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Museum of Contemporary Art
Chicago
Dec 19–20, 2015

Tsukasa Taiko
Legacy 12

Copresented with Asian Improv aRts Midwest

Directed and produced by Tatsu Aoki

Shamisen
Grandmaster Chizuru Kineya

Shakuhachi/bamboo flute
Grandmaster Kizan Kawamura

Taiko
SHINTA

Hand drum
Takane Umeya

Woodwinds
Douglas R. Ewart

Taiko and dance
Melody Takata and Gen Ensemble

Costume design
Fujima Ryu of Chicago

TSUKASA TAIKO
GINTENKAI UNIT

Eigen Aoki*
Kioto Aoki
Miyumi Aoki
Justin Mark*
Kiyomi Negi
Kenji Negi
Koji Negi
Noriko Sugiyama
Jun Takanarita
Mark Aburano-Meister
Neil Ducklow
Koki James
Morgan Mican
Kenji Muhlhall
Colin Wong*

*alumnus

PRODUCTION
Lenora Lee (Asian Improv aRts SF)
Joan Ambo (Fujima Ryu of Chicago)
Yukiko Aoki
Joyce Ashizawa-Yee (GenRyu Arts SF)
Steven Ducklow
Gail Itokazu
Jane Mulhall
Rika Sato-James
Joanne Kiyoko Tohei
Bradley Yee (GenRyu Arts SF)
Kay Kawaguchi (Fujima Ryu of Chicago)
Cameron Hadley (GenRyu Arts SF)
Kenjo Wong (Asian Improv aRts SF)

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Executive Producer and Artistic Director
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Tsukasa Taiko at JASC (Japan American Service Committee)
4427 North Clark Street
Chicago, IL 60640
773-275-0097
taikolegacy.com

Generous support for MCA Dance is provided by David Herro and Jay Franke.
Tsukasa Taiko is a program of Asian Improv aRts Midwest and the Japanese American Service Committee of Chicago and is supported in part by the Illinois Arts Council, the MacArthur Fund for Arts and Culture at the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation, the Alphawood Foundation, Corbett, Duncan & Hubly PC, the JCCC Foundation, and the Joyce Foundation.

Special thanks to Asian Improv aRts (SF), Kay Kawaguchi and Michael Tanimura of the Japanese American Service Committee, Michael Takada, Ken Carl, Joyce Jeng and Asian Social Network, Lauren Deutsch and the Jazz Institute of Chicago, Fujima Ryu of Chicago, Asian Improv Records Inc. and AOYA-MSD Inc., Irene Cualoping, Noriko and Kenichi Sugiyama, Takako Kimura, Murasaki Sake Lounge, and Koh and Yumi Fujimoto for their in-kind services and contributions.
The creeds “We can only contribute” and “Keep on playing what needs to be played” from my spiritual mentors Yasujiro Ohayashi and Fred Anderson continue. We are at the last corner to reach our twentieth-year anniversary—the nineteenth year of Tsukasa Taiko and the twelfth edition of Taiko Legacy.

I am not sure exactly when . . . but at some point in recent history, in the last four decades of taiko culture’s popularity, many of our colleagues forgot a few important basics: the music, being Japanese, and the virtue of Japanese cultural aesthetics.

It can be difficult to think beyond the spectacular vision of the powerful taiko drum ensemble. But the educational essence of our cultural art form requires that we deepen the investigation. Japanese-ness has to be embedded in the presentation. I believe, in spite of the evolution of modern Japan, we can recover and reclaim Japanese-ness faster than the lost musical concepts of taiko culture. As a member of the Japanese and Asian community, I’ve made it my goal and mission to preserve and transmit these core concepts for the generations to come.

The North American taiko tradition’s growth and establishment has seen a rise in performances emphasizing rhythms and pattern-oriented maneuvers over subtler nuances. The prevailing style is high energy power drumming using a very rapid technique, at the expense of playing more musical numbers. The potential remains for taiko’s popular form to deeply explore its cultural and artistic legacy. Prying a new domain out of the traditional shell is a natural part of the evolution. The distortion of formal ideas in order to advance the genre is good and, in fact, a key essence of the individual creative impulse. Yet, attention needs to be paid to the whole of the parts or we risk losing the core aesthetics.

How can we offer a higher level of artistic experience? How can we present something grand while remaining closely associated with the Japanese core value? How can we be truthful to the new while being honest to music? How can we offer music that demonstrates the pride of our legacy? How far can I direct our youth and community members into an artistic journey that provides a sense of achievement and pride via taiko? These challenges are difficult but we take them on with gratitude.

If we can do the music right, the next step is to reinforce the old and develop the new. We begin the journey in the rigorous traditions, travelling a road of dynamic, elastic reinvention, to reach what, I believe, can transform our culture of tradition into one of transcendence.

The youth of the Asian American communities and their parents are in motion; they are the true connection to the future. We want all those involved to own the pride and happiness of this artistic experience—community relies on the joy of being a part of art as a living necessity. Let’s play the living traditional music of our community. I invite you to the true cultural legacy.

Tatsu Aoki
Executive Producer
and Artistic Director
Tsukasa Taiko
MCA Stage’s series of artist-centered talks, workshops, and open studios engages the public with the artists in intimate settings and provides a closer look at the creative process. Join us today.

MCA SCREEN
Tatsu Aoki, formalism, structuralism, and reduction

On December 15, Tatsu Aoki, who has been creating experimental films for more than thirty years, introduced selections from his lesser-seen 16 mm films and presented the Chicago premiere of his digital work Pages. Jonathan Chen, on electronics, and Jamie Kempkers, on cello, accompanied the screenings, creating a live soundscape and improvised music. The sum of Aoki’s massive filmography is an abstract visual journey of space and time that creates a singular world of waiting and pursuing. His body of minimalist and structuralist films gives shape to his belief in a spiritual paradise that is serene and simple yet full of change and chance.

**Shape** (1996)
9 minutes, 16 mm

Aoki says about the film: “Shape has to do with the shape [that] is fixed . . . and the other shape, which moves, like the lights, water, and shadow. Once again, I try to prove in my filmmaking, as in my experimental performance work, that it is impossible to see ‘nothing happening’ in our view of life. Everything is happening: the traveling light of the projector, grains of the film, dust, patterns, movement, etc. Shape takes one of the simplest shooting angles to show the most complex moments of our daily life.”

**Hallway** (1985)
9 minutes, 16 mm

In this work, Aoki applies his approach to music performance to the building up of meditative space as layered images of real life, in real time. He says about creating the film “I was able to do a good rendition of this concept with live sound and music but having quite difficult time identifying the visual experience with this idea of ‘building up.’ Hallway expresses the concept using the architecture of my hallway and experimenting with multiple exposure of lights, space, and time.”

**Waiting Room** (1985)
14 minutes, 16 mm

In a generic waiting room setting, with the camera relocated only a few times, daylight fades and the reflection on the glass door entrance becomes increasingly grainy, until “we are no longer inside, nor have we passed entirely through the door to the outside world; instead we are left to inhabit another space—the room inside the Waiting Room.” For Aiko, the expressive film is “an aesthetic about waiting. The value of precious moments is inherent to my upbringing. This is one of the most Japanese films I have made.”

**Gate** (2009)
22 minutes, digital print

A study of structure, moving space, time, and pictures, this cinematic collage with photography depicts the raised train tracks of downtown Chicago. It locates beauty in functional architecture and in the durational experience of viewing moving pictures.

**Pages** (2015)
16 minutes, digital print

Aoki’s newest digital work, Pages, which premiered this October at the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, was created in collaboration with taiko musician Melody Takata, dance grandmaster Shunojo Fujima, saxophonist Francis Wong, and taiko player Kioto Aoki. It was initially a live performance and was inspired by the 1926 film A Page of Madness, directed by Teinosuke Kinugasa and based on the book by Nobel Prize-winning author Yasunari Kawabata (1899–1972). Audacious in vision and powerfully filmed, A Page of Madness is the story of a retired sailor who takes a job as a janitor in a lunatic asylum to look after his insane wife, who was locked away after attempting to drown their child. Aoki’s digital homage is a meditation on the emergence of Japanese modernist and experimentalist art movements.
ABOUT THE WORK

PRESHOW

“HANA HACHIJO”

Hachijo island, off the coast of Honshu (mainland) near Tokyo, was once notorious for being home to exiled criminals in the seventeenth century. Years later, the community on the island flourished, and the island would eventually become a recreation site for mainlanders. The drumming styles developed on Hachijo Island are varied and distinct. In this version, both song and dance speak to the beauty of the island and its people. Dance arrangement by Melody Takata.

“184 (I YA YO)”

This is one of two titles intended as a pun. The original composition was premiered in a summer festival of a Tokyo district in 1976. The title and the piece itself express defiance against pattern-oriented compositions. The listener is teased by a deceivingly rhythmic melody, not with the anticipated conclusion of the musical line but with the arrangement finishing in an unexpected way. The pronunciation of numbers “one-eight-four” in Japanese (I Ya Yo) is also a colloquial way of saying “I don’t like it” or “I don’t want to.”

“KURURI”

“Ku-ru-ri” is an onomatopoeic phrase that means spin. Ku-ru-ri also represents a particular playing method or routine for small taiko in ozashiki (chamber) music. The musicality stems from the piece’s original part in a shamisen composition. Tsukasa Taiko’s version modernizes the score for a more hyperdynamic performance incorporating small taiko. Previous performances, by a small ensemble, have challenged drummers to coordinate precise phrases and execute them together. This year the ensemble is augmented, increasing the difficulty of synchronicity while keeping the musicality at the center and supported by the technique (we hope).

“SHIBUYA”

This composition for odaiko (large drum) is in tribute to the flamboyant fellow, Mr. Shibuya, who worked on many of our stage props in Tokyo. It was written after observing and emulating how the straitlaced, traditionally minded, and perhaps slightly neurotic prop guy walked around the set, completing never-ending tasks. Typically the odaiko is not used for conveying subtle expressions of music, yet here we use it to the utmost extent for enhancing our humorous intent.

“YANAGIMACHI DELUXE”

The diagonal setting of the drums is inspired by Kabuki dance and became a formal part of Tokyo drumming since the beginning of the kumi-daiko (ensemble taiko) era. This is the enhanced version of one of the signature pieces of the Gintenkai cultural troupe from the late 1970s. Its late leader Yasujiro Ohayashi believed in dancing the taiko rather than hitting it, in order to play the music. The important concept of the piece is that the choreography is the essence of the rhythmic structure rather than the physicality of hitting the drum.

“SUJI”

The setting for this work is a forest. The unfolding of orchestral concept links the music to the landscape, as it underscores the drum’s central role to create sound and body movement. The term suji can refer both to a literal ligament connection as well as the energies required to maintain a bond, whether it be through custom, tradition, or art.

“4183 (YO I YA SA)”

The second piece with a pun-based title—pronounced Yo I Ya Sa in Japanese—is performed with an enthusiastic shout that embodies the phrase’s spirit. The song upholds the flow of the composition by utilizing dance movements, keeping the integrity of the music by avoiding rigid, command-driven motions.

“DEAL – SHINTA & EIGEN”

As is the tradition of Taiko Legacy, the joy of polyrhythmic application of taiko drumming will not be forgotten. The duet performance is musically grounded and compositionally wired, while completely open as an experience of creative music.

“DOSANKO (WILD HORSE)”

The original composition was created and performed by Dosanko Taiko in Hokkaido, Japan. Hide Yoshihashi inherited this piece for Tsukasa Taiko in 2001, and it has become one of the signature songs of Chicago taiko culture.
WHAT IS TAIKO?

Often used in Japan to refer to any kind of drum, taiko is recognized across the world for its highly stylized, choreographed performances that produce a thunderous sound. Rooted in a 2000-year history of Japanese court, theater, and ceremonial, folk, and festival music, taiko was originally performed in multi-instrument ensembles before undergoing a major evolution in the mid-twentieth-century with the emergence of all-drum ensembles. This new style, kumi-daiko, which roughly translates to “drum collection,” has since enjoyed wide popularity, particularly in the United States, where it has become a celebrated symbol of cultural heritage for the Japanese American community.

In 1998, Tatsu Aoki first fused taiko and visual art with an expanded solo improvisation concert at MCA Stage. The performance featured Aoki on double bass, taiko master John Sagami, Paul Kim on buk (Korean drum), and a slide montage of suminagashi (the ancient Asian technique of painting on water) works by artist Amy Lee Segami. Aoki’s debut of Taiko Legacy at MCA Stage in 2003 was part of US-JAPAN 150, commemorating the 150th anniversary of modern American-Japanese relations, and the first and largest taiko concert of its kind. For the eleventh anniversary of Taiko Legacy, and its ninth copresentation with MCA Stage, Tsukasa Taiko continues its expansion of the form by combining solo and large taiko ensemble performance with traditional court music, jazz improvisation, and traditional and contemporary pan-Asian dance.
ABOUT
THE ARTISTS

EIGEN AOKI
started his taiko career at age four on the stage of the Japan American Service Committee’s annual Holiday Delight. He joined Tsukasa Taiko as a teen, eventually becoming a soloist in Gintenkai, the national unit of Tsukasa Taiko’s advanced players. He has shared the stage as soloist with Mwata Bowden, Nicole Mitchell, Dohee Lee, Hamid Drake, Michael Zerang, and others, with appearances at Chicago Jazz Festival, Taste of Chicago, the Dusable Museum of African American History, and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago.

In 1977, Aoki left Tokyo to study experimental filmmaking at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he is an adjunct Full Professor in the Film, Video, and New Media Department and teaches film production and history. He also is a visiting professor at Northwestern University. He has produced more than thirty experimental films and is one of the most in-demand performers of bass, shamisen, and taiko, having contributed more than ninety recording projects and touring internationally during the last twenty-five years. Aoki is Founder and Artistic Director of Chicago Asian American Jazz Festival, which observed its twentieth year in 2015. Named President of San Francisco–based Asian Improv Records (AIR) in 1999, he has managed or produced more than forty AIR albums, notably the Max Roach and Jon Jang collaboration The Beijing Trio, and several projects in the hip-hop and Asian Pacific American arts arenas, including film screenings and concert series. Aoki was named one of 2001’s “Chicagoans of the year” by the Chicago Tribune for his music and has performed with music masters such as Roscoe Mitchell, Don Moye, pipa virtuoso Wu Man, and the late Chicago legend Fred Anderson. Aoki’s ROOTED: Origins of Now, a four-movement suite for big band, premiered in 2001 at Ping Tom Memorial Park, and was performed at the Chicago Jazz Festival and at MCA Stage as part of Chicago Asian American Jazz Festival. Additional notable releases include Basser Live (1999) and Basser Live II (2005), recorded live at the MCA; The MIYUMI Project (2000); Symphony of Two Cities (2002); and Posture of Reality (2003) with Wu Man. The Asian American Institute awarded Aoki the Milestone Award in 2007 for his contribution to Chicago-area arts, and in 2010, he received the Japan America Society of Chicago’s Cultural Achievement Award as well as a 3Arts Artist Award. He received the Living in our Culture award from the Japanese American Service Committee in 2014 and Jazz Heroes Award from the National Jazz Journalist Association in 2015.

DOUGLAS R. EWART
is a composer, multi-instrumentalist, instrument builder, and visual artist. He was born in Kingston, Jamaica, and as a child experimented with the material, texture, and sound of objects around him. Ewart emigrated to the United States in 1993 and entered the School of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) in 1967 as a student of Shaku Joseph Jarman and Roscoe Mitchell. In 1983, he founded his own recording label, Arawak Records, and has since released two of his albums, Red Hills and Bamboo Forest. His constantly evolving suite, Music from the Bamboo Forest, comprises six movements and uses numerous instruments, many of them handmade, such as bass and alto flutes, shakuhachi, panpipe, and nay flutes, blocks, bells, gongs, and bamboo.

Ewart has served as the Chair of the AACM multiple times between 1986 and 2009, and he regularly travels as lecturer, teacher, and workshop leader throughout the United States, Europe, and Japan. He has been received at the Contemporary Art Center (New Orleans, LA), the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, the Field Museum of Natural History (Chicago, IL), the Dusable Museum of African American History (Chicago, IL), Urban Gateways (Chicago, IL), the Creative Music Studio (Woodstock, NY), the Museum of Contemporary Craft (New York, NY), the Langston Hughes Center (New York, NY), the University of Illinois (Champaign, IL), Norfolk State University, the Riverside Museum (Baton Rouge, LA), the Washington Performing Arts Center, and the National Museum of American History (Washington, DC). He has led many ensembles including Douglas Ewart and Inventions, Clarinet Choir, Nyhablingi Drum Choir, Quadrasect, and
Elements. Ewart has performed with a number of musicians including Muhal Richard Abrams, Fred Anderson, Anthony Braxton, Anthony Davis, Robert Dick, Ameen Muhammad, Von Freeman, George Lewis, Leo Smith, Cecil Taylor, Alvin Curran, Kahil El Zabar, Joseph Jarman, Kalaparush, Roscoe Mitchell, and Mwata Bowden.

GRANDMASTER SHUNOJO FUJIMA received his natori (professional performance name) at a young age, which is a major milestone for a practitioner of the Japanese cultural arts. He went on to open his own school of classical dance in Tokyo and frequently traveled to the United States on tour with his dance troupe. He now permanently resides in Chicago, and for the past thirty-seven years, he has directed his own dance group. In 2013, he received the Japanese Foreign Minister’s Commendation Award for his ongoing work promoting Japanese culture in the US through teaching and performing Japanese classical dance. In addition to the annual recitals, Fujima and his dancers perform for various civic and cultural groups, colleges, universities, and various festivals in and around Chicago and the Midwest.

YOSHINOJO FUJIMA is a Chicago native who has studied Japanese classical dance for the last twenty-four years. In 2006, as a member of the Fujima Ryu of Chicago dance troupe, she received her natori. She continues to train with Shunojo Fujima Sensei, Founder and Director of Fujima Ryu of Chicago, to attain her shihan (teaching license), and develops her artistry working with Asian Improv aRts Midwest and Toyoaki Shamisen. She has performed in collaborations with Tatsu Aoki, Tsukasa Taiko, Bellisima Productions, and Yoko Noge’s Japanesque.

KIZAN KAWAMURA is a one of the rising young grandmasters of contemporary Japanese classical music. Born into a traditional Shakuhachi (bamboo flute) family, he started his formal practice at an early age under acclaimed grand master Taizan Kawamura. He was a winner of the Kumamoto Japanese classical music competition and was awarded by the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in 2009. From contemporary new music to the traditional, Kizan collaborates with many different artists internationally.

CHIZURU KINEYA is a nagauta shamisen artist, a master of the instrument accredited by the legendary Kineya Shamisen family. Her studies began at the age of six, and she now performs with numerous contemporary classical musicians in regular engagements at the National Theater of Japan and in the mainstream Japanese music and performing arts scene. In addition, she leads educational workshops to share the 400-year-long history of the shamisen tradition. Her US debut with the Chicago Asian American Jazz Festival in 2011 marked her first collaboration with Chicago blues musicians. Kineya has regularly collaborated with Tatsu Aoki and GenRyu Arts in San Francisco since her first Taiko Legacy engagement in 2005. Her 2012 Tokyo Shamisen CD project, Toyoakimoto, features Aoki and Melody Takata. She premiered a major Geisha musical theater project in May 2015 in Tokyo, following a preview performance presented by the San Francisco Asian Art Museum in April.

SHINTA was born and raised in Hokkaido, Japan, where he started studying taiko at the age of ten in the local neighborhood Taiko group. At eighteen, he joined as a trainee of the KODO Taiko group and toured nationally with the ensemble for three years. In 2006, he started performing original solo work in Hokkaido, with highlight engagements, including at the World Volleyball Cup opening ceremony, the first Hideyo Noguchi Africa Prize ceremony, the 150th anniversary of US/Japan opening of the Yokohama Port, and the Shanghai Expo.

MELODY TAKATA grew up in the Los Angeles area and has been performing in the traditional arts for more than twenty-five years. She is the founder and director of GenRyu Arts, established in 1995 as Gen Taiko and incorporated in 2008. She completed the ACTA master apprentice program for shamisen with Hideko Nakajima Sensei in 2003 and, in celebration of Gen Taiko’s tenth anniversary, the ACTA master apprentice program for shamisen with Hideko Nakajima Sensei in 2003 and, in celebration of Gen Taiko’s tenth anniversary, the ACTA master apprentice program for shamisen with Hideko Nakajima Sensei in 2003 and, in celebration of Gen Taiko’s tenth anniversary, the ACTA master apprentice program for shamisen with Hideko Nakajima Sensei in 2003 and, in celebration of Gen Taiko’s tenth anniversary, the ACTA master apprentice program for shamisen. Takata has been one of the most significant collaborators on Tsukasa Taiko’s national expansion program. Her original music releases include the 2014 CD Shadow to Shadow and her latest project, Pages.

TAKANE UMEYA is a certified performer from the traditional Umeya clan and active in Nagauta, a form of Japanese classical music used in Kabuki, the theater.
genre with origins in the dramatic dance of the early seventeenth-century Tokugawa shogunate. Originally performed by all-female ensembles, Kabuki gained popularity for its eroticism among the lower-class population before being banned and changed to all-male ensembles. Kabuki re-emerged in the early Meiji period and today is performed frequently in theaters and on television. *Nagauta* was incorporated into Kabuki theater in the eighteenth century and is still performed by an ensemble utilizing traditional Japanese instrumentation, with shamisen as the main instrument accompanied by *taiko* drum, *ōtsuzumi* hip drum, *kotsuzumi* shoulder drum, and *nokan* flute. Umeya is among only a handful of certified classical players in Japan today and in high demand as a Kabuki house musician. She performs frequently in classical and festival music concerts, and collaborates with contemporary musicians and media artists.

**TSUKASA TAIKO**

began as Tsukasa Daiko and was founded in 1996 by Hide Yoshihashi in conjunction with Japanese classical dance grandmaster Wakayagi Shiyu. Yoshihashi collaborated with Asian Improv aRts Midwest’s executive director Tatsu Aoki to expand the organization, and in 2004 Tsukasa Taiko became the resident ensemble of the Japanese American Service Committee (JASC). In 2005, Tsukasa Taiko launched the division Toyoaki Shamisen to revive the traditional musical relationship between the shamisen and *taiko*, taking an innovative step toward a more comprehensive *taiko* music experience. Its repertoire is unique in the United States for merging *kumi-daiko* (ensemble *taiko*) with other forms of Japanese folk and classical music, and employing shamisen as well as *shinobue* (flute). Tsukasa Taiko performs a broad range of musical styles, including *ozashiki* (geisha chamber music), *minyo* (folk music), and *ohayashi* (classical/folk/theater music) styles, and represents many Japanese musical traditions that are now rarely practiced.

Its lead role in the preservation, presentation, and advancement of Japanese arts is recognized internationally, with notable performances at Tokyo’s Bunka Shutter Hall, the Poland/Malta International Theatre Festival, the Smithsonian Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, and San Francisco’s Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. Tsukasa Taiko has been a feature at the Asian American Jazz Festival, Chicago Jazz Festival, Chicago World Music Festival, Symphony Center, and the Harris Theater. Tsukasa Taiko also offers classes, workshops, lectures, and demonstrations throughout the year for students of all experience levels as part of its dedication to strengthening Chicago’s Japanese American and Asian American communities, and using the arts to deepen the community’s understanding of its heritage and cultural legacy.

**Blair Thomas & Co.**

*Mar 31–Apr 3 at MCA Stage*

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Tickets at mcachicago.org
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Chicago

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Chicago, IL 60611

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To inquire about a lost item, call the museum at 312-280-2660. Unclaimed articles are held for thirty days.

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Patrons are seated at the management’s discretion. Food and open beverage containers are not allowed in the seating area.

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mcastage@mcachicago.org

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Isabel Dieppa, Coordinator
Richard Norwood, Theater Production Manager
Amanda L. Block, Intern
Udita Upadhyaya, Intern

HOUSE MANAGEMENT
Kevin Brown, Associate
Phill Cabeen, Associate
Quinlan Kirchner, Associate

BOX OFFICE
Matti Allison, Manager
Phongtorn Phongluantum, Assistant Manager
Molly Laemle, Coordinator
Stephanie Branco, Associate
Wright Gatewood, Associate
Laura Volkening, Associate
Julia Kriegel, Associate
Diandra Miller, Associate
Eric Shoemaker, Associate

Program notes compiled by Yolanda Cesta Cursach