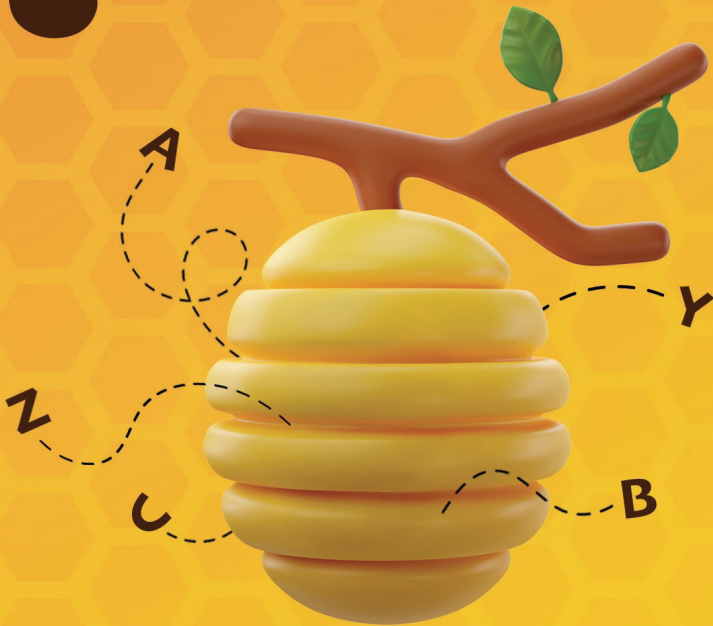




RALEIGH
LITTLE
THEATRE

Akeelah and the *Bee*



February 7-23

ADAPTED FOR THE STAGE BY **CHERYL L. WEST**

BASED ON THE ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY BY **DOUG ATCHISON**

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**RALEIGH
LITTLE
THEATRE**

Presents

AKEELAH AND THE BEE

Adapted for the stage by
Cheryl L. West

Based on the original screenplay by
Doug Atchison

Originally commissioned and produced by
Children's Theatre Company

Produced by special arrangement with Plays for New Audiences

Directed by **Monèt Noelle Marshall**

Scenic Design by **Sonya Leigh Drum**

Costume Design by **Elspeth McClanahan**

Lighting Design by **Erin Bell**

Sound Design by **Mindtracs**

Props Design by **Doc Price**

Stage Management by **Lindsay Nyman**

**THE VIDEOTAPING OR OTHER VIDEO OR AUDIO RECORDING
OF THIS PRODUCTION IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED.**

Sponsors

Special thanks to our show sponsor, [North State Bank](#):



Additional thanks to our media sponsor, [Triangle Family Magazine](#).



This program is funded in part by the City of Raleigh based on recommendations of the [Raleigh Arts Commission](#).



Akeelah and the Bee is supported by the [United Arts Council of Raleigh and Wake County](#), as well as the [N.C. Arts Council](#), a division of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources.



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Dear Friends,

Thank you for joining us at the Bee! Whether you're a long-time supporter of Raleigh Little Theatre or experiencing one of our shows for the first time, we're so glad you're here.

I would like to extend tremendous thanks to the cast, crew and creative team. Under the direction of Monèt Noelle Marshall, this group has poured their hearts into the process, learned to trust one another, and are ready to leave it all on the stage. In a time when it's easy to feel disconnected, we hope you go away feeling inspired and maybe even a little bit more connected to your neighbors.

The young actors in this production are a great example of what arts education can do. When introduced at an early age, it boosts the benefits of learning how to prepare, self-expression, and working as part of a team. It also helps kids step out of their comfort zones and discover talents they might not have even known they had. That's why it's so important for all of us to keep championing the arts and education. Whether it's by coming to shows like this, volunteering, or speaking up for more arts funding, we can all help nurture the next generation of storytellers and leaders.

Curious to know more about Raleigh Little Theatre? Visit our website at RaleighLittleTheatre.org to learn more about volunteer opportunities, auditions, theatre classes and summer camps. Better yet, scan the QR code on the volunteer page of your playbill during intermission and sign yourself up today.

By being here, you are helping to sustain this place where creativity thrives. As the lights dim and the show begins, I hope you feel yourself becoming part of the heartbeat of YOUR community theatre.

Hope to see you again soon!



Michele Weathers
Executive Producer



My daughter, Peyton,
with her 6th grade
Spelling Bee certificate!

Cast

Akeelah Anderson
Brielle Eugene

Gail Anderson
Patrice Aria Burkes

Reggie Anderson
Isaiah Pendergrass

Dr. Joshua Larabee
Deandre Sanders

Georgia
Karrah A. Driver

Batty Ruth/Bee Clerk
Dr. Joy L. Bryant

Drunk Willie
Spencer A. Matthews

Principal Welch/TV Announcer
Phillip Solano

J.T./Judge
Dan Lee

Dylan Chiu
Neel Chaudhuri

Javier/Chucky
Carlos J. Colón

Mrs. Chiu/Pronouncer
Seoyoung Hu

Izzy/Snorting Girl/Crying Girl
Lorelei Kemp

Ratchet Rhonda/Foxy Fay
Kenya Cardona

Trish/Horse Girl
Hayden Cooper

Mohawk Girl/Air Speller
Lilly Zonruiter

Production Team

Director

Monèt Noelle Marshall

Scenic Designer

Sonya Leigh Drum

Costume Designer

Elsbeth McClanahan

Lighting Designer

Erin Bell

Sound Designer

John Maruca

Props Designer

Doc Price

Stage Manager

Lindsay Nyman

Production Manager/Technical Director

Dennis R. Berfield

Assistant Technical Director

Ali Wood

Costume Shop Manager/Resident Costume Designer

Jenny Mitchell

Projections Engineer

Darby E. Madewell

Dramaturg

Rayden Leeder

Assistant Sound Designer

Sam Beck

Assistant Stage Manager

Lauren Montana

Team Dynamics Strategist

Kristina Brunelle

Letter from the Director

M-O-D-E-M

That was the word that a 9-year-old Monèt Noelle Marshall spelled to become the Powell's Lane Elementary Spelling Bee Champ in 1999. I still remember the nerves of sitting on that stage, in front of the whole school, willing my mouth to say the correct letters in the correct order. I remember the pride of my classmates as I beat out the 5th grader. I remember feeling powerful on that stage. Stages have been one of my places of power and purpose ever since.

Akeelah and the Bee is about drowning out all the noise and naysayers that say "you shouldn't," "you won't" or "you can't." It's about holding fiercely to the inner voice that says "I want," "I will" and "I sure can." I hope that as you enjoy this story it awakens the Akeelah in you; the version of you that is absolutely excellent at something. I know it's in there and you know it too. I hope you chase that thing, that dream, with reckless abandon. I hope you have teachers, coaches and cheerleaders to support you along the way.

And to the cast, crew, staff and parents, thank you for your time, talent, attention and belief. It has been an honor and joy to work alongside each of you.

With G-R-A-T-I-T-U-D-E,
Monèt Noelle Marshall

Cast Biographies



DR. JOY L. BRYANT (Batty Ruth/Bee Clerk) is very excited to debut with Raleigh Little Theatre in this classic production of *Akeelah and the Bee*. A recipient of the Gus Witherspoon Community Arts Award, Joy is a lyric soprano and theatre artist from Raleigh. She is familiar across the Triangle theatre circuit and loves to bring life to her characters. She thanks God for the

gift of artistic expression and strives to touch the hearts of all who share in her theatrical and musical spaces.



PATRICE ARIA BURKES (Gail Anderson) holds a BA in Film Production from the New School and has studied at HB Studio & the Barrow Group in NYC. This is her first stage performance in 20 years since she wrote and performed, *Elmo'd Out!* a satirical look at her experience as a stay-at-home mom. She is honored and excited to be in this production and hopes she

can help create an experience the audience resonates with.



KENYA CARDONA (Ratchet Rhonda/Foxy Fay) loves to make people smile and is looking forward to playing this role! Kenya is a talker, who likes to draw, animate, and listen to music. Sometimes she sews small plushies or fixes stuff that has little holes or tears in it. A fan of horror, she likes playing video games, making their own characters and songs, and making scary stories about video game characters or sometimes even TV show

characters too! She loves getting her hands dirty to craft, draw, create, paint etc... All types of "creative art!" Kenya's dream is to become an actor or voice actor, and if all else fails, an artist!



NEEL CHAUDHURI (Dylan Chiu) has loved being in the cast of *Akeelah and the Bee* at Raleigh Little Theatre. Neel has previously played the role of a mouse in Sonorous Road Theatre's production of *Cinderella*. He has taken acting lessons at Moonlight Theatre and Raleigh Little Theatre. He is an eighth grader at Martin Middle School. In his free time, Neel loves painting and

spending time with his golden retriever.



CARLOS J. COLÓN (Javier/Chucky) is a 13 year old male from Raleigh, North Carolina who first became interested in acting when he was 10 years old. He began training at Moonlight Stage Company, Moonlight Music, The Comedy Conservatory and at ComedyWorx in music, acting and improv. This play is his acting debut and he is so excited to perform. He would like to thank all of his coaches for getting him to where he is now.



HAYDEN COOPER (Trish/Horse Girl) is very excited to be making her Raleigh Little Theatre stage debut! She has enjoyed participating in their Middle School Ensemble sessions over the past year. Her most recent role, *Aladdin Kids* (Jafar), grew her passion for theatre. She looks forward to growing her skills as a young thespian.



KARRAH A. DRIVER (Georgia) is thrilled to make her theater debut in *Akeelah and the Bee* at Raleigh Little Theatre! An aspiring actress, screenwriter, and director, she loves crafting horror and drama. Karrah draws inspiration from her mom, Akilah, a creative powerhouse, and her aunt Saniyah, an amazing theater artist, actress, and singer. Offstage, she enjoys watching

football and crime shows, playing dress-to-impress with friends, and spending time with her best friend, Hayden. As the oldest of four, she's a natural storyteller with big dreams of becoming an author, writer, and director.



BRIELLE EUGENE (Akeelah Anderson) is no stranger to the stage as she steps into her first major production with Raleigh Little Theatre. Her credits include: two summer intensives of Next Stop Broadway! (DPAC), a TV commercial extra (Visit Raleigh), Fairy Godmother in *Descendants* (Theatre Raleigh), Fleur in *Acting for Film & TV* (North Raleigh Act), and workshops in playwriting,

movement, & performance (RLT). As an eighth grader, she excels in academics and athletics while perfecting her talents as an actress, singer, and writer. During her time away from theater, Brielle enjoys traveling, reading, and making memories with family. Follow her on Instagram @Brielle.Eugene

Cast Biographies



say hello; she loves people!

SEOYOUNG HU (Mrs. Chiu/Pronouncer) is a math teacher and student at NC State who loves theatre just as much! Her recent credits include *Cinderella 40* at the very own Raleigh Little Theatre and *Soft Launch* by Dipti Bramhandkar. She currently trains as an actor in the Ivana Chubbuck studio, and took part in the Uta Hagen Workshop at Burning Coal Theatre. So please



shows in the future!

LORELEI KEMP (Izzy/Snorthing Girl/Crying Girl) is onstage at Raleigh Little Theatre a second time, having played Wally Webb and Sam Craig in *Our Town (Multilingual)*. They have also done a variety of shows at their school such as *High School Musical the Musical (Ensemble)*, *Newsies (Ensemble)*, *Radium Girls (Edward Markley)*, and more. Lorelei hopes to be in a lot more



DAN LEE (J.T./Judge) loves to entangle himself in the life of theatre. From *A Wise Man to Mark Antony*, Dan has found a relevance within them that allowed him to portray them with gravitas. He hopes to bring all that he can to the role of J.T.



he is excited to step on stage! When not on stage, you can find him exploring life with his wife and children, sharing laughs with friends, or dreaming up his next artistic creation.

SPENCER A. MATTHEWS (Drunk Willie) is thrilled to be part of a Raleigh Little Theatre production! With a heart full of passion for acting, he has worked his craft in various productions, where he discovered the joy of storytelling recently playing the Centaur in *The Lion, the Witch, & the Wardrobe* with Firebox Theatre. This is Spencer's first venture with Raleigh Little Theatre, and



love for acting to the role and can't wait to share this experience with the audience.

ISAIAH PENDERGRASS (Reggie Anderson) is thrilled to make their main stage debut in *Akeelah and the Bee* as Reggie. Having been involved in acting from a young age through family projects with Pendergrass Productions, this is their first official stage performance. With a deep passion for the craft, they're excited to bring their energy, dedication, and



DEANDRE SANDERS (Dr. Joshua Larabee) is a man of many talents and skill sets. He has used his B.A. in theatre to begin crafting an ascending career in film production and theatre alike. Working with theatre organizations and platforms such as; International Black Theatre Festival, Three Bone Theatre, Burning Coal Theatre, Agape Theatre Project and many

more has allowed him to showcase his talent of the dramatic arts to many audiences. Deandre takes great pride in promoting Black theatre and diverse stage plays. His goal for more diverse and inclusive theatre venues and programs has led him to his non-profit theatre organization founded in 2024: "Cacao Drama Organization."



PHILLIP SOLANO (Principal Welch/TV Announcer) is excited to be making his return to Raleigh Little Theatre as Principal Welch. He has spent the past few months strengthening his acting skills, attending classes at Raleigh Little Theatre. Most recently, Phillip worked with RLT as Sheriff Buster in their production of *Misery*. Outside of the theatre, Phillip is

an elementary school teacher and loves playing games in his spare time. Phillip would like to thank his friends and family for their support, with special thanks to Kathryn for her guidance, love, and inspiration.



LILLY ZONRUITER (Mohawk Girl/Air Speller) is a high school student who has recently decided to try exploring more of her interests. As someone who loves reading and watching movies, she decided theatre was a good way to start. In 5th and 6th grade she was in drama club, but she felt uncomfortable performing in front of others. Now she's decided to get out of her

comfort zone to help her feel more confident in the future and have some fun!

Production Team

Biographies

MONÈT NOELLE MARSHALL (Director) is a playwright, director, producer and the Powells Lane Elementary School Spelling Bee Champ of 1999. As Founding Artistic Director of MOJOAA Performing Arts Company, she amplifies Black playwrights and creates bold, immersive works like *Escape to Freedom*. With a passion for storytelling that connects, challenges, and inspires, Monèt invites audiences to engage deeply with the world and themselves. Learn more about her work at MonetIsArt.com.

SONYA LEIGH DRUM (Scenic Designer) is a theatrical designer and arts educator based in Raleigh. For the past 25 years, Sonya has designed scenery for universities and theatre companies big and small. Recent regional collaborators include: The Duke Department of Theater Studies, Meredith College Theatre, RedBird Theatre Company, and Theatre Raleigh. Sonya is pleased to be working once again with Raleigh Little Theatre. *Akeelah* will be her 8th production design at RLT. When not designing, Sonya works as a Magnet Visual Arts Specialist for the WCPSS.

ELSPETH MCCLANAHAN (Costume Designer) is thrilled to be working again at Raleigh Little Theatre. Some of her RLT credits include *Nate the Great*, *What We're Up Against*, *Into the Woods*, *Antigone*, *She Kills Monsters*, *Elephant and Piggie*, *Misery*, most recently *All Smiles* and *Doubt*. She received her bachelor's in Theatre from Radford University. Her other credits include *Hair*, *La Cage aux Folles*, *Grease*, *Will Rogers' Follies*, *Tommy*, *West Side Story*, *42nd Street*, and *Freakshow*. Special thanks to her family.

ERIN BELL (Lighting Designer) is a theatrical lighting designer and event photographer based in Durham, NC. Lighting credits include *Indigo Blue*, *The Durham Nutcracker*, *A Christmas Carol: What the Dickens!?* (Walltown Children's Theatre), *Momversations*, *Dance Nation* (National Women's Theatre Festival), *Peerless*, *Garbologists*, *Single Black Female* (Bulldog Ensemble), *Motherworld* (Monèt Marshall), *Infinite Infant* (Miki Zhu), *Choreolab 2023* (Duke Dance Department), *Coming Back for Me* (Cary Playwrights' Forum), *Harold & Maude* (Theatre in the Park), *Again, but this time with feeling and could be worse* (real.live.people). Upcoming shows include *What We Leave Behind* (Theatre Raleigh).

JOHN MARUCA (Sound Designer) is a sound designer and audio engineer from Raleigh, North Carolina. He has been working with Raleigh Little Theatre for over 10 years and is very excited to continue work with this current season.

DOC PRICE (Props Designer) is pleased to serve as the Props Designer for *Akeelah and the Bee*. He has contributed to several productions this season, most recently as Assistant Stage Manager for *Doubt*. A long time member of the Central Florida theatre community, Doc's involvement began in childhood and continued through college. He studied at Daytona State College and gained hands-on experience as a member of the run crew and scene shop assistant at Seaside Music Theatre in Daytona Beach. After a long hiatus, he is excited to return to the theatre, helping bring compelling stories to life.

LINDSAY F. NYMAN (Stage Manager) returned to the Raleigh area after graduating from Appalachian State University in 2023 with a BA in Technical Theatre Design and Production. While at App State, her focus shifted from scenic design and construction to stage management after falling in love with all of the moving parts that make up the coordinated chaos of a production. For the last 18 years, Lindsay has been heavily involved with the sport of competition jump rope. Though no longer actively competing, she volunteers a majority of her spare time as the Production Director for the American Jump Rope Federation where she spends her time developing the sport and planning/executing national tournaments. She finds that as the AMJRF Production Director she can combine her love for stage management and the sport of jump rope together to create a strategically run tournament heavily based on the foundation of theatrical stage management. When not in rehearsal for a show or planning for a jump rope tournament, you can find Lindsay on the water at Jordan Lake or curled up watching a movie with her two standard poodles, Midnight and Meeko. Lindsay is excited to be involved with her second production here at RLT and looks forward to many more in the future.

DARBY E. MADEWELL (Projections Engineer) (she/they) is thrilled to be working with Raleigh Little Theatre again after having done lighting and projection design for the 40th annual production of *Cinderella*. This is Darby's 13th show with RLT, including lighting design for *Hands on a Hardbody* and projection design for *Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. When she isn't backstage, Darby is completing their master's degree in computer engineering at NC State University. Thanks to all of the RLT volunteers for everything that you do!

Production Team

Biographies

RAYDEN LEEDER (Dramaturg) is excited to be back at Raleigh Little Theatre for another show! Recent production credits include *Cinderella 40* (Dramaturg), *I and You* (Director), and *Lynn Nottage's Sweat* (Asst. Director/Dramaturg). Rayden would like to thank all the cast and crew for all the love put into this show to make it so magnificent!

LAUREN MONTANA (Assistant Stage Manager) is thrilled to be back on headset for another amazing show at Raleigh Little Theatre! She's recently worked on crews for *Cinderella 40* and *Doubt*, as well as crews and SM teams for various productions at her alma mater, New York University. After an extensive break from the theater, she couldn't have asked for a better place to land than here in Raleigh, and she can't wait to keep working with such an incredible group of artists!

KRISTINA BRUNELLE is an Organizational Strategist, guiding leaders and teams to greater effectiveness through purposeful discussions and activities that foster strong interpersonal connections. Her work helps smooth out the challenges that often arise in fast-paced, high-stakes environments while cultivating a stronger sense of community. By night, she's an avid theatre-goer, likely seated in a row near you. Grateful for this incredible cast and crew—here's to a truly spectacular performance. On with the show! IG: kbbrunelle

CHERYL L. WEST (Author) plays include: *Something Happened in Our Town*, *Last Stop on Market Street*, *Akeelah & the Bee*, *Mwindo*, *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy*, *Addy: American Girl Story*, and *Pullman Porter Blues*. Her plays have been seen in England, Off-Broadway, on Broadway (Play On!) and in numerous regional theaters around the country. She has written TV and film projects at Disney, Paramount, MTV Films, Showtime, TNT, HBO, CBS and is the Webby-nominated writer for the original web series *Diary of a Single Mom*. Ms. West is the recipient of several awards: American Alliance For Theatre & Education (AATE) Distinguished Play Award (2016), the 2016 Charlotte B. Chorpenning Playwright Award, the Helen Hayes/Charles McArthur award for outstanding new play, the Susan Smith Blackburn prize, an international playwriting award for distinguished new plays, the National Endowment Playwriting Award and the Beverly Hills/Hollywood NAACP Best Playwright Award. As said by The L Magazine, "Cheryl L. West writes plays that often trump those of master playwright August Wilson - not only meticulous neo-realist slices of African-American life, but dense, ethereal explorations of language and the inner regions of her character's souls. They are vigorously expressionistic, and yet remain grounded, entertaining theater."

Connecting People With the Arts

The City of Raleigh Arts Commission nurtures creativity and enriches our community by championing the arts in Raleigh:

- Partnering with local cultural organizations
- Supporting arts programming
- Advocating for arts investment
- Presenting art exhibitions, public art and special events

Vinculando al Pueblo con las Artes




La Comisión de Artes de la Ciudad de Raleigh sustenta la creatividad y enriquece a nuestra comunidad, favoreciendo las artes en Raleigh por medio de:

- La asociación con organizaciones culturales locales
- El apoyo de la programación de las artes
- El fomento de la inversión en el arte
- La presentación de exposiciones artísticas, arte público y eventos especiales

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Raleigh Little Theatre

Staff Biographies

MICHELE WEATHERS (Executive Producer) (she/her/hers) Previously: Executive Director and Senior Advisor at Carolina Ballet (2017-2023), Managing Director at PlayMakers Repertory Company (2014-2016), Managing Director at Barrington Stage Company (Pittsfield, MA) and North Carolina Theatre (1991-2004). NY credits include: *In the Heights*, *High Fidelity*, *Orson's Shadow*, and *Red Light Winter*. In 2019, she was recognized with TBJ's Women in Business Leadership Award and, in 2024, she was a member of the inaugural group of award winners for Raleigh Magazine's Impact 50. DEI training: artEquity and Emerging Equity. Michele is a member of the League of Professional Theatre Women and is a Theatre grant panelist for the NEA. Her daughter, Peyton Rose, is a senior at Enloe High School. Meredith College grad. She is incredibly proud of RLT's place in this community.

DENNIS R. BERFIELD (Production Manager/Technical Director) is from South Williamsport, Pennsylvania. He received degrees in Theater and Communication Studies at the Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania, and a Masters of Fine Arts in Scenic Design and Technology at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Dennis has worked at various regional and off-Broadway theaters as a Scenic Artist, Carpenter, Master Carpenter, Scenic Designer, Assistant Technical Director, and Scenic Coordinator. After working professionally for a number of years, Dennis became an adjunct professor at Millikin University in Decatur, IL, and went on to become the Technical Director at the University of Scranton in Pennsylvania.

TERRA HODGE (Director of Education) (she/her) is the Director of Education at Raleigh Little Theatre. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Theatre Education from North Carolina Central University and her Master of Arts degree in Media Arts from Long Island University, Brooklyn Campus. Prior to joining RLT, Terra was the Theatre Arts teacher at Culbreth Middle School in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. She was named the 2017-2018 Culbreth Teacher of the Year and was named an Honor Teacher for Chapel Hill – Carrboro City Schools. Terra has worked as a teaching artist, actor, and director with many local theatre companies. She is the director of Agape Theatre Project's production of *Crowns* that was featured at the 2024 International Black Theatre Festival in Winston Salem, NC.

JENNY MITCHELL (Costume Shop Manager) is the Costume Shop Manager here at Raleigh Little Theatre. She is thankful to have such a dedicated group of volunteers and co-workers to work with on this, and every, production. Her most recent credits include: *Something Rotten!*, *Kinky Boots*, *Trouble in Mind*, *Curtains*, and *Junie B. Jones Is Not A Crook*.

MEGAN FARRELL (Marketing Manager) joined the Raleigh Little Theatre team in August 2019. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration with a concentration in Marketing from North Carolina State University. Megan grew up a theater kid and loves getting to "play" on the admin side of the performing arts now as an adult. When she's not at the theatre, Megan is likely cheering on the Dodgers, watching horror movies, or going on adventures with her tiny best friend Emmie.

ALI WOOD (Assistant Technical Director) could be found both on-stage and backstage while she was growing up. From skits her grandfather wrote for church to performing at the local community theatre, Ali was always involved. However, during her college years, she found lighting and swapped over to the dark side. After graduating, Ali worked as an Entertainment Stage Technician for Walt Disney World and now she continues her career as the Assistant Technical Director here at Raleigh Little Theatre where she hopes to continue spreading the love and joy of theatre with everyone she meets.

DENISE SCHUMAKER (Associate Costume Shop Manager) first worked with Raleigh Little Theatre in 1994 as a volunteer on costumes for *Oliver!* Since then, she has designed, built, organized, and supervised costumes, props and sets for local theatre, dance, and opera, plus off-Broadway, tours, film, and television. In addition to RLT, you may have seen her work on stage at North Carolina Theatre, North Carolina Opera, Theatre in the Park, Theatre Raleigh, Peace University, NCSU, Duke University, Barton College, Honest Pint Theatre Company, RedBird Theater Company, Justice Theatre Project, or elsewhere. She was honored with an Emmy® nomination in 2010.

Raleigh Little Theatre Staff Biographies

KIRAN BAUCOM (Development Manager) was born and raised in Durham and is so happy to be back home working in the Triangle's thriving arts scene. She received a Bachelor of Arts in American Studies from Yale University, where she held various roles in campus theatre, film, comedy, and performance poetry spaces. As Development Manager, Kiran draws on her varied experiences in arts administration, grant management, and nonprofit fundraising. She looks forward to every opportunity to support the work of her brilliant coworkers and form ever-deeper connections with the entire RLT community.

SAWYER SHAFER (Box Office and Front of House Supervisor) is a graduate of Wright State University's Theatre Studies program. Prior to moving to North Carolina in 2021, he spent five years as the Founder and Producing Artistic Director of Sansami Creative Works, LLC. in West Liberty, Ohio, an endeavor for which he received an Arthur Vining Davis Entrepreneurship Award in 2015. In his free time, he can be found writing (and rewriting) scripts, obsessing over soccer or professional wrestling, and hanging out with his fiancée Allison and their Siberian Husky, Luna.

CANDACE SPENCER (Education Programs Specialist) is an accomplished African American theatre professional passionate about nurturing young artists. She holds a BA in Theatre from Greensboro College and an MFA in Theatre Performance from the University of Louisville. Candace has expanded her artistic perspective through a six-month study abroad program in London, where she explored theatre and dance. While pursuing her MFA, Candace gained four years of experience teaching introductory acting classes to undergraduates, and she developed on-camera acting skills during her undergraduate studies. She is skilled in drama instruction, on-stage and on-camera acting, and stage directing. Her dedication to youth development is not only evident in her teaching experience, but also in her work with young artists at a summer camp in Los Angeles, California. Candace's diverse training, experience, and love for theatre make her an invaluable asset to the RLT Education team.

EMMA CLEMENTS (Jack Hall Scholar) is a local director and producer. They are very excited to be joining the RLT team for the 2024-2025 season as the Jack Hall Scholar! They recently graduated from UNC-CH, where they held several student leadership and production roles, including Executive Director of Production for Pauper Players' 2022-2023 season. Emma also serves as the Artistic Director for Boy With Box Theatre Company, a new small-budget theatre company in Chapel Hill.

MAGGIE GINA (Administrative Intern) is currently a sophomore at NC State majoring in Business Administration with a double minor in arts entrepreneurship and music performance. Since she first picked up a trumpet at age 9, she was immediately drawn to a world of music and creativity, helping her realize she needed the arts to be forever a part of her life! Maggie is very excited to be a part of RLT and is grateful for the chance to gain real-world experience in marketing/administration and see first hand what it means to bring a performance to life. When not in the theater, Maggie can usually be found spending time with friends and family, studying, or in and out of practice rooms.

YOU'RE INVITED TO
RALEIGH LITTLE THEATRE'S

Backstage
NIGHT

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 26
7:00 - 9:00 PM

Come out to RLT's Backstage Night for a tour of the theatre and information on volunteering in the costume shop, scene shop, front of house, and more! Refreshments will be served.

Visit RaleighLittleTheatre.org for more information.

Program Notes

Spelling is one of the first things we are taught as children in elementary school. It is the foundation of writing and the backbone of literature. I'm sure much like Akeelah's classmates, many of us dreaded the spelling bee; having to go up in front of our class and spell increasingly difficult words. While the task was daunting to us as children and likely still even now, we can understand the importance of spelling. And for young kids like Akeelah, the spelling bee can teach us so much more.

The Scripps National Spelling Bee, also known as just "The National Spelling Bee" was founded by The E. W. Scripps Company in 1925. The spelling bee has always been held as a not for profit event that celebrates the achievement of spelling. The National Spelling Bee has been running every year since it started in 1925, only missing the bee 3 times; 1943–1945 due to World War II and 2020 due to COVID. While it is held in the US and the main participants are from America, people from other countries come to participate in this event. Some of these countries include Canada, China, Mexico, and Nigeria. The National Spelling Bee is the longest running and largest event made to promote education in the US. The goal of the spelling bee is to encourage children to engage in the art of spelling and help enlarge their vocabularies and widen their knowledge of the English language.

Akeelah's story shows us a third important effect of spelling bees: how it can help build your confidence! Akeelah begins the story embarrassed and ashamed of her skill in spelling, not having any belief in herself that she could ever find passion or success in something like spelling. It is through the help of her friends and family that Akeelah rises up to the challenge of not only facing the bee, but also facing her own insecurities and rising above. Akeelah grows throughout the story to be proud of her abilities and confident in her identity. She grows to know herself and understand that she doesn't need to win to show her talent, and she doesn't need to do things alone to prove she is the best. Akeelah is only able to find this inner strength through learning the importance of community and knowing she has a support system behind her cheering her through her successes and lifting her up from her low points.

Akeelah teaches us not only the way spelling bees can help us grow in knowledge, but also in character. Spelling helps us learn the foundations of language and writing, while also teaching us how to speak loud and proud. No matter where you place in the spelling bee, you can trust in yourself and your abilities, knowing even if you fall, those you love will be there to pick you up.



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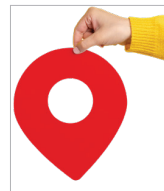
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