



presents the Chicago premiere of

# ***What We're Up Against***

**By Theresa Rebeck**

**Directed by Lauren Shouse**

*What We're Up Against* is presented by  
special arrangement with SAMUEL FRENCH INC.

*What We're Up Against* is produced by Compass Theatre  
and performed on the West Stage in the Raven Theatre Complex.

## CAST IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

Stu.....Charlie Strater  
Ben.....Ted James\*  
Eliza..... Echaka Agba  
Janice .....Denise Hoeflich\*  
Weber ..... Jeff Kurycz  
Understudy Stu .....Charles Rasmussen  
Understudy Ben & Weber .....Pierce Ducker  
Understudy Eliza..... Shawnita Grant  
Understudy Janice ..... Hanna Williams

Directed by **Lauren Shouse**  
Scenic Design by **Lauren Nigri**  
Costume Design by **Izumi Inaba**  
Lighting Design by **Becca Jeffords**  
Sound Design by **Kevin O'Donnell**  
Props & Production Managed by **Robert Salazar**  
Technical Direction by **Manuel Ortiz**  
Stage Managed by **Caitlin Body\***  
Assistant Stage Managed by **Lizzy Mable-Leigh**  
Assistant Directed by **Sophie Hamm**  
Master Electrician **Carley Walker**  
Scenic Painter **Abbie Reed**  
Front of House **Emma Gibson**



\*Member of Actors Equity Association, The Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers

## ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

Theresa Rebeck is a prolific and widely produced playwright, whose work can be seen and read throughout the United States and abroad. Last fall, her fourth Broadway play, *Bernhardt/Hamlet*, premiered as part of the Roundabout Theatre Company's 2018-19 season, making Rebeck the most Broadway-produced female playwright of our time. Other Broadway productions of her work include *Dead Accounts* (starring Katie Holmes); *Seminar* (starring Alan Rickman); *Mauritius* (starring F. Murray Abraham).

In television, Rebeck created the NBC showbiz drama "Smash," and has written for "Canterbury's Law," "LA Law," "NYPD Blue," "Law & Order: Criminal Intent," "Dream On," "Brooklyn Bridge," and many more.

Originally from Cincinnati, Rebeck holds an MFA in Playwriting and a PhD. in Victorian Melodrama, both from Brandeis University. She lives in Brooklyn with her husband and two children.

## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

"This is what we're up against" is a line in Theresa Rebeck's searing comedy spoken between two men about their new "challenging" female colleague. We have heard so many similar words being uttered by men in positions of authority about women who are made to believe that by speaking their truth, they are committing a nefarious attack. How many women today are perceived as defying the system when they ask to be equally heard and believed?

Rebeck's play is set in 1992 in an architecture firm that is a microcosm of many of the misogynistic systems that are still in place today. The men at the top get to decide when and how much the women will work. They tokenize women on projects and characterize them as hostile or hysterical if they present a perceived problem. There is an unwritten code for how a woman is supposed to behave: keep her opinions to herself, don't show off, be a gracious team player and never question authority. And anyone who does not comply is a trouble maker.

This story follows Eliza, a skilled and ambitious architect who subverts the system with the hope of exposing bias in her workplace. While not a story specifically about sexual harassment, it is a story about how a woman is mocked, belittled, ostracized for just trying to do her job. And not just by men - Eliza expects an ally in the other female identifying architect in the office, but is quick to learn that the system has shaped women to keep other women down as well. And while Eliza is not a perfect hero, we rally behind her ability to fight back instead of being shut out.

I know so many women, myself included, who have felt this kind of workplace discrimination at some point in our careers. I have been ignored in a room full of men. I have been thought to be emotional and not up to the same challenge as a male colleague. And some of my experiences have led me to make myself small to fit in. I have too often kept quiet instead of speaking out against an injustice. If I have learned nothing from recent political events, I have learned that I cannot and will not remain silent in the face of inequality and discrimination.

I wish I could say this play is a hilarious period piece and shows us how far we have come, but it feels more relevant and necessary than ever. Rebeck comedically illuminates an ugly part of a system that has been designed to elevate those that comply to the unwritten code of conduct. I hope this story will inspire all of us who feel like we are angrily shouting into the void. Because we can take that anger and come together to rebuild this system into something that works for us all.

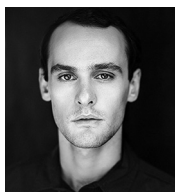
—Lauren Shouse

## CAST BIOGRAPHIES



**Elchaka Agba – Eliza**  
Chicago theatre credits include: *Women Laughing Alone with Salad* (Theater Wit); *At the Table* (Jeff Award - Best Ensemble, Best

Supporting Actress; Black Theatre Alliance Award - Best Supporting Actress) *Broken Nose Theatre*; *The Crucible, Between Riverside and Crazy* (U/S Steppenwolf; *Short Shakes! Romeo and Juliet* (Chicago Shakespeare); *A Comedical Tragedy for Mister Punch, United Flight 232* (Jeff Award - Best Ensemble) The House Theatre of Chicago; *Don't Go Gentle* (Haven); *Balm in Gilead* (Griffin). TV/Film credits include *The Red Line* (CBS), *Chicago Med* (NBC), *The Resentful Angel, Actress*, and *Cheap Plastic Mask* (Bloodstained Film Fest - Best Actress). She is a graduate of The School at Steppenwolf and is represented by Grossman and Jack Talent.



**Pierce Ducker – u/s Weber/Ben**

Pierce graduated from Adelphi University with a B.F.A in acting in May. He moved to Chicago in September to begin

his career and is honored to be a part of such an exciting project. He would like to thank his family, his girlfriend Emma, and a special thank you to Robert Salazar.



**Shawntia Grant – u/s Eliza**

Shawntia a Washington DC Native moved to Chicago in 2012 to pursue her acting career. After graduating from

Chicago State University, with a degree in Communications, Media, Arts and Theater, Shawntia landed a lead role in *Lissette Dances Divine*, and *Blue Island in the Red Sea* and is currently Directing a production

titled *Soul in Suburbia* with Collaboraction Theater Company. Shawntia is very excited to be the under study of Eliza, and will be looking forward to gracing the stage.



**Denise Hoeflich\* – Janice \***

Denise was last seen in *A Great Migration*, a staged reading at Silk Road Rising. Other recent theatre credits

include *Hinter* (Steep Theatre), *Chagrin Falls, Skin For Skin* (Agency Theatre Collective) *The Seedbed* (Redtwist) and *Dreams of the Penny Gods* (Halcyon Theatre). Web/film credits include *The Haven* (Mia McCullough, Elisabeth Laidlaw producers) and *We Are Nothing* (WeTheArtists producers). Next up is the role of Sandra in the Chicago Premiere of *Reap the Grove* at Artemisia. Denise is a graduate of The Academy at Blackbox Acting and represented by BMG Talent. Thanks to Lauren for her vision and grateful to Adam for all of his support!



**Ted James\* – Ben**

Ted is thrilled to be a part of this Chicago premiere! Recent stage credits include *The School for Lies* (Clitander) at The Artistic Home;

*The Wild Duck* (Greggers), *Diana of Dobson's* (Jabez), and *Dreams of the Penny Gods* (Bobby) at Halcyon Theatre, where he was previously an ensemble member. Recent screen credits include *Heath Takes a Trip* and *The Holdouts*. As a director, his latest film *Lemonade* premiered at the Chicago International Film Festival. Ted wishes to thank Lauren for her incredible vision and support throughout this production.

## CAST BIOGRAPHIES CONT.



**Jeff Kurysz – Webber**

Jeff is so thrilled to be working on this production with Compass Theatre! Other Chicago credits include: *Support Group for Men*

(Goodman Theatre); *33 to Nothing* (A Red Orchid Theatre); *The Legend of Georgia McBride* (Northlight Theatre) *Shakespeare in Love* (Chicago Shakespeare Theatre) *Year of the Rooster, R+J: The Vineyard* (Red Theater); *Romeo and Juliet* (Teatro Vista); *Zurich* (Steep Theatre); *One Came Home* (Lifeline Theatre); *All My Sons* (Eclectic Theatre Co.); *Amadeus* (Boho Theatre); Regional credits include: *Richard III, Twelfth Night* and *The Tempest* (Arkansas Shakespeare Theatre). Television credits include *Crisis* (NBC); *Chicago Fire* (NBC); *Proven Innocent* (FOX). He is a graduate of The School at Steppenwolf.



**Charles Rasmussen – u/s stu**

Charles is thrilled to be part of *What We're Up Against*. He has been in the arts since he could hold a crayon

and has been performing since he learned to talk. He balances a career in advertising with his life as an actor and a visual artist. Some of his acting credits include: Theatre - *Lettie* (U/S, Victory Gardens), *Half and Half* (U/S, Metropolis Performing Arts Center), *12 Angry Men* (Madison Street Theatre), *Six Degrees of Separation* (Eclectic Full Contact Theatre), *Bang Bang You're Dead* (Passion Theatre), *The Karaoke Artist, Nana's Choice* (Gorilla Tango), *Fighting Neverland* (Second City), *What We Think Is Funny: Electric Lunchbox* (iO Chicago), *Happy Karaoke Fun Time* (The Annoyance), *Handsome and Beautiful* (Underground Lounge), Film - *Dhoom 3, Marbles, You Bet, Captive, Communicators, What About Chrissy, Practically Married.*



**Charlie Strater – Stu**

Charlie is a multi-instrumentalist, painter and actor. He was recently seen on stage playing mandolin and electric bass guitar in the

Paramount Theatre (Aurora) production of *Once*. Recent TV credits include *Chicago Fire* and *Chicago P.D.* Charlie is a graduate of Northwestern University's School of Theatre/Communications.



**Hannah Williams – u/s Janice**

Hannah is so excited to be a part of Compass Theatre's inaugural production! Hannah has also worked with

many other theatre companies in the Chicagoland area including The Right Brain Project, Citadel Theatre, Big Noise Theatre, Ghostlight Theatre Ensemble, 20% Theatre, Prop Thtr Group, Waltzing Mechanics and Oil Lamp Theatre. For more information about Hannah's work you can visit: [www.hannahwilliams.org](http://www.hannahwilliams.org). She is proudly represented by Actors Talent Group.

## PRODUCTION BIOGRAPHIES

### **Caitlin Body – Stage Manager \***

Caitlin is excited to be working with Compass Theatre for the first time! She is a graduate of The Theatre School at DePaul University with her BFA in Theater Arts. She has stage managed *For Her as a Piano* with Pegasus Theater, *Wild Duck* with Halcyon Theater, *Forgotten Future*, *Sketchbook*, *Gender Breakdown*, *Connected*, *Encounter*, *Blue Island*, and *Peacebook* with Collaboration, *Julia De Burgos: Child of Water* with Urban Theatre Company, *Pen the Musical* with Chicago Musical Theatre Festival. She was the production manager for a short film *Heath Takes A Trip*. Caitlin would like to give a huge shout out to her family and friends for being so supportive.

### **Emma Gibson – Front of House**

Emma is thrilled to be a part of the inaugural production for Compass Theatre. A recent graduate of Smith College, Emma moved to Chicago in September, after working as the box office manager at Chester Theatre Company in the Berkshires, to pursue her acting career.

### **Sophie Hamm – Assistant director**

Sophie is a Chicago based playwright and director. She recently received her BA in Theatre from Loyola University Chicago where she had the opportunity to direct a production of *25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, and perform in their productions of *Tintypes* and *Cabaret*. Her writing has been presented in readings at Loyola, Victory Gardens College Night, and Asterisk Arts Collective. Thank you bunches to Lauren for this awesome opportunity!!!

### **Izumi Inaba – Costume**

Izumi is so grateful to join this team. Chicago: Goodman, Steppenwolf, Court, Victory Gardens, Writers, Northlight, Remy Bumppo, Wit, Gift, A Red Orchid, The Second City, House, Hypocrites, Lifeline, Steep, Sideshow, Haven, Griffin, and many more. Regional: Milwaukee

Rep, Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, Baltimore Center Stage, Kirk Douglas Theatre. Awards and exhibitions: Michael Maggio Emerging Designer Award, Jeff Awards, USITT and Prague Quadrennial. Izumi is a resident designer at Albany Park Theater Project. M.F.A. in Stage Design, Northwestern University.

### **Becca Jeffords – Lighting Designer**

Becca is thrilled to be working on *What We're Up Against* with the team. She received her MFA in Lighting Design from Northwestern University and graduated from Columbus State University Summa Cum Laude in Production Design. Some recent Chicago designs include: *Southern Gothic* (The Windy City Playhouse), *The Walls of Harrow House* (Rough House Theatre); *Zurich* and *The Few* (Steep Theatre); *Neverwhere*, *Bunnica*, *Arnie the Donut*, *Sparky!* and *Soon I will be Invincible* (Lifeline); *The Temperamentals* and *The Pride* (About Face Theatre), and *A Snowy Day with Beatrix Potter* (Chicago Children's Theatre). For more information, visit [www.beccajeffords.com](http://www.beccajeffords.com).

### **Lizzy Mable-Leigh – Assistant SM**

Lizzy is a genderqueer Chicago storyteller, actor, director, and improviser hailing Murfreesboro, TN. They have had the immense fortune to study with Black Box: The Academy, Theatre Unspeakable, The Annoyance Theatre, and The Second City. Lizzy is very grateful to be surrounded by such passionate people to grow as an artist with. They have performed at venues across Chicago and write non-stop.

### **Lauren Nigri – Scenic Designer**

Lauren is a Chicago based designer and Northwestern MFA Graduate in Stage Design. Recent design credits include: *Curve of Departure* (Northlight Theatre); *A Midsummer Nights Dream* (Chicago Shakespeare Theater); *Hint*, *The Few* (Steep Theater); *Nice Girl*, *Betrayal* (Raven

## PRODUCTION BIOGRAPHIES CONT.

Theatre); *Souvenirs* (Milwaukee Repertory Theater); *The Scorpion Sting* (Lyric Opera/Lyric Unlimited); *Sleeping Beauty* (Marriott Theater); *Adding Machine*, *A Musical* (The Hypocrites); *Violet* (Griffin Theater); *Harrow House* (Rough House); . Recent associate designs include: *The Steadfast Tin Solider* (Lookingglass); *Beauty Queen of Leenane* (Northlight Theatre) and *Southern Gothic* (Windy City Playhouse). She was awarded as one of ten design exhibitors chosen for the United States at the 2015 Prague Quadrennial. [laurenigri.carbonmade.com](http://laurenigri.carbonmade.com)

### **Kevin O'Donnell – Sound**

Kevin is very happy to be working Compass Theatre, and with director Lauren Shouse again, after having worked on her productions of *The Legend of Georgia McBride* (Northlight Theatre) and *Betrayal* (Raven Theatre). Recent credits include the New Orleans productions of *A Christmas Carol* (Le Petite Theatre) and *MacBeth* (New Orleans Shakespeare Festival); *Of Mice and Men* (Kansas City Rep); *Vietgone* (Writers Theatre); *Frederick* (Chicago Childrens Theatre); and *Pirates of Penzance* (Olney Theatre Center). He is also a drummer.

### **Manuel Ortiz – Technical Director**

Manuel (he/him/his) is a Chicago native actor, carpenter, designer and photographer. He received his BFA in Acting at DePaul University. When he is not building and/or performing on stage,

you can find him at home joyfully playing with all 15 of his animal friends (yes, he has pictures). As an artist, he has devoted himself to many artistic mediums such as puppeteering, makeup, lighting, and more. Working in such a prodigiously diverse community of captivating artists, Manny has grown and hopes to continue to collaborate and cultivate a community of inclusion and ardent passion of theater in a new in hopes to one day operate a Theater and education training grounds/facility for all ages.

### **Abbie Reed – Scenic Painter**

Abigail is a Scenic Painter, Designer, and Draftsperson in the Chicagoland area. Abigail attended Oberlin College ('15) with a degree in Scenic Design. Recent credits include *A New Brain* (Theo Ubique) *The Ben Hecht Show* (Grippe Stage Co.) *Pippin* (Desert Foothills Theater, Arizona). Abigail designs and builds escape rooms for Mobile Room Escape and works in the scenic department for several theaters, most often including Writer's Theater in Glencoe and The House Theater of Chicago.

### **Robert Salazar – Production Manager and Props Designer**

Robert is a proudly active member across several of Chicago's creative scenes. For the stage, Robert toured the country acting in *Los Secretos de Santa Monica*, directed *Displayed* at The New Colony,

and creative produced *Good Evening with Pat Whalen*. For the screen, Robert has written scripts for several Fortune 500 companies, production designed many commercials and directed a handful of shorts and music videos. As a musician, Robert plays clubs around town in rock trio *Boo Baby*. He is currently the senior creative producer at Family Bridges/Lazos de Familia, developing bilingual educational entertainment. He'd like to thank Compass Theater for including him on the team that breaks the bottle on the boat. ¡Ándale!



**Lauren Shouse – Director**

Lauren Shouse is a freelance director and the Associate Artistic director at Northlight Theatre. Her recent

directing credits include: *The Cake* at Rivendell Theatre (Jeff nomination for Best Director), *The Legend of Georgia McBride* at Northlight Theatre, *Nice Girl* and *Betrayal* at Raven Theatre; *Avenue Q*, *Rapture*, *Blister*, *Burn*, *Superior Donuts*, and *A Christmas Story* at Nashville Repertory Theatre, the world premiere of *Long Way Down* with 3Ps productions; the world premiere of *Religion and Rubber Ducks* with Ovvio Arte; *Parallel*

*Lives*, *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, *The Last Five Years* and *Chess in Concert* with Street Theatre Company; the world premiere of *Rear Widow* at Chaffin's Barn Theatre, and *Sylvia Plath's 3 Women*. She received her MFA in theatre directing at Northwestern University where she directed *Stop Kiss*, *Eurydice* and *In the Next Room or the Vibrator Play*. In Chicago, Lauren has also worked with Steppenwolf Theatre, Goodman Theatre, Lookingglass Theatre, Sideshow Theatre, Route 66, The Gift, Chicago Dramatists, and Stage Left Theatre. [www.laurensousedirects.com](http://www.laurensousedirects.com)

**Carley Walker – Master Electrician**

Carley is a freelance lighting designer and electrician in the Chicagoland area. She graduated with a BFA from the University of Oklahoma in 2014. She moved to Chicago in 2016 and has enjoyed exploring a wealth of opportunities in this amazing city. Her most recent design credits include *The Snow Queen*, *The Uncorker of Ocean Bottles* and *FORTS* with Filament Theatre, *Bridges of Madison County* with BrightSide Theatre, and *Peacebook* with Collaboraction. She is very excited to be working on her first show with Compass Theatre.