirates of Penzance*), and Timber Lake Playhouse (*Rock of Ages, Funny Thing... Forum*). Here's to us!

MACK SPOTTS (they/he) (Swing) was last seen as Gideon in Refracted Theatre Company's world premiere of *St Sebastian*. Past roles include Kodaly and Head Waiter u/s in *She Loves Me* with Blank Theatre Company (Jeff nomination - Best Ensemble), "Jack Kelly" in *Newsies*, "Szkzp" in *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, "Slank" in *Peter and the Starcatcher* (all with Minnesota State University, Mankato) and "Eddie Southern" in *Sister Act* (Highland Summer Theatre). BFA in Musical Theatre from MNSU. All my love to my friends and family. @mackspotts

CREATIVE TEAM BIOS

Danny Kapinos (Director; Co-Artistic Director) is a director, music director, and accompanist. As co-Founding Artistic Director of Blank Theatre Company, he directed *She Loves Me* (Jeff nominations—Best Director and Best Musical), *Spring Awakening*, and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. Credits as an assistant director include *Pearl's Rollin' With the Blues* (Writers Theatre, dir. Ron OJ Parson) *The King's Speech* (Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, dir. Michael Wilson), *Becky Shaw* (Windy City Playhouse, dir. Scott Weinstein), and *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* (Filament Theatre, dir. Katy Walsh). Proud graduate of Northwestern University. SDC Associate Member and SDCF Observership Class of 2019-2021.

Aaron Kaplan (Musical Director) thrilled to be returning to Blank after their Jeff-Nominated season of *She Loves Me* and *The Wild Party*, the latter of which earned a nomination for Best Musical Direction. Aaron enjoys a multifaceted musical career as a conductor, musical director, cellist, music educator, and arranger. He earned a master's degree in orchestral conducting from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign under the tutelage of Donald Schleicher, as well as his bachelor's degree in cello performance and bachelor's degree in music education with high honors also from the University of Illinois. Aaron has been the music director/conductor for over 85 productions (the majority with complete orchestration) including *West Side Story*, *On the Town*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Les Misérables*, *RENT*, *Chess*, *Guys & Dolls*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, and *The Producers*. Aaron is the artistic director/conductor of the JAM Orchestra, a Chicago-based ensemble dedicated to performing a diverse repertoire of classical, Broadway, swing, and film music. He also conducts the Sinfonia Orchestra for the Elgin Youth Symphony Orchestra, the Preludio Orchestra at Music Institute of Chicago, and is the assistant director of the Chicago Suzuki Institute. A dedicated teacher, Aaron is an orchestra director at Glenbrook North and Glenbrook South High Schools. Special thanks to Danny, Dustin, Chris, Sachio, and this fabulous orchestra and cast. Thank you for supporting live theater, live music, and the arts in the community!

BENJAMIN CARNE (Lighting Designer) is a lighting designer and electrician based in Chicago. Ben is so excited to return to Blank after designing *She Loves Me*. Other recent credits include: *Botticelli in the Fire* (Jeff Award, First Floor Theater) *It Came From Outer Space* (TheatreSquared); *Body Movement Series* (Fever Productions); *The Grelley Duval Show*; and *Shrek the Musical* (Drury Lane Theatre). As well as assistant lighting design for *It Came From Outer Space* (Chicago Shakespeare); *A Chorus Line* (Drury Lane). Ben is the resident lighting designer for *Cabaret Zazou*. He is a graduate of Columbia College Chicago. A portfolio of his work can be found at: bcarnedesign.com

CINDY MOON (Costume Designer) is a Chicago-based freelance costume designer, originally from the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. Her recent Chicago area design work includes *The ThreePenny Opera* (Theo Ubique); *Twelfth Night* (Midsommer Flight); *Airness & Little Shop of Horrors & Outside Mullingar* (Citadel Theatre); *Shout!*

(Metropolis); *She Loves Me* (Blank Theatre Company); *Dory Fantasmagory* & *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus* (Young People's Theatre). Regional designs include *Hello, Dolly!* & *The Mock Marriage & The Pirates of Penzance* (Ohio Light Opera); *Million Dollar Quartet* (Tuacahn). Education: MFA in Costume Design and Technology, Virginia Tech.

ADRIAN LUKA TIRADO (Scenic Design) Adrian is beyond thrilled to have designed his first show with Blank Theatre Company. This will be his second professional project since graduating last spring. His other design credits include *Man and Moon* (16 Street Theatre), and *These Shining Lives* (University of Northern Colorado). On his downtime, Adrian enjoys cooking and reading. Special thanks to Sam and Percy for your support.

BOBBY LEE (Stage Manager) of Libertyville, IL is excited and grateful to be working on this production, after having stage managed *She Loves Me* for Blank Theatre last spring. Over the winter, he was the stage manager for Citadel Theatre's TYA production of *Junior Claus*. He is also a stagehand with the Hemmens Cultural Center and the James Lumber Center for the Performing Arts.

TONY PELLEGRINO (Fight Choreographer) Tony is a Chicagoland based director, actor, educator, and fight choreographer with a Bachelors in Performance from Illinois State University. Recent credits include *Wendy and Peter Pan* (Bartlett High School), *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (Blank Theatre Company), and numerous seasons as a performer/fight captain/assistant director at the Bristol Renaissance Faire. Regional credits: *Into the Breeches!* (Alabama Shakespeare Festival), *As You Like It* (Alabama Shakespeare Festival), *Superior Donuts* (Heartland Theatre Company), *True West*, (University of Illinois Springfield), *The Tooth of Crime* (Illinois State University)

SACHIO NANG (Associate Music Director) From Skokie, Illinois, Sachio Nang is thrilled to be leading the orchestra for Blank Theatre Company's production of *Merrily We Roll Along!* Graduating from Niles West High School in 2020, Sachio has been specializing in pit orchestra and accompanist work with theatre companies all around the Chicagoland area. He worked as the Conductor/Keys and Associate Music Director on the last two shows here at Blank (*She Loves Me* and Andrew Lippa's *The Wild Party*) and most recently joined the *Elf* 2022 National Tour as the Assistant Music Director/Keys 2 last holiday season, his first national tour! Also a multi-instrumentalist, Sachio loves learning new instruments, and specializes in woodwinds, guitars, bass, and drums, in addition to piano! He is very excited to be back home, playing music professionally!

Blank Theatre Company Production History

2021-2022:

Blank Sings: The Maury Yeston Songbook

LOVE [BLANK]S TOO: A Valentine's Day Cabaret

She Loves Me

Music by Jerry Bock, Lyrics by Sheldon Harnick, Book by Joe Masteroff

The Wild Party

Book, Music and Lyrics by Andrew Lippa

2019-2020:

The CaBOOret

The Mystery of Edwin Drood

Book, Music and Lyrics by Rupert Holmes

LOVE [BLANK]S: A Valentine's Day Cabaret

Nine [Cancelled due to Covid-19]

Music and Lyrics by Maury Yeston, Book by Arthur Kopit

2018-2019:

Spring Awakening

Music and Lyrics by Duncan Sheik, Book by Steven Sater

New Year, New You: a Cabaret

Blackbird

By David Harrower

The Next Page: a Cabaret

2017-2018:

The First Page: a Cabaret

Blank's Sondheim Birthday Party

Songs for a New World: In Concert

Music and Lyrics by Jason Robert Brown

Mission Statement

Blank Theatre Company is an artistic home that connects emerging theatre-makers with seasoned professionals by creating fulfilling artistic opportunities that give new life to existing texts and welcome new and frequent theatre-goers alike.

www.blanktheatrecompany.org

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