PLAYWRIGHTS' CENTER

RUTH EASTON NEW PLAY SERIES

THE OPTIMIZERS

by Katie Bender

The Barbara Field Library at Playwrights' Center honors one of our founders.

Bradley Bradleyson is a wellness guru with millions of followers. He preaches happiness through the neuroscience of physical and mental control. For three years he's also been in three different relationships with different women, all of whom believe him to be monogamous. This is a play about those women. *The Optimizers* is a farce about trying to have it all and what happens when it all falls apart.

PRODUCTION TEAM

Playwright	Katie Bender
Director	Pirronne Yousefzadeh†
Design Consultant	Sarah Bahr
Apprentice Stage Manager	Liv Pedersen
Technical Director	Peter Morrow
Lighting Designer	KD Deutsch Frost
Videographer	Caitlin Hammel
Sound Engineer	Rachel Brees
Workshop Producer	Nicole A. Watson
Associate Workshop Producer	Jared Zeigler
Artistic Assistant	Grace Whiting
Company Manager	Barry Inman

CAST

Stella	Taj Ruler
Krista	Sally Wingert*
Jenn	Katie Bradley*
Gwendolyn Taltrow	Jane Froiland*
Bradley Bradleyson/Others	Andrew Carlson*
Stage Directions	Sophina Saggau

*Appearing through an Agreement between this theater, Playwrights' Center, and Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

† Member, Stage Directors & Choreographers Society

ARTIST BIOS

Katie Bender (she/her/hers) (playwright) is a playwright, performer and theater maker. Her plays include *Judith*, *SHE WOLF*, *The Survivors/Los Sobrevivientes*, *Instructions for a Séance* and *Howling, Texas* to name a few. Filled with games, physical exertion and a poetic delight in the mundane, her work often examines the surprising ways humans transform within impossible systems. Katie's work has been developed and produced all over the country including at Hyde Park Theater, ZACH, The Alley, Shrewds, EST, Kitchen Dog, Playwrights' Center, LAUNCH PAD, Fusebox Festival, THT Rep, New Harmony Project, ACT Theatre, All For One Theater, Urbanite and Amphibian Stage. She is the co-creator of Underbelly, with whom she made ecstatic site-specific performances such as *Slip River* which received the Critics Table Award for Best New Comedy. Her play *Judith* received the B.Iden Payne award for Best New Script. Katie was a Jerome Fellow and is currently a Core Writer at The Playwrights Center. She received her M.F.A from The University of Texas.

ARTIST BIOS

Pirronne Yousefzadeh (director) is the proud daughter of Iranian immigrants, and serves as associate artistic director and director of artistic partnerships at Playwrights' Center. She is a director, writer, and educator with a passion for new work that centers and uplifts the stories of global majority communities with buoyancy and joy. Pirronne has developed and directed work at Playwrights Horizons, New York Theatre Workshop, The Public, Soho Rep, Ars Nova, The Kennedy Center, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Williamstown Theatre Festival, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Geffen Playhouse, La Jolla Playhouse, Cleveland Playhouse, Geva Theatre, Mixed Blood, and many more. She is a Usual Suspect at New York Theatre Workshop, New Georges Affiliated Artist, and a member of Ensemble Studio Theatre, and an alumna of the 2050 Fellowship at NYTW, Sagal Fellowship at Williamstown, SDC Denham Fellowship, Lincoln Center Directors Lab, Soho Rep Writer/Director Lab, and Drama League Directors Project. Pirronne was a finalist for the 2020 Zelda Fichandler Award from SDC and is a proud member of the union. M.F.A., Columbia University. Upcoming projects include *Kween* by Vichet Chum (Merrimack Repertory Theatre), *Blood and Milk* by Nikki Massoud (The Playwrights Realm).

ARTIST BIOS

Katie Bradley (Jenn) is an actor and director based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Select theater credits include: Guthrie Theater (*Murder on the Orient Express*, *Guys and Dolls*, *A Christmas Carol* - four seasons, *South Pacific*), Oregon Shakespeare Festival (*The Cocoanuts*, *Into the Woods*); Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts in Los Angeles (*Into the Woods* – OSF production), Pacific Conservatory Theater, Indiana Repertory Theatre, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, Children's Theatre Company, Ten Thousand Things, and History Theatre. Katie is also a long-time actor and director with Theater Mu.

Andrew Carlson (Bradley Bradleyson/Others) is an actor, dramaturg, and director who has worked with the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, Cleveland Playhouse, Children's Theatre of Charlotte, ZACH Theatre, Austin Shakespeare, American Records Company, and the Great River Shakespeare Festival. He has also participated in new play development with playwrights Steven Dietz, Aditi Kapil, Allison Gregory, Kirk Lynn, David Valdes, and Lisa Loomer. As a scholar, Andrew has published in *Theatre History Studies*, *The Routledge Companion to Dramaturgy*, and *American Theatre*. Andrew teaches at Carleton College where he serves as the chair of the Department of Theater and Dance.

Jane Froiland (Gwendolyn Taltrow) has worked and played at the Guthrie Theater, Children's Theatre, History Theatre, Park Square Theatre, Mixed Blood Theatre, Ten Thousand Things, Jungle Theater, Gremlin Theatre, Yellow Tree Theatre, and many others. She is thrilled to be able to work with so many amazing artists!

Taj Ruler (she/they) (Stella) is an actor, improviser, voiceover artist in the Twin Cities. Some of her stage experience includes Children's Theatre Company, Mixed Blood Theatre, Girl Friday Productions, Pillsbury House Theatre, and the Brave New Workshop. When she is not onstage, she is most likely laughing uncontrollably with her wife, hanging out with friends, and/or listening to an audiobook while putting together a puzzle.

ARTIST BIOS

Sophina Saggau (she/her) (stage directions) is a Minneapolis-based actor and alumna of the UMN/Guthrie Theater BFA Actor Training Program. She has worked locally with The Guthrie Theater, Children's Theatre Company, The Jungle Theater, Ten Thousand Things Theater, The Moving Company, Yellow Tree Theatre, Park Square Theatre and Walking Shadow Theatre Company. In the spring she will be making her Mixed Blood debut in *The Jungle*.

Sally Wingert (Krista) has been a part of the Twin Cities theater community for over 40 years. She has worked locally and nationally in theaters across the country, among them; the Guthrie, Mixed Blood, Ten Thousand Things, Theater Latté Da, Six Points, ART, McCarter, Yale Rep, The Alley, Asolo, London's West End and Broadway. Working on script development at the Center has been some of the most important and satisfying work she has done.

Sarah Bahr (she/her) (design consultant) is a Twin Cities-based costume and scenic designer. She has been working at Playwrights' Center as a design dramaturg since 2023. Her designs have been produced at the Jungle Theater, Minnesota Opera, Ten Thousand Things, Trademark Theater, History Theatre, Artistry, Theater Latté Da, Jacobs School of Music, BRKFST Dance Company, and Vail Dance Festival. Sarah was recognized by *American Theatre* magazine as a "Roll Call People to Watch: Twin Cities" in 2024 and was awarded a MN Theatre Award for Exceptional Overall Production for her Costume Design for *This Bitter Earth* at Penumbra Theatre in 2018. As a proud member of United Scenic Artists Local 829 Sarah is a Central Region Board Member and activist for equity for theatre designers and technicians. Sarah holds a Design and Technical Theatre MFA from the University of Minnesota and a Studio Art MA from New York University. Instagram:@sarahbahrdesign Website: sarahbahr.com

ARTIST BIOS

Rachel Brees (she/her) (sound engineer) is a Twin Cities-based sound designer and audio engineer. Her recent credits include Marketplace Morning Report, Minnesota Opera, Playwrights' Center, Ten Thousand Things, Open Eye Theatre, and Minnesota Public Radio. She also sound designs for the kids' podcasts *Brains On, Smash Boom Best*, and *Forever Ago*. She holds a BA in Theatre Arts and Music from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities.

KD Deutsch Frost (lighting designer) is a non-binary, first generation artist specializing in lighting and video for theaters around the Twin Cities. Their recent designs include *Physical Prizes* by Zoe Koenig, *Blood of the Earth* by Erika Martin, *CASTLES* by Kat Purcell at 825 Arts and the Avalon, and *Close to Home* by Sharifa Yazmeen at Pillsbury House + Theatre. They are the Video Supervisor at the Walker Art Center, as well as a programmer and stagehand around the Twin Cities. They may be found in a dark corner crocheting to pass the time.

Caitlin Hammel (videographer) has been a film professional for 19 years, working with artists from many disciplines on documentaries and shorts. She has created films for Ragamala Dance, Joe Chvala, Mary Ellen Childs, and the McKnight Solo Fellowship, amongst others. Her documentary and dance film work has been shown at screenings and film festivals nationally and internationally. She has collaborated to create projection design with nimbus theatre, Karla Grotting, Eclectic Edge Ensemble, and DA Dance, and is so glad to have the opportunity to film and edit these amazing new plays as they grow.

ARTIST BIOS

Peter Morrow (technical director) moved to the Twin Cities from Dublin, Ireland in 2012. He quickly found community and collaborators in the Twin Cities by stumbling into Bedlam shortly after he arrived, a community which has continued to grow and become a second home. Peter has designed, composed and collaborated with many companies, colleges, and amazing artists along the way including zAmya, Interact, Wonderlust, Full Circle, Red Eye Theater, Pillsbury House + Theatre, Stages Theatre Company, Exposed Brick, Mni Giizhik, New Arab American Theater, Theater Mu, Penumbra, New Native Theatre, Pangea, Playwrights' Center, Theater Latté Da, The Children's Theatre Company and The Guthrie Theater; Body Watani, BRKFST, Threads, Collide and Twin Cities Ballet; Ifrah Mansour, A.P. Looze, Akiko Ostlund, Diver Van Avery, Pedra Pepa and Asha Rowland. He performs his own music as well as playing with Carlisle Evans Peck, CB. and Theo Langason. Peter is a 2025-26 McKnight Theater Artist Fellow.

Liv Pedersen (apprentice stage manager) is a writer, dramaturg, and aspiring theater historian who lives in Minneapolis, MN. They have a Bachelor of Science in Theatre Studies from the University of Evansville and a Master of Letters in Playwriting and Dramaturgy from the University of Glasgow. Liv's work looks at how we interact with history and how the stories we tell ourselves create our perception of reality. Never afraid of pitching in, they've sold tickets at the Williamstown Theatre Festival, supported community theater workshops with the Citizens Theatre in Glasgow, and presented shows at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. When not working or writing, Liv loves listening to podcasts, spending too much money at record stores, sipping on iced tea, and tormenting their cat.

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

ACTORS' EQUITY

SDC The Director is a Member of the STAGE DIRECTORS AND CHOREOGRAPHERS SOCIETY, a national theatrical labor union.

SAG·AFTRA

Member Open Play

At every Member Open Play, we read a new play by a Playwrights' Center member out loud together. It is an opportunity for members to get feedback on their scripts in a supportive, informal setting. It is also a chance to meet fellow members and new play enthusiasts.

Attendance is open to members and non-members alike. Come ready to read a part! You may be "cast" as a character for the read through (no acting experience required.)

Sign up to attend via the events page on our website. And if you're interested in script feedback services like this, check out our membership options!

Read more at pwcenter.org/events

Learn the Craft

Playwrights' Center offers continuing education to playwrights of all experience levels, and anyone is eligible to take any class Playwrights' Center offers. Some classes can be taken for graduate or undergraduate credit through a partnership with Augsburg University.

Writers can learn from each other through:

- Online playwriting classes, writing workshops, and topics-based seminars focused on theory and craft.
- Educational resources including articles, videos, and a monthly podcast exploring writing practices, business, and life as an artist.

Learn more at: pwcenter.org/new-plays-on-campus/

WHAT'S COMING UP NEXT

ALMACÉN
In The Lab
by Julián Mesri
❖ January 16

BABBUR SHAIR
Member Open Play
by Hamad Naroze
⊙ December 15

THE TREATMENT
Ruth Easton New Play Series
by Amy Berryman
❖ February 9–10
⊙ February 23–March 1

❖ = In-person performance
⊙ = Online recording available

UPCOMING CLASSES AND SEMINARS

ONLINE WRITING INTENSIVE: WRITING TEEN ROLES WITH DEPTH AND POWER
Instructed by Margot Connolly
January 17–March 7
9 a.m.–11 a.m. CST

ONLINE WRITING INTENSIVE: TOTAL THEATER: A GENERATIVE ANTI-NATURALIST WORKSHOP
Instructed by Jarek Pastor
February 5–February 26
6 p.m.–8 p.m. CST

ONLINE WRITING INTENSIVE: WRITING SOCIAL JUSTICE THEATER THAT DOESN'T SUCK
Instructed by Shannon TL Kearns
January 29–March 5
6:30 p.m.–8:30 p.m. CST

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Program Applications Are Now Open!

This year we're accepting applications for the following programs:

McKnight National Residency & Commission
DEADLINE: December 11, 2025 at 11:59 p.m. CT

McKnight Fellowships in Playwriting
DEADLINE: January 8, 2026 at 11:59 p.m. CT

Core Writer
Info Session: December 17, 2025 at noon CT
DEADLINE: January 22, 2026 at 11:59 p.m. CT

Core Apprentice
Info Session: January 7, 2026 at noon CT
DEADLINE: February 5, 2026 at 11:59 p.m. CT

McKnight Theater Artist Fellowships
DEADLINE: March 26, 2026 at 11:59 p.m. CT

Read more at pwcenter.org/programs

FELLOWS & CORE WRITERS

'25 – '26

Nissy Aya
Katie Bender
Benjamin Benne
Amy Berryman
Cris Eli Blak
Lee Blessing
Carlyle Brown
Marge J. Buckley
Brandy N. Carie
Vinecia Coleman
Andrew Lee Creech
Sandra A. Daley-Sharif
Brian Dang
Michelle de Joya
Madeline Easley
Harley Elias
L M Feldman
Jeffrey Hatcher
Gethsemane Herron
Chloé Hung
Gemma Irish
C.A. Johnson
Cristina Luzárraga
Maya Macdonald
Julián Mesri
Peter Morrow
Nick Hadikwa Mwaluko
Isabel Nelson
Bianca Nkwonta
Kira Obolensky
Charlie Oh
John Olive
Skye Reddy
Alejandro Rodriguez
Andrew Rosendorf
Whitney Rowland
J. Isabel Salazar
Sarah Sander
Mikell Sapp
Jasmine Sharma
Saymoukda Duangphouxay Vongsay
Sharifa Yazmeen
Seayoung Yim

Land Acknowledgement

Playwrights' Center acknowledges that we are on the traditional land of the Dakota People and we also honor the Anishinaabeg (Ojibwe) People of this land. Here at the Center we work to decolonize our spaces and practices, to remove systemic barriers faced by Native people, and to move toward addressing reconciliation.

We invite you to do the same by learning about and assisting Native organizations where you live.

Visit pwcenter.org/about for a list of Native community organizations in Minneapolis/St. Paul.

Free artistic expression is under constant threat, but here at Playwrights' Center we protect and support it every day. That's our mission and it's what we've always done.

Community support ensures that playwrights can keep writing and sharing their work, and artists need you now more than ever.

Take a stand to make sure that playwrights get the resources they need. Make a donation to Playwrights' Center today.

Learn more at pwcenter.org/donate
or scan the QR code.

Thank you to our supporters

Giving to Playwrights' Center means supporting equitable theater-making practices. Together with our donors, we look to a future where the paradigm of how art is brought to life is fair-minded and accurately represents the diverse perspectives the world has to offer, not just the voices of a fortunate few. Our donors do more than provide financial support. Supporters partner with us to help in transforming the very world where we live, making the voices of new artists loud and clear enough for all to hear.

Actress Ruth Easton (nee Edelstein) was born in North Branch, Minnesota and graduated from North Branch High School. She attended the University of Minnesota for one year and the following year attended Macalester College before finishing her collegiate career at Cumnock School in Los Angeles. She went on to New York where she studied acting with Oliver Morosco. Mr. Morosco opened a stock theater company in upstate New York where Ms. Easton starred in several plays. After performing with other stock theater companies she returned to New York City where she appeared in five Broadway plays over a period of seven years. They included Exceedingly Small, Privilege Car, Town Bay, Buckaroo and Charlie Chan. Exceedingly Small was directed by Ethel Barrymore and Easton played opposite Eric Dressler. New York critics praised her performance as "thoroughly touching" and "highly spirited and excellent." She starred in radio dramas on the Rudy Vallee Hour and the Fleischmann's Yeast Hour opposite such actors as Walter Huston, Judith Anderson and Lionel Barrymore. She also appeared with Clark Gable, Eddie Cantor and Al Jolson during the course of her career. Ms. Easton's legacy, her commitment to theater and the development of new works continues through the charitable gifts made by the Ruth Easton Fund of the Edelstein Family Foundation.

MINNESOTA STATE ARTS BOARD
CLEAN WATER LAND & LEGACY AMENDMENT

*This activity is made possible by the voters of Minnesota through a Minnesota State Arts Board Operating Support grant, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts and cultural heritage fund.

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VENTUROUS Theater Fund

THEATER BEGINS HERE

"Stories give us chances to see ourselves and what we could hope to be." - 2020–21 Jerome Fellow Candrice Jones

We start with the storytellers.
The playwrights.
The artists.

As we continue to meet the challenges of these times, Playwrights' Center seeks to reimagine what is possible in theater, both in this moment and beyond. Throughout our 2025–26 season we are intensifying our efforts, investing even more deeply in creative process, arts education, and access to opportunity. We are working to amplify unheard voices and promote equitable spaces, allowing for the greatest diversity of artists to make plays around the world. Through additional fellowships and increased public programming, we are creating new channels of support for thousands of writers—from paid opportunities that will sustain playwrights and theater makers, to expanded educational resources that will enhance online learning tools and connect students from around the world. We are inspiring a whole new generation of theater artists, so that we can truly say "Theater begins here."

JOIN US.

Find out more. **pwcenter.org/about**

Playwrights' Center is committed to creating more equitable and accessible space—both in-person and online—where all feel welcome. Accessibility information may be found at **pwcenter.org/accessibility**. If you find your needs aren't addressed or if you have any questions, please connect with Emily Matthees at **emilym@pwcenter.org**.