



A REBEL PHOENIX
THEATRE COLLECTIVE
PRODUCTION

BY ZORA HOWARD

STEW

DIRECTED BY
FELICIA
PEMBA



JANUARY 23 - FEBRUARY 1

"STEW" is presented by arrangement with Concord Theatricals on behalf of Samuel French, Inc.
WWW.CONCORDTHEATRICALS.COM

A NOTE FROM OUR ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Welcome to STEW -

We are producing *Stew* at a moment when this country continues to repeat the same cycles and then refuses to take responsibility for them. Violence, particularly against Black communities and Black women, is treated as inevitable. Grief is rushed. Accountability is delayed or avoided. Families are left to carry the consequences while systems remain unchanged.

This play does not allow that avoidance.

It is also important to say this plainly: this production did not come together without challenges. As the Artistic Director of this company, I take responsibility for the shortcomings that occurred in leadership along the way. Building something new, especially something committed to hard, necessary work, means learning in real time. Mistakes were made. Adjustments were required. Growth is not theoretical—it happens under pressure. What matters is how you respond.

Rebel Phoenix Theatre Collective was founded on the belief that theatre should not be neutral. Neutrality protects systems that harm people and allows cycles to continue unchallenged. Producing *Stew* is a deliberate choice to confront those cycles, not only onstage, but within our own practices as a company.

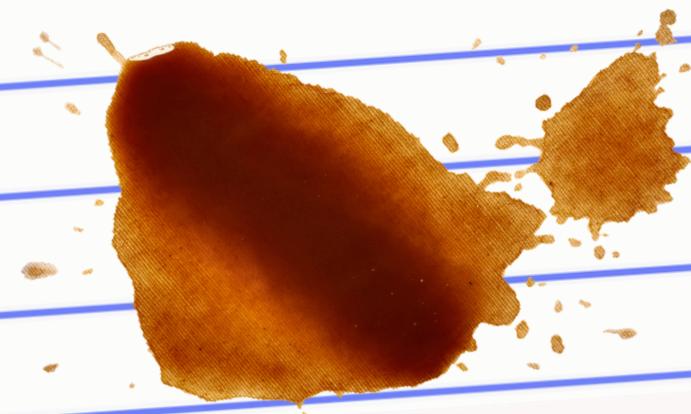
This work asks us to look honestly at generational harm, at responsibility, and at what it takes to break a pattern instead of inheriting it. That demand applies to artists, leaders, institutions, and audiences alike. Thank you for being here, for engaging with this story, and for holding space for work that does not pretend growth is easy or clean. Accountability is part of the process. So is learning. So is doing better.

Sincerely,
— Nat Coe
(They/Them)
Artistic Director



CAST

Mama Cherylandria Banks
Lillian Deatra Branston
Nelly Kieara Kurtz-Williams
Lil' Mama Kayla Howard



CREW

Felicia Penza Director
Kolby Kelly Stage Manager
Alexandra Kallis Set Designer
Joanna DeShay Costume Designer
Autumn Ford Lighting Designer
Nat Coe Sound Designer
Victoria Rose Nail Art Designer
Dustin Kallis Master Carpenter
Grayson Penza Stagehand



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Zora Howard is a Harlem-bred writer and performer. Plays include **STEW** (2021 Pulitzer Prize Finalist; Page 73 Productions); **THE MASTER'S TOOLS** (Williamstown Theatre Festival); **BUST** (2022 Susan Smith Blackburn Prize Finalist; 2022 L. Arnold Weissberger New Play Award Finalist); **HANG TIME** (2022 Creative Capital Award Finalist); and **GOOD FAITH**. Her work has been developed at Ojai Playwrights Conference, SPACE at Ryder Farm, The Lark, Primary Stages, and Cape Cod Theatre Project, among others. In 2020, her film **Premature** (2020 Film Independent John Cassavetes Award nominee), which she co-wrote with director Rashaad Ernesto Green, opened in theaters following its world premiere at the 2019 Sundance Film Festival. Zora is the inaugural Judith Champion Fellow at MTC, a 2022 Lilly Award and Helen Merrill Award recipient and is currently under commission from Seattle Rep, MTC, and Wessex Grove.

**World Premiere of STEW
was produced by
PAGE 73 PRODUCTIONS
(Michael Walkup, Artistic Director; Amanda
Feldman, Managing Director; and Rebecca Yaggy,
Director of Development)**

Special Thanks:
Julie Renée Butler; Claude and Alex Howard;
Michael Walkup; Kari Olmon; Page 73's 2019
Interstate 73 Cohort; Colette Robert; Portia;
Kristin Dodson; Toni Lachelle Pollitt; Nikkole
Salter; the entire creative team of STEW's NYC
Premiere produced by Page 73 Productions; Justin
Emeka; Collaborative Artists Bloc (CAB); Keiana
Richárd; Deborah Stein; Marybeth Ward; and
Dominique Morisseau.
For Tajai Rice.
And
For all of the women who raised me.





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Felicia Penza ~ Director

Felicia Penza is a multidisciplinary artist, vocalist, writer, and graphic designer based in Phoenix, Arizona. Her work spans the intersections of storytelling, music, and visual design, with recent credits including directing and performing in a range of community and professional productions across the Valley. She recently co-directed *Topdog/Underdog* with 5th Wall Playhouse, 2025, and brings over a decade of experience as a performer and creative collaborator in theatre and live arts.

There is a particular weight that Black women carry. It is ancient, inherited, and learned early. And yet, alongside that weight lives something just as powerful: joy. Laughter. Brilliance. Black Girl Magic is not a slogan. It is survival. It is alchemy.

While I have performed on stages for years, *Stew* marks my first solo effort in the director's chair. I am a deeply collaborative creative, and this process has been rooted in trust. These women have sat with me, cried with me, laughed with me (LOTS of laughter) and held space with me. Together, we have supported one another as we prepared a dish seasoned with truth, humor, secrets, faith, and family.

Nina Simone's *Four Women* has lived with me since the moment I first read the script last year. These four Black women each carry their own story. Some are familiar. Some are passed down through generations. Some are things we have never witnessed out loud before. And some are the pains and heartaches we survive by pushing down, simply because there is still more work to do and too many people depending on us. It is a badge of honor and pride to be a Black woman. But navigating the world while setting aside our own grief so we can keep going? That chapter is one I know well.

I think often of my grandmother, Lula Mae Hampton, whose kitchen had yellow walls with green accents, much like the one you see onstage tonight. She leaned fiercely into her faith, trusting God to always right the ship, even as she quietly worried about everyone and everything. In moments of chaos, she was our anchor, our true north, guiding the family back on course. That resilience was passed to her daughter, my formidable mother, Annette Penza. I carry those inherited traits, both the strength and the weight, and they have shaped who I am and how I have guided these extraordinary actors.

Thank you to Rebel Phoenix Theatre Collective for trusting me with this vision. And thank you for taking a seat at the table tonight. It is my hope that you leave nourished.

~Felicia Penza

SPECIAL THANKS

Rebel Phoenix Theatre Collective extends our deepest gratitude to the individuals and organizations whose generosity, guidance, and support helped bring STEW to life:

Annette Penza
Ben Ford
Stephanie Likes
Chandler High School Drama Department
Mesa Encore Theater
Order Chaos Theatre Company
JP Clemente
Casual Astronaut
Lex Barker
Paige Westfall
Ballet Theatre of Phoenix
Ian Parsons
Liz DelVecchio
Victoria Rose and Missfit Nails
Cheryl Briley
Lorelee Godden
Dave Roden
Makayla Evans
Stephan Martin
Isabella Penza

To our extraordinary cast, crew, and Board of Rebel Phoenix Theatre Collective:

Thank you for your heart, talent, and unwavering commitment.

And to everyone who offered time, encouragement, resources, or steady belief in this production:

We see you, we appreciate you, and we are grateful beyond words.



MAIN
STREET
CREATIVE
ARTS CENTER

MET MESA **encore**
THEATRE

A black and white graphic of a cat's head and shoulders, with the words 'Stray Cat Theatre' written across it.

BY BRANDEN JACOBS-JENKINS

GLORIA

GLORIA

MAR
20-29
2026

A stylized sun rising over a mountain, with the words 'VALLEY PLAYERS' to its right.

Bringing contemporary and modern theater to the valley

CAST AND CREW BIOS



Cherylandria Banks ~ Mama

Cherylandria was born in Memphis, TN. She has lived in the valley for over 20 years. This is her first production with Rebel Phoenix. She's honored to be a part of this experience. Her motto is 'Trust the Process'.

Deatra D. Branston ~ Lillian

Deatra D. Branston (Lillian) is thrilled to join Rebel Phoenix Theatre Collective and step into the world of STEW. A storyteller at heart, she is drawn to work that carries truth, legacy, and the weight of lived experience. Taking on Lillian is both an artistic challenge and a personal gift, allowing Deatra to explore themes that resonate deeply with her own childhood journey and offering unexpected pathways toward healing through the process of storytelling. Recent credits include POTUS (Stray Cat Theatre), The Hula Hoopin' Queen (Childsplay), and The Hunchback of Notre Dame (Theater Works). Guided by her faith and the enduring love of her late mother, Patricia Ann Branston, Deatra brings gratitude and intention to every creative space she enters.

Outside of performing, Deatra directs youth theatre productions throughout the Valley and will be directing Annie Jr. in Spring 2026. She also creates original content through Creative Start Productions, blending storytelling, faith, and purpose-driven creativity. To follow her artistic journey and upcoming projects, connect with her on social media at @deatradbranston. Deatra is honored to collaborate with Rebel Phoenix Theatre Collective and looks forward to future opportunities to grow with the company.



Kieara Kurtz-Williams ~ Nelly

Kieara is excited to be part of Rebel Theatre Collective's first season and to collaborate with such a talented production team and cast. From the first rehearsal, this experience has already proven to be special, driven by creativity, trust and a shared goal to tell a story that is authentic to our people.

Her recent performance credits include Disney's *Newsies* (Medda Larkin) and *Sister Act* (Deloris, understudy) with Hale Centre Theatre Arizona, *The Spongebob Musical* (Sandy Cheeks) at Mesa Community College, and *Little Shop of Horrors* (Chiffon) with Arizona Regional Theater. As a director, she has loved guiding productions such as *Hadestown: Teen Edition*, *Sister Act* and *Sweeney Todd: School Edition* with Actor's Youth Theatre, along with *Little Shop of Horrors* and *The Addams Family* at Mesa Encore Theatre.

Outside of performing, Kieara is passionate about theater education and mentorship and currently serves as the Assistant Artistic Director at Actor's Youth Theatre.

She is deeply grateful to her family and friends for their constant love and encouragement, which make this work possible.

Kayla Howard ~ Lil' Mama

Kayla Howard is an American stand-up comedian, teacher, and radio personality. Her high-energy, clean, and clever storytelling style of comedy has landed her the opportunity to perform and produce comedy shows in comedy clubs, schools, universities and casinos across the nation. In 2023, she founded Cool Kids Comedy Club to help children build confidence, literacy, and mental health skills through comedy.



We would like to recognize our Founders Club Members:

Bronze Phoenix:

(\$100)

Sara Alirezaei
Jenni Bridgers
Roberta Daniels
Mary Douthat / James
Wittke
Nikki DiGiorgio
Diane Katz
Zach Lundquest

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Jessica B. Phillips

Gold Phoenix:

(\$500)

The Roalofs Family

Platinum Phoenix:

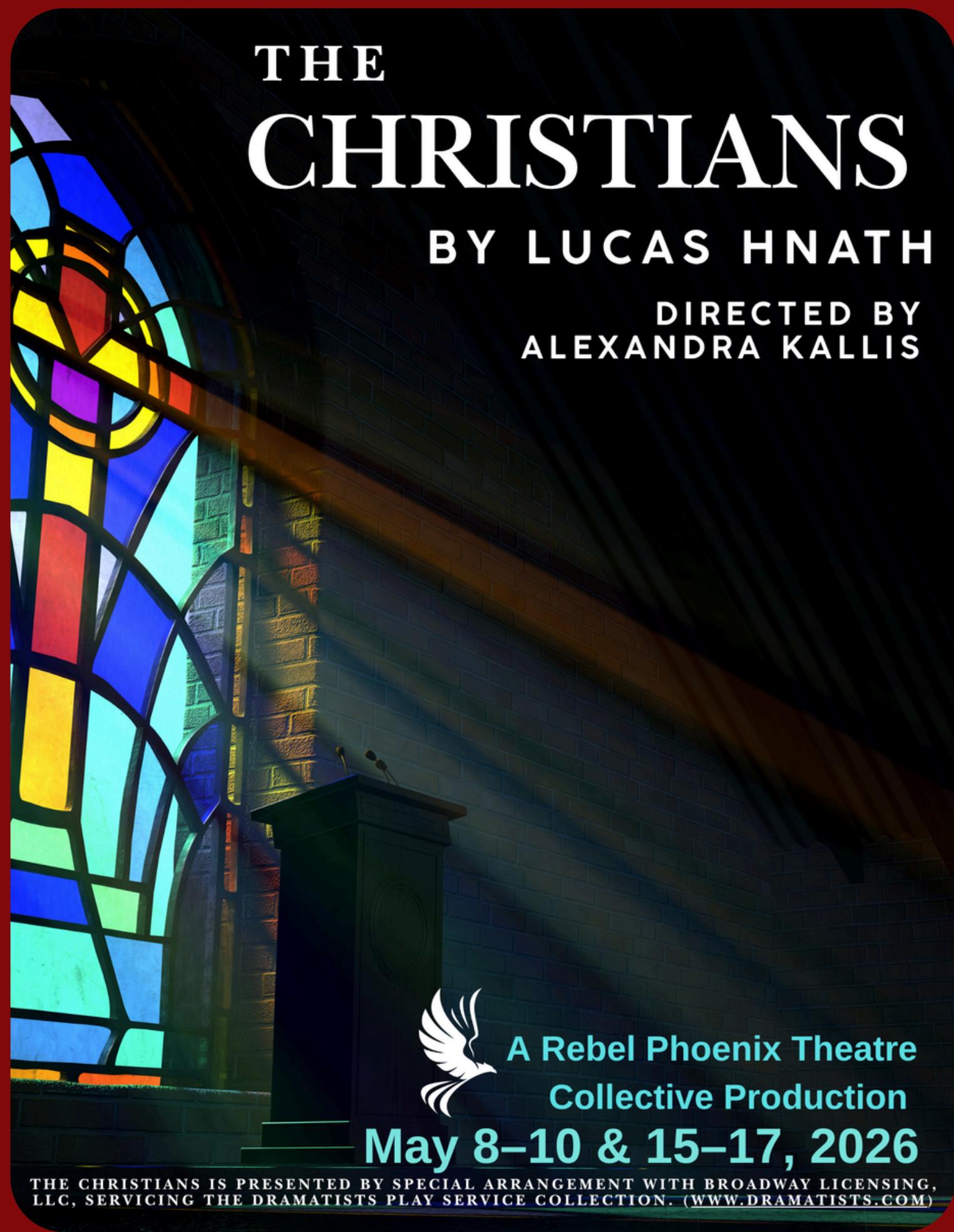
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Andrea Hough
Brendon Kunker



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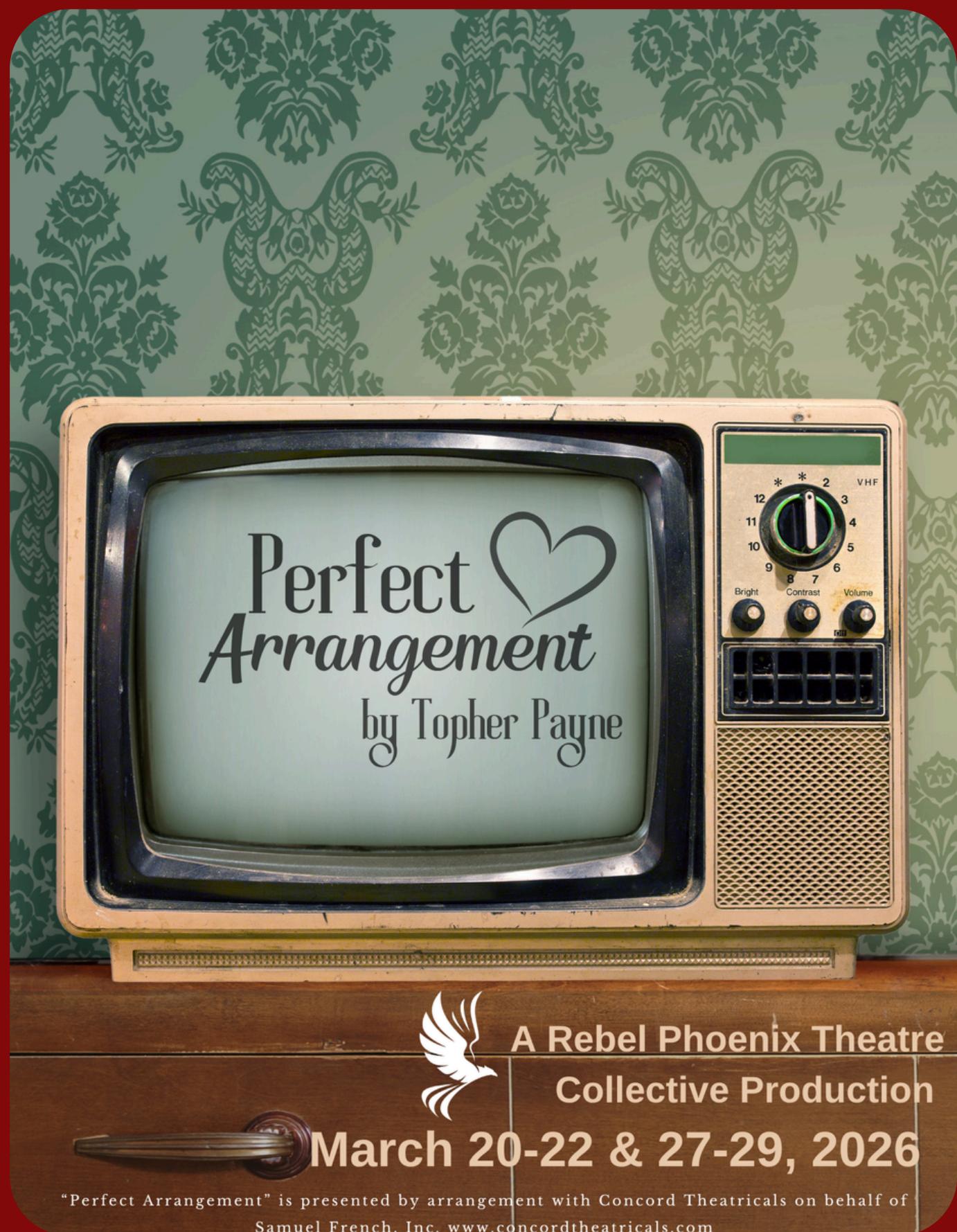
REBEL PHOENIX THEATRE COLLECTIVE:



THE
CHRISTIANS
BY LUCAS HNATH
DIRECTED BY
ALEXANDRA KALLIS

**A Rebel Phoenix Theatre
Collective Production**
May 8-10 & 15-17, 2026

THE CHRISTIANS IS PRESENTED BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT WITH BROADWAY LICENSING, LLC, SERVICING THE DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE COLLECTION. (WWW.DRAMATISTS.COM)



Perfect  Arrangement
by Topher Payne

**A Rebel Phoenix Theatre
Collective Production**
March 20-22 & 27-29, 2026

"Perfect Arrangement" is presented by arrangement with Concord Theatricals on behalf of Samuel French, Inc. www.concordtheatricals.com

