

IT'S BACK, AND WEIRDER THAN EVER.



AMERICAN
STAGE



WEIRD IN ST. PETE

OCT. 2 - 19, 2025

BY HELEN R. MURRAY

DIRECTED BY STEPHEN RIORDAN

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

DUNCAN & McCLELLAN





WEIRD IN ST. PETE

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Book by Helen R. Murray
Directed by Stephen Riordan

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American Stage would like to thank all our volunteers for their support.

CAST

Sarah Beth Saho (she/her).....Duncan
Jonathan O'Brien (he/him).....Duncan
Culver Casson (she/her)..... Mary Reeser
Edward Leonard (he/him) Old Bill
Stephen Riordan (he/him)..... Director, Peter Demens
MacKenzie Aaryn (she/her) Cora
Jay Hoff (he/him)Jack Kerouac

CREATIVE TEAM

Helen R. Murray (she/they)..... Playwright
Stephen Riordan (he/him)..... Director
Macy M. Smith (she/her)..... Costume Designer
Meyah Fortier (she/her)..... Stage Manager

ACTORS' EQUITY ASSOCIATION

(AEA or 'Equity') Actors' Equity Association ("Equity"), founded in 1913, is the U.S. labor union that represents more than 51,000 professional Actors and Stage Managers. Equity fosters the art of live theatre as an essential component of society and advances the careers of its members by negotiating wages, improving working conditions and providing a wide range of benefits, including health and pension plans. Actors' Equity is a member of the AFL-CIO and is affiliated with FIA, an international organization of performing arts unions.

#EquityWorks

CAST



Sarah Beth Saho

she/her
Duncan

LIVE NOW



Jonathan O'Brien

he/him
Duncan

Jonathan O'Brien is excited to return to American Stage! Born and raised in St. Petersburg, Jonathan has been previously seen at American Stage as Narrator 1 in last season's *Tales By Twilight*. Other recent credits include Linus in *You're a Good Man Charlie Brown* (ThinkTank Theater). When he's not on stage, Jonathan loves working as a Tea-Tender for Twist Kava Bar. Jonathan would like to thank his friends and family for their endless love as well as his fiancé Justin and his cat Nickolas. Instagram @jonny0b



Culver Casson

she/her
Mary Reeser

Culver is a graduate of Northwestern University with a B.A. in Voice, The Juilliard School of Music with an Advanced Certificate in Vocal/Opera Performance and The William Esper Studio in New York City (a 2 year Sanford Meisner method acting program). You may have seen her as the incinerating "Mary Reeser" in *Weird in St. Pete* at Floridarama this past fall, or roaming about Boyd Hill Nature Preserve as "Narrator 2" in *10 Ways to Survive the Zombie Apocalypse* as a member of American Stage's "Beyond the Bay" Acting Company. Or perhaps you caught her playing "Taryn" in *The Dog* at the James Museum as part of American Stage's "Lift Every Voice Festival" downtown St. Petersburg, FL. Favorite roles include "Jessica Gatewood" in *Splendor* at Chelsea Playhouse and The Pantheon Playhouse in New York City, "Johanna" in *Sweeney Todd* at Skylight Opera in Milwaukee, "Rosabella" in *The Most Happy Fella* at Light Opera Works in Chicago, "Papagena" in *The Magic Flute* with the Madison Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Maestro John DeMain, and "Monica" in *The Medium* with the Bronx Opera. Culver also has performed her own acclaimed cabaret show *Island Magic* at Don't Tell Mama's and Judy's in New York as well as *Heart and Home* at the inauguration of the Marion Anderson Studio in CT. She has been a featured soloist with many national

CAST

symphony orchestras, and since moving to Florida almost 9 years ago, graduated from American Stage's UCB style Improvisation program, was a founding member of "Definitely Not Murderers", American Stage's Musical Improv House Team as well as a featured soloist at St. Petersburg Opera's *Pirates and Angels Variety Show*. Culver also taught acting and music at a private school in Clearwater for 4 years and has directed over 13 shows, including *Grease*, *Pippin* and *It's a Wonderful Life* at the Bilheimer Capitol Theater. Carrollwood Cultural Center audiences have seen Culver as "Josephine Vitale" in *Tony and Tina's Wedding*, winner of Broadway World's Tampa Regional Award for Best Play 2022. She also directed *Spamalot* there and was nominated by Broadway World for Best Director 2023. At the Carrollwood Players Theatre, she played "Helen Bechdel" in *Fun Home*, which was nominated for Broadway World's Tampa Regional Award for Best Musical 2023, had the time of her life performing "Elizabeth Benning" in *Young Frankenstein*, the Musical for which she won a Nancy Award for Best Musical, was the ever-drunk-and-disorderly "Miss Hannigan" in *Annie*, which won Broadway World's Tampa Regional Award for Best Musical and Best Ensemble 2024, performed the villainous Miss Baltimore Crabs' "Velma Von Tussle" in the critically acclaimed smash hit musical, *Hairspray*, and just finished playing her dream role of "Joanne" in Sondheim's *Company*. She also runs around the area as many Singing Telegram Characters- "Clunky Da Funky Chicken" is her favorite clucker to perform! And last but not least, she teaches private voice lessons to students, both local and national, at Culvernote Voice Studio: Culvercasson.com. Keep the Arts Alive!!!



Edward Leonard

he/him
Old Bill

Edward Leonard is a young and aspiring actor from Miami, Florida. Edward is a graduate from New World School of the Arts in Miami and alumni of University of South Florida, Saint Petersburg where he has received his BA in Finance. Edward has performed in The Saint Petersburg Shakespearean festival for a consecutive two years and has participated in many original local Tampa Bay projects alongside Studio 620 and the Sunshine City Film Festival.



MacKenzie Aaryn

she/her
Cora

MacKenzie Aaryn is extremely excited and grateful to be on her first show with American Stage! Originally from Ohio, she studied Acting at Wright State University. Previous Tampa Bay credits include *Blackbird*, *Into The Night*, and *Ghost Stories* from *Yellowstone* at The Off Central and *Cordelia* in *King Lear*. She is also passionate about filmmaking and most recently won Best Lead Performance in the Green Light Cinema Challenge and has a movie *Man In The Blue Suit* scheduled to hit streaming Nov 5th. She also teaches theatre with Theatre Exceptional: dedicated to telling stories for, about, and including adults with disabilities. She would like to thank her director Anthony for putting together such a fun team and the art community in Saint Petersburg for always doing its thing! Stay weird St. Pete!

CAST



Jay Hoff

he/him

Jack Kerouac

Jay is thrilled, honored and so very humbled to have been cast alongside the other wonderfully talented actors in this extraordinary American Stage production. Born in Cocoa Beach Florida, Jay currently resides in St. Petersburg and has lived in the Tampa Bay area for twenty years, with his husband John Huls. He performs regularly throughout the year as part of the Dirty John's sketch comedy troupe and has enjoyed occasional gigs with Radio Theatre Project and Potomac Theatre Project, at The Studio@620. Jay is also a locally recognized LEGO artist and has shown at many St. Petersburg area galleries and venues

CREATIVE TEAM



Helen R. Murray

she/they

Playwright

Helen R. Murray is an award-winning director, playwright, the Producing Artistic Director of American Stage, former Executive Producer of the Aurora Fox Arts Center in Colorado and Artistic

Director of the Hub Theatre in Virginia. Her original plays have been produced by the Hub Theatre, Theatre Alliance, ArtsWest, Malibu Playhouse, the Jewish Community Center of Northern Virginia and have been seen at the Kennedy Center's Page to Stage Festival. She has directed across the country and mentored writers through the Writer's Guild Initiative NYC. In addition to her roles offstage, Helen has worked as an actor in many Washington, D.C. area theaters, including Folger Theatre, Woolly Mammoth, Theatre J, Forum Theatre, Theatre Alliance, Rorschach Theatre, and Keegan Theatre. Helen has also appeared in numerous independent films and commercials. Her co-adaptation of Wonderful Life earned her a Helen Hayes Award nomination for Outstanding New Play, and her original play, Abominable, was nominated for the national Steinberg New Play Award. She is also the recipient of the Puffin Foundation Award for Outstanding Emerging Artist, the Washington Canadian Partnership Award for Leadership in the Arts, and her play Redder Blood won the 2016 Jewish Playwriting Contest.

CREATIVE TEAM



Stephen Riordan

he/him

Director/ Peter Demens

Stephen's work has been seen on several stages throughout Tampa Bay, having most recently been featured in HAMLET620 at The Studio @ 620. In addition to his work as an actor, director, and playwright in Tampa Bay, he has recently launched a new podcast "The Stephen Riordan Show" on Radio St. Pete, highlighting some of the incredible up-and-coming talent we have in our beautifully creative city. Having spent several years as a casting director and arts educator, Stephen is excited to be able to share some of these artists' awesome stories to the Tampa Bay audience. Thank you to Anthony and AS for the opportunity to portray one of St. Pete's founding fathers.



Macy M. Smith

she/her

Costume Designer

Macy M. Smith is a freelance Costume Designer and Wardrobe Technician based in St. Petersburg. You may have seen her work recently in St. Pete, Tampa Bay, and even Pittsboro, North Carolina.

Macy is so thrilled to have the opportunity to design for American Stage again. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Theatre with a concentration in Costume Design from Greensboro College. Her recent credits include, Midsummer Night's Dream (Berkeley Preparatory), Yellow Boat (Circle City Theatre Company), Cinderella (Berkeley Preparatory), The Dreamer Examines His Pillow (Tampa Rep), and Crimes of the Heart (American Stage). You can connect with Macy on her website, macy-smith-designs.com.



Meyah Fortier

she/her

Stage Manager

Meyah is thrilled to be joining American Stage again for another show. You may have seen some of her work this past season on Ring of Fire and This Girl... as Prop Master. Some of her favorite credits include being ASM at the Mahaffey for A Very Broadway Christmas, being ASM Disney's Beauty and the Beast and Ragtime in the Park as well as Stage Managing Three Sisters, Miss Julie, Clyde's and John Proctor is the Villain with the Asolo Conservatory.

ABOUT THE CHARACTERS

**all the characters in this piece are taken from true historical residents of St. Pete*

Duncan McClellan

Duncan McClellan is a renowned glass artist and the founder of the Duncan McClellan Gallery (DMG) in St. Petersburg, Florida. His fascination with glass began at age five during a visit to a glass factory in West Virginia. After honing his skills in leather and clay, McClellan pursued glassblowing in Ybor City, Florida, in 1987. He furthered his studies at the ARS Studio in Murano, Italy, becoming the second American invited to work there.

In 2005, McClellan transformed a 7,800-square-foot former fish and tomato packing plant into the DMG, a vibrant space that includes exhibition galleries, a hot glass workshop, and lush sculpture gardens. The gallery showcases rotating exhibitions of nationally and internationally recognized glass artists and serves as a hub for community engagement and education. Through the DMG School Project, McClellan offers mentorship and workshops to artists and students, fostering a deeper appreciation for the art of glass.

Mary Reeser

One of the Old Northeast's most puzzling and talked-about mysteries is the story of Mary Hardy Reeser, a 67-year-old widow who lived in a small apartment at 1200 Cherry Street and mysteriously passed away in 1951 under unusual circumstances – seemingly a victim of spontaneous combustion: One summer night, Mary returned home after visiting family and settled into her favorite chair. By the next morning, she was gone, her favorite chair burnt to cinders. Few remains were found, while the rest of the apartment was strangely untouched by fire.

The case confused both local police and the FBI, who concluded she may have accidentally fallen asleep while smoking, though the limited damage around her chair left many questions unanswered. Over the years, her story gained national attention and became one of the most well-known cases linked to the idea of spontaneous human combustion—a highly debated theory suggesting the human body could catch fire without an obvious cause.

While science generally disputes this, the case has remained unsolved, and some say Mary's kind spirit might still linger in the neighborhood, remembered not only for the mystery surrounding her death, but for the gentle presence she left behind.

Old Bill

Old Bill the Alligator, a longtime feature in a curio shop near St. Petersburg's Mirror Lake Park, became an unlikely witness to a dark and often overlooked chapter in the city's history. In 1914, just steps from where he sat on display, a Black man named John Evans was lynched by a white mob without trial or justice. For years, the story of Evans' brutal death was buried, left out of official narratives and public memory. Old Bill, as a symbol of the park and its past, now represents more than local nostalgia—he stands near the very site where violence and racial terror once went unacknowledged. As the truth about Evans' lynching comes to light, Old Bill becomes a silent reminder of the history hidden in plain sight and the need to confront it with honesty.

ABOUT THE CHARACTERS

**all the characters in this piece are taken from true historical residents of St. Pete*

Peter Demens

Peter Demens, born Pytor A. Dementyev in Russia, played a pivotal role in Florida's early development despite living there for only eight years. Raised in privilege and trained as a military officer, Demens fled Russia in 1881 due to political persecution—or possibly scandal—and settled in Central Florida. There, he became a successful entrepreneur, building structures for Rollins College and gaining control of the Orange Belt Railway after a series of financial setbacks. He extended the railway to the Gulf Coast and named the final stop St. Petersburg, after his childhood home in Russia, laying the foundation for the city's development. Though he left Florida in 1889 and later aided Russian immigrants in California, Demens is remembered as one of St. Petersburg's founding figures, commemorated at Demens Landing Park.

Jack Kerouac

Jack Kerouac, iconic author of *On the Road* and a leading voice of the Beat Generation, spent the final years of his life in St. Petersburg, Florida. He moved there in the 1960s with his mother and third wife, seeking a quieter life away from the literary spotlight. Kerouac lived in a modest home in a suburban neighborhood, far from the bohemian scenes he once thrived in. Despite his fame, his time in St. Pete was marked by personal struggles, declining health, and increasing isolation, fueled by alcoholism. He died there in 1969 at the age of 47. Today, Kerouac's former home has become a quiet landmark for fans and literary pilgrims, symbolizing both his enduring legacy and the tragic end of a restless, groundbreaking writer. A friend to Mary Reeser; they were neighbors. Courage by Jack Kerouac was written around 1942 but not published until 2011.

Cora & Cornelius, The Mystery Monkey Of Tampa Bay

The “Mystery Monkey of Tampa Bay” was a wild rhesus macaque that roamed the Tampa Bay region for several years, eluding capture and captivating locals with its audacity and near-mythical status. **Nicknamed “Cornelius” after his eventual capture, the monkey was known to rummage through trash, scale rooftops, and even bite a resident — events that turned him into a local celebrity with Facebook followers and media attention.** In October 2012, after a multi-year pursuit, wildlife officials finally subdued him via tranquilizer dart and took him into quarantine, where he was evaluated and later readied for relocation to a sanctuary or wildlife facility. Cornelius's story raises important questions about invasive species, human-animal interaction, and the ethics of how we handle nonnative wildlife found in residential settings. **His mate, named in *Weird in St. Pete* as “Cora,” was a female rhesus macaque whom zoo officials relocated to serve as a companion for the famous solo primate.**

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