

**BURNING  
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# KIDSWRITE!

## 2025

# FESTIVAL

7 plays by youth  
playwrights  
produced by  
professional  
theatre artists

**Directed by Susan Gross**  
**May 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, 2025**  
**7:00pm**

Residence INN  
RALEIGH  
DOWNTOWN



North Carolina  
Arts Council  
City of Raleigh



Raleigh  
Arts

THE SHUBERT  
FOUNDATION INC.



Burning Coal is supported by the United Arts Wake County as well as the N.C. Arts Council, a division of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources.

Burning Coal is supported in part by the City of Raleigh through a grant from the Raleigh Arts Commission.

Burning Coal is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit

# Festival Selections :

## ***What's In A Name?***

by Noah Howard  
(9th Grade, Willow Springs High School)

## ***The Ballad of a Music Duo and Fairies***

by Caroline Grace Zyla  
(9th Grade, Homeschool)

## ***Orpheus: A Mediation***

by Taite Capes  
(10th Grade, Millbrook High School)

## ***Phoebe Can't Know***

by Valeria Torres  
(11th Grade, Knightdale High School)

## ***Gumrunners***

by Riley Barricklow, Drew Bryan, Benjamin Chamblee,  
Thomas Dierks, Jack Mulley, and Grace Neuman  
(8th Grade, Franklin Academy)

## ***Titanium Lovers***

by Sheila Aswathi  
(11th Grade, Millbrook High School)

## ***Ribbing***

by Abigail Zwhalen  
(11th Grade, Seaforth High School)

# A Note from the Director

It takes a lot of courage to begin writing a play, to let your thoughts take on a story that you hope will find an audience. I applaud each and every playwright for taking that step, of not only writing the play, but submitting it in the hopes that it will connect with someone who will bring your vision to life.

It's been my absolute privilege to work with these talented young playwrights. Each one bringing a unique storytelling to the stage that will make you laugh, tear at your heart or give you hope in this often perplexing world we live in today.

Many thanks to Jerome Davis for giving me this opportunity and my amazing cast and crew. I would be lost without you. It is such a joy to work with you in bringing these stories to life. Thank you for taking the time to attend this performance and for supporting theatre.

-Susan Gross, May 2025

# Act 1

## ***What's in a Name?***

by Noah Howard (9th grade, Willow Springs High School)

Preston Campbell.....	Stage Manager
Addison Florio.....	Antonia
Luca Lemelle.....	Stan
Henry Luftman.....	Ernest
Collins Wilson.....	Noah

## ***The Ballad of a Music Duo and Fairies***

by Caroline Grace Zyla (9th grade, Homeschool)

Preston Campbell.....	Jax
Addison Florio.....	Cassie
Katie Milligan.....	Violet
Lemony Wood.....	Liam

## ***Orpheus: A Meditation***

by Taite Capes (10th grade, Millbrook High School)

Cori Ann Holder.....	Eurydice
Luca Lemelle.....	Orpheus
Bobby Kaufman.....	Hades
Katie Milligan.....	Persephone

## ***Phoebe Can't Know***

by Valeria Torres (11th grade, Knightdale High School)

Jacob Berger.....	Evan
Addison Florio.....	Avery
Cori Ann Holder.....	Phoebe
Collins Wilson.....	Aaron
Lemony Wood.....	Mom

# Act 2

## ***Gumrunners***

by Riley Barricklow, Drew Bryan, Benjamin Chamblee, Thomas Dierks, Jack Mulley, and Grace Neuman (8th grade, Franklin Academy)

Addison Florio.....	Winter
Cori Ann Holder.....	Penelope
Luca Lemelle.....	Eugene
Bobby Kaufman.....	Superintendent Bryan, Student 1, Student 2
Collins Wilson.....	Sonny
Lemony Wood.....	Vito

## ***Titanium Lovers***

by Sheila Awasthi (11th grade, Millbrook High School)

Addison Florio.....	Eve
Cori Ann Holder.....	Galatea
Katie Milligan.....	Amara
Collins Wilson.....	Adam

## ***Ribbing***

by Abigail Zwhalen (11th grade, Seaforth High School)

Jacob Berger.....	Edward
Katie Milligan.....	Sophie

# Production Team

**Brenda Bailey** (Assistant Stage Manager) is enjoying being a part of another Burning Coal Theatre Production supporting *KidsWrite!* 2025. This is Brenda's third production as assistant stage manager with Burning Coal, previously supporting the shows: *Being Chaka* and *Rainmaker* earlier this season. When not behind the scenes, Brenda can also be seen on stage in productions such as Bob Marley's: *Three Little Birds* and *Bright Star* with Pure Life Theater, *Doubt* with Magnolia Arts Center, and *Crisis of Moments* in partnership with North Carolina Central and Duke University. Outside of theater, Brenda can be seen performing live music and hosting poetry events throughout the Triangle.

**Christopher Barefoot** (Assistant Stage Manager/Board Op) has dabbled in local theatre since 1999, when he was dragged into it kicking and screaming by his partner, Adam (Stage Manager). In that time, he has been involved with a number of productions doing anything from selling concessions to ushering to Assistant Stage Managing. His last theatre work was on Burning Coal Theatre's production of *The Cherry Orchard* where he worked as the Assistant Stage Manager and Board Operator.

**Adam Budlong** (Stage Manager). For Burning Coal: *The Cherry Orchard*, *The Normal Heart*, *The Heretic*, *Man of La Mancha*, *St. Nicholas*, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, *Inherit the Wind*, *A New War*, *Accidental Death of An Anarchist*, *Waiting for Godot*, *Juno and the Paycock*, *Tartuffe*, *The Mound Builders*, *Company*, *The Weir*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Adam has been involved with Burning Coal Theatre since 1999. By day, Adam plays with computer software for a local analytics company.

**Bri Flynn** (Properties Design). For Burning Coal Theatre: *Moonlight*, *Haughey/Gregory*, *The Rainmaker*, and *Being Chaka*. For Raleigh Little Theatre: *Curtains*, *Hands on a Hardbody*, and *Trouble In Mind*. Bri is a graduate of The Savannah College of Art and Design where she received a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Production Design. In addition, she has 10+ years of Film and Technical Theater experience. She is grateful to Burning Coal for giving her the opportunity to join the wonderful cast and crew of *KidsWrite!* 2025.

**Beth Gargan** (Costume Designer). For Burning Coal Theatre: 2025 *KidsWrite!* Festival, *Paint Me This House of Love*, *The Rainmaker*, 2024 *KidsWrite!* Festival, *Radio*, *A Home*, and *Arcadia*. For Justice Theater Project: *Violet*, *Matilda Jr.*, *26 Pebbles*, *12 Angry Jurors*, and *Annie Jr.* For S.T.A.R. Special Theatre Arts of Raleigh: *Rock of Ages*.

**Susan Gross** (Director) For *Burning Coal: Bringing Them Home* (The Oakwood Cemetery Plays); *Disaster at Lakeview*; *Regrets of Man* (KidsWrite! 2024). As an actor, Susan made her Off-Broadway debut in the New York premiere of Christopher Durang's *The Vietnamization of New Jersey*. In NYC she performed at Theatre Row, The Brick, Dixon Place, and Teatro LATEA. In Boston, Susan performed with Lyric Stage, New Repertory Theatre, W.H.A.T. and Greater Boston Stage Company. Susan performed her solo show *Ruby* as part of Burning Coal's Second Stage Series. *Ruby* received its premiere in New York with Tongue In Cheek Theater and was nominated for best performance, direction and production of a solo show at Planet Connections Theatre Festivity. She will be directing *Learning Curves*, a solo show by Jake Lipman, which will premiere this August at Burning Coal. She is a proud member of Actors' Equity, Dramatists Guild and SAG-AFTRA

**Barry Jaked** (Technical Director) is the Resident Technical Director and has been working as a Technical Director or Master Electrician for Burning Coal since 2011. Most recently for *Burning Coal: Copenhagen*, *The Rainmaker*, *Paint Me This House of Love*, *Being Chalka*, *Merrily We Roll Along*. If it needs to be built, plugs in and turns on he takes care of it. He would like to thank Jerry Davis for putting up with him for all these years.

**Amatullah King** (Assistant Stage Manager) is deeply grateful to the Burning Coal Theatre Company and KidsWrite! (special thanks to Jerry, Susan, Adam, Carry, the incredible cast, and the brilliant writers) for this opportunity. A proud native of New York City, Amatullah's theatre experience includes work with: Sullivan Street Players, East Village NYC (actor; writer); Find Your Voice, East Village NYC (actor; writer); Starfish Theatreworks, East Village NYC (actor; writer; teaching artist; dramaturg; administration and fundraising); Boo-Arts Productions/Manhattan Theatre Source, NYC (actor; ASM for *The House of Bernarda Alba* and ASM for *12 Angry Women*). She also studied at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, NYC (evening scene study; vocal training). Amatullah's original one-act plays have been staged at Lincoln Center's Clark Studio Theatre and Blue Heron Arts Center. In 2008, Amatullah who has strong familial ties to Raleigh, made North Carolina her permanent home to raise her son. In 2018, she participated in Lincoln Center's Summer Forum for Teaching Artists, where she workshopped themes related to race, monuments, and memory. She later presented the piece at UNC Chapel Hill's Institute of African American Research. Amatullah thanks her supportive family for encouraging her return to her second love, theatre. She counts her son, Elijah, as her greatest love and production.

**Thania Melendez** (Lighting Designer) is a recent graduate from the University of North Carolina School of the Arts, where she obtained a Bachelor of Fine Arts with a concentration in Lighting. She is working with Burning Coal Theatre for the first time, and is so excited that it is to help produce such fantastic stories by young playwrights. She will be attending the SPOLETO USA Festival before coming back in the near future to work with Burning Coal again and cannot wait to design more shows.

**Jeremy P. Miller** (Sound Design). For Burning Coal: *Ruby, Bringing Them Home* (The Oakwood Cemetery Plays). His sound design was also featured in the NY premiere of *Ruby with Tongue in Cheek* Theater. Upcoming: *Learning Curves* (Burning Coal premiere). Though new to theatre, he is a veteran of the video game industry and currently serves as a World Director at Electronic Arts. Originally from the UK, Jeremy earned BAFTA (British Academy of Film and Television Arts) membership through his years of work there.

**Meredith Riggan** (Scenic Charge Artist) is a North Carolina based artist and is excited to be returning to Burning Coal Theatre Company KidsWrite! productions. This is Meredith's 10th season painting for Burning Coal Theatre. After receiving her Bachelor's Degree in Scenic Art from the University of North Carolina School of the Arts, Meredith has worked as the Scenic Charge Artist at several theatres around North Carolina including William Peace University, Honest Pint Theatre, Sweet Tea Shakespeare, Triad Stage, City Arts-Greensboro Children's Theatre, The Winston Salem Theatre Alliance, ECU Loessin Playhouse, along with several freelance jobs such as painting for The International Festival and painting custom pet portraits and works of art.

**Carry Vaughan-Sprouse** (House Manager, Assistant Stage Manager) has been with Burning Coal Theatre since 2013 as their lead House Manager/Front of House Coordinator. She has also stage managed, assistant stage managed and assistant directed numerous productions in her time at Burning Coal. Her favorites are *The Heretic* (2013), *Iron Curtain Trilogy* - Raleigh and London Tours (2014), *Romeo and Juliet* (2015), *Dark Vanilla Jungle* - London Tour (2016), *The Normal Heart* (2018), *A Hundred Words for Snow* (2020), *I and You* (2021), *A Great Big Woolly Mammoth Thawing from the Ice* (2022), and *Radio* (2024).

**ColeTrain** (Shop Dog, "Paint Assistant") is excited to be a part of another production at Burning Coal Theatre. He has been "assisting" his Scenic Artist Mom in several theatres since he was 7 weeks old and is now a seasoned shop dog at 13 years. He has no formal training in Scenic Art, but he is great at supervising projects, looking cute, and tries to leave a paw print on every set. ColeTrain is a 10/10 good boy.



# Cast



**Jacob Berger** (Evan in *Phoebe Can't Know*, Edward in *Ribbing*) is an actor and model represented by Marilyn's Agency. He is very thankful to be joining Burning Coal's *KidsWrite!* after acting in Burning Coal's Mainstage (*Arcadia*), Oakwood (*Bringing Them Home*), and Second Series (*Ex-Boyfriends*). A huge shoutout to all our playwrights! You all gave us actors scripts that challenged us and gave us a fun time. You all have such an exciting future for your creative endeavors! To our audience, thank you for supporting theatre and enjoy these plays!

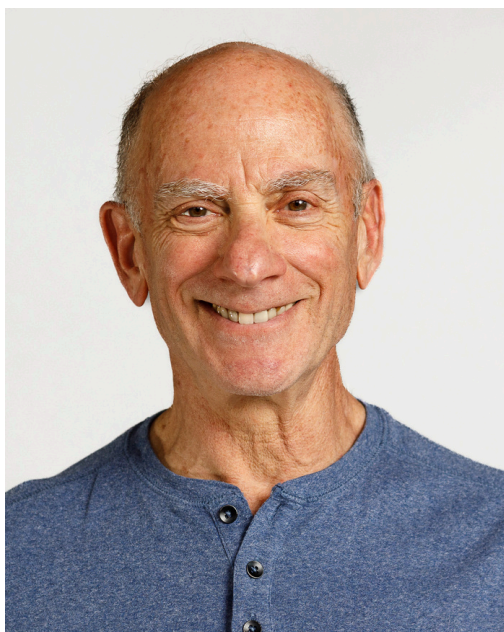
**Preston Campbell** (Stage Manager in *What's in a Name*, Jax in *The Ballad of a Music Duo and Fairies*) is honored to be returning to Burning Coal Theatre for this year's production of *KidsWrite!*. Preston was seen last year at Burning Coal in their productions of *Haughey/Gregory* and *The Rainmaker*. Other Burning Coal credits include: *The Royale*, *Art*, and *Mlima's Tale*.



**Addison Florio** (Antonia in *What's in a Name*, Eve in *Titanium Lovers*, Cassie in *The Ballad of the Music Duo and Fairies*, Winter in *Gumrunners*, Avery in *Phoebe Can't Know*) is enrolled at Cape Fear Community College studying the arts and film. This is Addison's third involvement with *KidsWrite!* and is excited to be back on stage! Addison has been involved in the arts from an early age both on stage, as well as stage management, production crew, design, and assistant directing. For Burning Coal: *Arcadia*, *Moonlight*, *Hymn*, *A Little Night Music*, *KidsWrite! 23/24*, *Copenhagen*, *The Rainmaker*, *Paint Me This House Of Love*, *Merrily We Roll Along*. Addison applauds the cast, crew, and playwrights for their hard work and would like to thank the audience for their support!

**Cori Ann Holder** (Eurydice in *Orpheus*, Phoebe in *Phoebe Can't Know*, Penelope in *Gumrunners*, Galatea in *Titanium Lovers*)

Cori Ann is a Durham, NC native with a B.M. in Musical Theatre Performance from UNC Pembroke. She is thrilled to be working with Burning Coal again but this time as an actor, and having the opportunity to share the stories of this year's *KidsWrite!*. She feels honored to be back on stage, especially with such a talented cast and crew! Love to her parents, brother, husband, and cats and their constant support. Credits: *Beauty and the Beast Jr.* (SM), *Silent Sky* (SM), *A Christmas Carol* (ASM), *Paint Me This House of Love* (ASM), and *Merrily We Roll Along* (ASM).



**Bobby Kaufman** (Hades in *Orpheus*, Student 1, Student 2, and Superintendent Bryan in *Gumrunners*). At Burning Coal: *1776*, *Awake and Sing*, *Evita*, *Galileo*, and last year's Oakwood Cemetery plays. He's performed with The North Carolina Theater 9 times, Theater in the Park 5 times, and with Raleigh Little Theatre, The Justice Theatre Project and Theatre Raleigh. He is grateful to be living in a city with such a great appreciation for the arts. As a playwright he was honored to be chosen as a finalist in the 2024 North Carolina Playwrights Lab. Bobby is very happy to be joining this fun group of actors for *KidsWrite! 2025!*

**Luca Lemelle** (Stan in *What's in a Name*, Eugene in *Gumrunners*, and Orpheus in *Orpheus*) is honored to be a part of *KidsWrite! 2025*, especially because it supports youth in theatre and writing! Luca is excited to be back with Burning Coal after acting in Oakwood (*Bringing Them Home*) this past September. He also trains and performs at Theatre Academy Productions (*Peter and the Starcatcher*, *Legally Blonde*, *Frozen*, and *Fiddler on the Roof*). Luca also works as a freelance voiceover artist. He would like to thank the entire cast + team who worked on *KidsWrite!*, TAP, and his very supportive family.



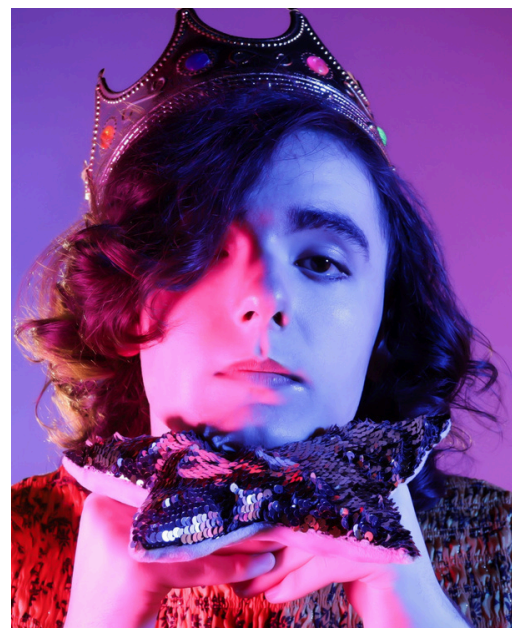


**Katie Milligan** (Sophie in *Ribbing*, Amara in *Titanium Lovers*, Violet in *The Ballad of the Music Duo and Fairies*, and Persephone in *Orpheus*). For Burning Coal Theatre: *Merrily We Roll Along* and *Ex-Boyfriends*. For OdysseyStage: *Ona*. For Sweet Tea Shakespeare: *Richard III* and *A Little Princess*. For North Raleigh Arts & Creative Theatre: *DOT*. For Virginia Samford Theatre: *Tartuffe*, *You Can't Take it with You*, and *The Taming of the Shrew*. Katie is a book lover, spine enthusiast, and all around theatre admirer. She thanks the cast, crew, production team, and her amazing director, Susan, for this experience.



**Collins Wilson** (Noah in *What's in a Name*, Aaron in *Phoebe Can't Know*, Sonny in *Gumrunners*, Adam in *Titanium Lovers*) is thrilled to be making his return to Burning Coal. He was last seen in *Butterfly Wings* (2023) at Oakwood. Collins has performed and directed in Pennsylvania, Virginia, and North Carolina. Favorite roles include Demetrius in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Sweet Tea Shakespeare), Charles Granville in *Arabella* (Scrap Paper Shakespeare), and Speed in *The Odd Couple* (Allenberry Playhouse). When not on stage, you can find him spending time with his dog Diamond or rereading *Lord of the Rings* for the umpteenth time.

**Lemony Wood** (Vito in *Gumrunners*, Liam in *Ballad*, Mom in *Phoebe Can't Know*) is a Raleigh based creative with various artistic pursuits, notably acting on stage, screen, and voicework. For Burning Coal: *The Tempest*, *Spoon River Anthology*, *Cats*, and *Matilda Jr, Bringing Them Home*. Lemony was previously one of the playwrights for *Kidswrite! 2022*, so to get the chance to come back to the show in a new way has been very exciting. She would like to thank her director Susan, as well as the Swiss surgeons and nurses who treated her after her sledding accident. Plus, an additional kudos to the entire cast and crew, as well as any of her friends who are here in the audience tonight.



# Playwrights



**Sheila Awasthi** (*Titanium Lovers*). Sheila is passionate about theater. She loves acting, writing, and attending plays and musicals. Reading is a favorite pastime of hers, which fuels her interest in the art of storytelling. Additionally, Sheila studies piano and voice. She is currently a junior at Millbrook High School.

**Riley Barricklow, Benjamin Chamblee, Thomas Dierks, Jack Mulley and Grace Neuman** (*Gumrunners*). Riley, Benjamin, Thomas, Jack, and Grace are 8th graders in the Franklin Academy Middle School Advanced Acting class. They have collectively worked on 17 productions. They have directed, designed, costumed, and performed this show in front of multiple live audiences. Thomas Dierks formulated the original idea and everyone built upon it. They all had a common goal to bring Thomas' idea to life.



**Taite Capes** (*Orpheus: A Meditation*). Taite is a 16 year old student and theatre maker living here in Raleigh, North Carolina. He is a big nerd and as his theatre teacher says: "the school dramaturg" Taite's interests range from theatre history, to playwriting, to directing and much more. Outside of theatre, Taite is an avid singer, participating in his school choir, and the North Carolina Master Chorale Youth Choir. He is currently a sophomore at Millbrook High School.



**Noah Howard** (*What's in a Name?*). Noah is a freshman at Willow Springs High School in Wake County. During his freshman year, he served as secretary for the WSHS International Thespian Society and had roles in *Clue Jr* and *Once Upon a Mattress*. Noah was honored to be selected for his second KidsWrite! Festival.



**Valeria Torres** (*Phoebe Can't Know*). Valeria Torres is 17 and a junior at Knightdale High School. She is an emerging playwright who enjoys telling stories in all forms. Her passions include reading—romance novels are my favorite—and creating stories that explore emotion and the challenges of growing up. Writing helps her express herself and connect with others, and she hopes to keep improving her voice through theater and literature.

**Abigail Zwhalen** (*Ribbing*). Abigail is a junior at Seaforth High School who thrives both on and off stage. Her recent performances include Countess Lily in *Anastasia* and an ensemble member for the 2025 DPAC Rising Stars Awards. Abby was the winner of NCYPF's 2024 Young Playwright contest with her play *A Touch of Love*, which she directed and took to NC Thesfest, where the performance received a superior rating. Her play *Magnum Opus* advanced to the final round of the International Thespian Festival 2025, where she will compete against playwrights from around the world. Abby would like to thank her family, friends, and Mrs. Horowitz-Andrews for always supporting her, and Burning Coal Theatre for this incredible opportunity.





**Caroline Zyla** (*The Ballad of a Music Duo and Fairies*). Caroline is fourteen years old and homeschooled. This is her third fully written script. She has a deep passion for writing and acting. Caroline loves Shakespeare. She wrote a modern interpretation of *Romeo and Juliet*, which she performed with a group of friends. She also enjoys writing a variety of stories that range from coming of age to fantasy. This is the first time Caroline has entered anything like this, so she is excited to share this play.

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