

THEATREWORKS SILICON VALLEY STAGES  
HEARTWARMING HIT MUSICAL FOR THE HOLIDAYS  
**THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY  
SPELLING BEE**

**Music and Lyrics by William Finn**

**Book by Rachel Sheinkin**

**Conceived by Rebecca Feldman**

**Additional Material by Jay Reiss**

**Directed by Meredith McDonough**

**Music Direction by William Liberatore**

**Choreography by Lee Ann Payne**

**Creative Producer James Monroe Iglehart**

**November 29 – December 24, 2023 (opening night: December 2)**

**LUCIE STERN THEATRE, PALO ALTO**

PALO ALTO, CA (20 October 2023) — Offering a jocund, jocular, jolly treat for the holidays, TheatreWorks Silicon Valley stages *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*. In this charming musical comedy, middle-school misfits personified by adult actors face off in a spelling showdown, vying for glory and a coveted slot at the National Spelling Bee. While they wage war with words like “crepuscular” and “hasenpfeffer,” this ragtag crew wrestles with the highs and lows of competition, finding self-discovery along the way. This heartwarming hit captures all the chaos, heartbreak, and elation of becoming a childhood champion. At each performance a few audience members are selected to be a part of the fun as competitors, providing them a front row seat to the pandemonium. In-demand regional theatre director **Meredith McDonough**, who formerly served as TheatreWorks Director of New Works, helms this production that is decked out for the holidays, with Tony Award winner **James Monroe Iglehart** collaborating with TheatreWorks as Creative Producer on the hilarious show that gave him his Broadway debut. *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* will be presented **November 29 – December 24, 2023 (press opening: December 2)** at Lucie Stern Theatre, 1305 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto. For tickets (starting at \$27) and more information the public may visit **TheatreWorks.org** or call **(877)-662-8978**.

Based on Rebecca Feldman’s improvisational play *C-R-E-P-U-S-C-U-L-E*, *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* was developed into a musical at Barrington Stage Company. This musical transferred to Broadway after a sold-out engagement Off-Broadway at Second Stage Theater.

*TheaterMania* called the show “a treat and a half,” while *The New York Times* deemed it “effortlessly endearing.”

TheatreWorks is committed to creating an environment that is accessible for all audiences in its community. American Sign Language interpretation will be available at the performance of *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* at **7:30pm Tuesday, December 12, 2023**. In partnership with c2 Caption Coalition, TheatreWorks will offer open captioning (a screen displaying all dialogue and a description of sound effects) for the performances of *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* at **2pm & 7pm Sunday, December 17, 2023** and **2pm Wednesday, December 20, 2023**.

TheatreWorks is collaborating with Gravity Access Services in offering audio descriptions to assist patrons who are visually impaired. This service, which includes a pre-show talk, will be available **8pm Saturday, December 23, 2023** and **2pm Sunday, December 24, 2023**. (To utilize audio description, patrons should pre-register at **(877)-662-8978** after purchasing tickets). Assistive listening devices are offered at every performance with no advance registration required. For more information about accessibility programs at TheatreWorks the public may visit **TheatreWorks.org/accessibility**.

TheatreWorks will require face masks to be worn for the performances of *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* at **8pm Friday, December 8, 2023; 2pm Saturday, December 9, 2023; and 2pm Sunday, December 17, 2023**. For up-to-date information about COVID-19 health and safety procedures the public may visit **TheatreWorks.org/safety**.

TheatreWorks will also host *Making a Musical*, a special conversation with director **Meredith McDonough** and TheatreWorks Artistic Director **Giovanna Sardelli**. This event will allow audiences to peer behind the scenes and learn more about the process of bringing *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* to life onstage in this new production. *Making a Musical* will be held **6:30pm Thursday, November 30, 2023** ahead of the 8pm preview performance—this event is free for ticket holders of the November 30 performance. TheatreWorks will also host post-show discussions with the cast following the **Wednesday, December 6** and **Wednesday, December 20, 2023** performances of *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*.

Iglehart and McDonough have assembled a talented cast to bring to life this exuberant musical. Seen in the reading of *Once Upon a Rhyme* in TheatreWorks’ New Works Festival, **Dave Abrams** (he/him) makes his TheatreWorks mainstage debut as Chip Tolentino, a Boy Scout who won last year’s Putnam

County Spelling Bee but experiences an unfortunate obstacle while defending his title. Abrams won Theatre Bay Area (TBA) Awards for his performances in Bay Area Musicals' *Hairspray*, Contra Costa Civic Theatre's *In the Heights*, and Berkeley Playhouse's *Ragtime*. He has also performed with Center Repertory Theatre, Hillbarn Theatre, Tri-Valley Repertory Theatre, Woodminster Summer Musicals, and Landmark Musical Theatre. He has also participated in readings with American Conservatory Theater, SFBATCO, and 42nd Street Moon.

**Blake Kevin Dwyer** (he/him) makes his TheatreWorks debut as Leaf Coneybear, a homeschooled kid who is the second runner-up from his district and is constantly distracted. Dwyer's film and TV credits include Amazon Prime Video's "With Love;" Freeform's "Good Trouble;" Peacock's "Saved by the Bell;" CW Seed's "Cupid's Match;" Netflix's "American Vandal;" Showtime's *Debunkers, Inc.*; and Tubi's *Magic Carpet Rides*. His theatre performances include roles with Coachella Valley Repertory, Up Next Productions, M&W Theatre, Los Angeles Ensemble, and Del Rey Players.

**Maia Ingram Campbell** (she/her) makes her TheatreWorks debut as Olive Ostrovsky, a shy girl whose best friend is the dictionary. Campbell has been seen in productions at Ray of Light Theatre, Berkeley Playhouse, Landmark Musical Theatre, and MIT Musical Theatre Guild. She has appeared in staged readings with Town Hall Theatre Company and Crowded Fire Theater.

**Jenni Chapman** (she/they) returns to TheatreWorks as Logainne Schwartzandgrubenierre (Schwartzzy), the youngest of the spellers who is driven by the desire to make her two fathers proud. Seen in TheatreWorks' *To Kill A Mockingbird* and *A Christmas Memory*, Chapman has also performed with Palo Alto Players, Cabrillo Stage, South Bay Musical Theatre, and Sunnyvale Community Players.

**Mai Abe** (she/her) makes her TheatreWorks debut as Marcy Park, a chronic overachiever who speaks six languages and wins at everything she does. She has previously performed with Bay Area Children's Theatre, The Pear Theatre, Sunnyvale Community Players, Foothill Music Theatre, and Palo Alto Players.

**Beau Bradshaw** (he/him) makes his TheatreWorks debut as William Barfée, an obnoxious kid plagued by allergies who uses his magic foot to help him spell. Seen in the national tour of *The Spongebob Musical*, Bradshaw has also appeared onstage with TheaterWorks USA, Axelrod Performing Arts Center, Pittsburgh Playhouse, and The Ghostlight Theatre.

**Molly Bell** (she/her) returns to TheatreWorks as Rona Lisa Peretti, a former Putnam County Spelling Bee champion who is now a moderator. Bell was seen in TheatreWorks' *Snapshots*, *A Little Princess*, *Merrily We Roll Along*, *Memphis*, and *Floyd Collins*. She has also performed with Marin Theatre Company, Center Repertory Company, San Jose Repertory Theatre, and American Musical Theatre of San Jose.

**Anthone Duriel Jackson** (he/him) makes his TheatreWorks debut as Mitch Mahoney, the comfort counselor who is performing community service at the Spelling Bee by handing out juice boxes to the kids who are eliminated. Jackson has acted with California Shakespeare Theater, Coastal Repertory Theatre, Hillbarn Theatre, Broadway By The Bay, Ray of Light Theatre, Tabard Theatre, African-American Shakespeare Company, Boxcar Theatre, Oakland Theater Project (Ubuntu), SFBATCO, and South Bay Musical Theatre.

**Christopher Reber** (he/him) returns to TheatreWorks as Douglas Panch, the vice principal who moderates the Spelling Bee. Reber's TheatreWorks performances include *Rags*, *Cyrano*, *Peter and the Starcatcher*, and the New Works Festival reading of *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. Reber's film and TV credits in Paramount's *The Tiger Woods Story* and TNN's "18 Wheels of Justice." He has been seen onstage at San Francisco Playhouse, 42nd Street Moon, Jewel Theatre Company, Hillbarn Theatre, San Jose Repertory Theatre, Cabrillo Stage, and Hangar Theatre.

*The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* features musical direction by **William Liberatore**, choreography by **Lee Ann Payne**, scenic design by **Andrea Bechert**, costume design by **Courtney Flores**, lighting design by **Steven B. Mannhardt** with associate lighting designer **Jarku Tang**, and sound design by **Jeff Mockus**. **Taylor McQuesten** serves as stage manager with **Emily Anderson Wolf** as assistant stage manager.

**William Finn** (Music & Lyrics) is the writer and composer of *Falsettos*, for which he won the Tony Award for Best Book of a Musical and Best Original Score. His work includes the Tony-nominated score for *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, music and lyrics for the musical adaptation of *Little Miss Sunshine*, *March of the Falsettos*, and *Falsettoland* (Outer Critics Circle Award for Best Musical, two Los Angeles Drama Critics Awards, two Drama Desk Awards, the Lucille Lortel Award and Guggenheim Fellowship in Playwriting). He wrote music and lyrics and co-wrote book with James

Lapine for *A New Brain*, which was produced at Lincoln Center and seen in 2015 at Encores! Off-Center.

**Rachel Sheinkin** (Book) won the Tony Award and Drama Desk Award for Best Book of a Musical for *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*. She collaborated with GrooveLily's Brendan Milburn and Valerie Vigoda on the musical *Striking 12*, seen at TheatreWorks in 2004 and nominated for a Lucille Lortel Award for Outstanding Musical for its Off-Broadway run. Other work includes *Sleeping Beauty Wakes* with Deaf West Theatre, *Serenade*, and book and lyrics for *Blood Drive*.

**James Monroe Iglehart** (Creative Producer) won a Tony Award and Drama Desk Award for originating the role of the Genie in Disney's *Aladdin* on Broadway. Starring as King Arthur in the upcoming revival of *Spamalot*, Iglehart's other Broadway credits include *Hamilton*, *Memphis*, *Chicago*, and *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, in addition to performances with Freestyle Love Supreme. He can currently be seen in the pre-Broadway engagement of the Louis Armstrong musical *A Wonderful World* and was recently seen in Paper Mill Playhouse's World Premiere stage production of Disney's *Hercules*. His film and TV credits include Disney's *Disenchanted*, Netflix's "Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt," Amazon Prime Video's "The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel," Peacock's "Girls5eva," Fox's "Gotham," Netflix's "Maniac," NBC's "Perfect Harmony," *Three Christs*, and Disney's "Rapunzel's Tangled Adventure," "Elena of Avalor," "Vampirina" and "DuckTales." A Bay Area native, Iglehart appeared in TheatreWorks Silicon Valley's productions of *Memphis* (TheatreWorks 2004, Broadway 2009-11), *Big River* (TheatreWorks 2012), *It Ain't Nothin' But the Blues* (TheatreWorks 2009), and *Into the Woods* (TheatreWorks 2005).

In-demand regional theatre director **Meredith McDonough** (Director) was previously TheatreWorks' Director of New Works. At TheatreWorks, she directed the World Premiere Musical *Triangle*, as well as *Upright Grand*, *Auctioning the Ainsleys*, *Silent Sky*, *Now Circa Then*, [title of show], and *Opus* (San Francisco Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle Awards for Best Director and Best Production). McDonough was the associate artistic director at Actors Theatre of Louisville for seven seasons, and she has also directed productions for Guthrie Theater, Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Marin Theatre Company, Magic Theatre, Round House Theatre, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, Arizona Theatre Company, Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival, Two River Theater, Williamstown Theatre Festival, and Dallas Theater Center. In New York City, McDonough has developed work with Roundabout Theatre Company, Atlantic Theater Company, The Lark, Keen Company, and Ars Nova. She was the associate

artistic director of The Orchard Project, was the New Works Director for the National Alliance for Musical Theatre, and served on the board of Stage Directors and Choreographers Society.

**TheatreWorks Silicon Valley**, led by Artistic Director **Giovanna Sardelli** in partnership with Executive Director **Debbie Chinn**, presents a wide variety of contemporary plays and musicals, revitalizes great works of the past, and serves more than 100,000 patrons per year. Founded in 1970 by **Robert Kelley**, TheatreWorks has grown from a truly original Silicon Valley start-up to become one of the nation's leading professional non-profit theatre companies. TheatreWorks was recently honored as the recipient of the 2019 Regional Theatre Tony Award. TheatreWorks also champions new work, offering artists support and a creative home as they develop new stories for the American theatre. Offstage, TheatreWorks' arts education programs in local schools and arts engagement programs in Silicon Valley neighborhoods uplift its audiences and strengthen community bonds. Onstage and off, TheatreWorks welcomes the mosaic of people that embody the Bay Area and beyond, celebrating the transformative power of theatre to ignite imagination, inspire conversation, and enliven our souls.

Media sponsor for TheatreWorks Silicon Valley's 2023/24 season is *San Francisco Chronicle*.

#### **For Calendar Editors:**

**WHAT:** Offering a jocund, jocular, jolly treat for the holidays, **TheatreWorks Silicon Valley** stages *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*. In this charming musical comedy, middle-school misfits personified by adult actors face off in a spelling showdown, vying for glory and a coveted slot at the National Spelling Bee. While they wage war with words like "crepuscular" and "hasenpfeffer," this ragtag crew wrestles with the highs and lows of competition, finding self-discovery along the way. This heartwarming hit captures all the chaos, heartbreak, and elation of becoming a childhood champion. At each performance a few audience members are selected to be a part of the fun as competitors, providing them a front row seat to the pandemonium. In-demand regional theatre director **Meredith McDonough**, who formerly served as TheatreWorks Director of New Works, helms this production that is decked out for the holidays, with Tony Award winner **James Monroe Iglehart** collaborating with TheatreWorks as Creative Producer on the hilarious show that gave him his Broadway debut.

**WHEN:** Previews: Wednesday, November 29 – Friday, December 1, 2023  
*Opening: Saturday, December 2, 2023*  
Closes: Sunday, December 24, 2023

**SHOWS:** Previews: 8:00pm  
Tuesdays: 7:30pm  
Wednesdays: 2:00pm, 7:30pm  
Thursdays & Fridays: 8:00pm

Saturdays: 2:00pm, 8:00pm  
Sundays: 2:00pm, 7:00pm

**ACCESS:** **ASL Interpretation:** 7:30pm Tuesday, December 12, 2023  
**Open Captioning:** 2pm and 7pm on Sunday, December 17, 2023; 2pm Wednesday, December 20, 2023  
**Audio Description:** 8pm Saturday, December 23, 2023; 2pm Sunday, December 24, 2023  
*Please register in advance, as service includes a pre-show talk thirty minutes before the performance.*  
**Masks Required:** 8pm Friday, December 8, 2023; 2pm Saturday, December 9, 2023; and 2pm Sunday, December 17, 2023  
**Assistive Listening Devices available at every performance**

**EVENTS:** **Making a Musical – conversation with Meredith McDonough and Giovanna Sardelli:** 6:30pm Thursday, November 30  
**Post-show discussions with cast:** 7:30pm Wednesday, December 6, 2023; 7:30pm Wednesday, December 20, 2023

**WHERE:** **Lucie Stern Theatre**

**TICKETS:** Single tickets (starting at \$27) and subscriptions (starting at \$107) are currently available.

**INFO:** For information visit [theatreworks.org](http://theatreworks.org) or call (877)-662-8978

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**PRESS:** Contact Lauren Goldfarb, Carla Befera & Co., [lauren@cb-pr.com](mailto:lauren@cb-pr.com)

**PHOTOS:** Downloadable high-res photos are available: <http://cbpr.co/press/spellingbee>