Auckland Theatre Company presents

Grand Horizons

By Bess Wohl

## This audio-described performance is proudly presented by Dentons Kensington Swan

## CAST

Bill — Roy Billing

Brian — Todd Emerson

Carla — Andrea Kelland

Ben — Kevin Keys

Tommy — Esaú Mora

Jess — Amy Usherwood

Nancy — Annie Whittle

## CREATIVE

Director — Jennifer Te Atamira Ward-Lealand

Set Designer — Tracy Grant Lord

Lighting & Sound Designer — Sean Lynch

Costume Designer — Siobhan Ridgley

## PRODUCTION

Stage Manager — Tom Bailey

Assistant Stage Manager — Sofia Miernik

Props Manager — Magdalena Hoult

Intimacy Coordinator — Jennifer Te Atamira Ward-Lealand

Casting Consultant — Benjamin Henson

## SHOW CREW

Build Manager — Andrew Gibson, Entertainment Production Services

Set Construction — Ray's Theatrical Services

Sound Operator — Paul Jeffery

Lighting Operator — Peter Davison

Fly Mechanist — T.J. Haunui

## ACCESSIBLE PERFORMANCES

**NZSL Interpreting and Signing — Platform Interpreting NZ**

**Audio Description — Nicola Owen and Neha Patel, Audio Described Aotearoa Ltd**

**Accessibility Videographer — Rebecca Stringer**

*Grand Horizons* was commissioned by Williamstown Theatre Festival and

Second Stage Theatre. Its world premiere was on 17 July 2019 at Williamstown

before its Broadway premiere on 23 January 2020 at the Helen Hayes Theatre.

Grand Horizons is the first production in the Auckland Theatre Company 2022 season and began previews on 8 February with the New Zealand premiere on 10 February 2022 at ASB Waterfront Theatre. After playing to restricted audiences under the COVID-19 Protection Framework, the production returned for an encore season on 17 May 2022.

Two hours, including interval. Contains strong language, and sexual references.

Please switch off mobile phones and all noise-emitting devices. Wear your mask throughout the performance.

Rehearsal photographs by Andi Crown.

Principal Funders: Creative New Zealand and Auckland Council

# **Haere Mai. Welcome.**

Welcome to the first production in our 2022 season. With New Zealand in the red setting of the COVID-19 Protection Framework, it is not unfolding as we had planned, but we are here and so are you, albeit in unusual circumstances.

I salute the company of actors, creatives and crew, who have created *Grand Horizons*, for their determination to make theatre, to perform, to go on. Director Jennifer Te Atamira Ward-Lealand has found both laugher and profound insight in Bess Wohl’s text – it is surely the tonic we all need.

Beyond the stage is a group of people who toil to create our season, promote our shows, run our theatre and manage our company. My deepest gratitude to our awesome kaimahi.

This production is made possible by MiNDFOOD, whose publishers, Michael and Michelle McHugh, are generous and loyal friends.

Auckland Theatre Company is backed by Auckland Council through the Auckland Regional Amenities Funding Board and Creative New Zealand – support we never take for granted. Thank you to everyone who helps Auckland Theatre Company be all we can.

The months ahead will be very difficult for the performing arts. We are not sure how it will play out. Whatever happens, our commitment to making great theatre for Aucklanders is undimmed.

Thank you for supporting Auckland Theatre Company and this glorious group of artists by being here, by the act of coming to the theatre. We are in awe of your steadfastness in these tumultuous times.

**Jonathan Bielski**

Artistic Director & CEO

# Note from the Director

**Jennifer Te Atamira Ward-Lealand reflects on the process of bringing the Broadway hit comedy to New Zealand audiences**

I don’t think there has been one day during rehearsal on which we haven’t had a revelation, or when some personal story hasn’t arisen that relates to what is happening for the French family. Bess Wohl has written a play that keeps on giving and it has been such a joy to work on it with this marvellous group of actors.

In one scene, Nancy French says “I always felt like I had these big things inside me. I mean I did; I know I did." She’s desperate to escape the confines of being the wife and mother. I think she speaks for many people whose desires were thwarted in some way – who, as a result of circumstances that they found themselves in, could never be who they wanted to be.

The painful thing is that, in many ways, her husband has felt the same – constrained by the responsibilities and security of his job. But who knew? For whatever reason, whatever dynamic was playing out, neither of them could find the words to express this – and to the person who was, supposedly, the closest to them.

For their sons, having the parents settled in the retirement home, ready for their final chapter, has been somewhat of a relief. They’re safe. They’re secure. So, this upsetting of the apple cart has a profound effect on these men, turning them from children to parents – and parents who need to settle down this errant mother and father, to get them back in line.

The irony of this, of course, is that they themselves revert to their younger roles, and the ways in which they live and behave now are thrown into relief. How will they handle impending parenthood? How do they deal with intimacy? Do they actually communicate in their own relationships? And, importantly,

have they ever seen their parents as people in their own right? Nancy says to her son, “No. You have to hear this. I will be a whole person to you!” She forces a reckoning – and one that needs to happen.

*Grand Horizons* is written with fierce emotional intelligence, humour and humanity – and, however difficult it is for the characters to navigate the situation in which they find themselves, they are all left in a far more honest place as a family.

# **Synopsis**

New Zealand. Now.

On a quiet night like every other night at Grand Horizons, an independent senior living community, Bill and Nancy practise their evening ritual. There are no surprises on the menu after 50 years of marriage. Bill seems perfectly at

ease with their routine but Nancy begins to wonder whether or not there is something more for her.

Their two grown-up sons, Ben and Brian, are anxious to understand what is the issue. They convene at the retirement village with Ben’s fiancé, Jess, and their own ideas on intimacy, love and family. As they attempt to talk some sense into Bill and Nancy, some hard truths are revealed that make them more flawed and human than was evident in the picture-perfect marriage with which they grew up.

# Playwright **Bess Wohl**

Bess Wohl made her Broadway debut in 2019 with her play *Grand Horizons*, for which she received a Tony Award nomination. Other theatre includes: *Small Mouth* Sounds – OCC Award, *Make Believe* – OCC Award, *Continuity*, *American Hero,* *Barcelona*, *Touch(ed)*, *In*, *Cats Talk Back* and *Pretty Filthy*. Her plays have been produced at theatres in New York, around the US and internationally. Awards include the Sam Norkin Drama Desk Special Award, the Georgia Engel Comedy Playwriting Prize, a MacDowell Fellowship and inclusion on Hollywood’s Black List of Best Screenplays. Wohl is an Associate Artist with The Civilians and an alumna of the Ars Nova Play Group, and holds new play commissions from Manhattan Theatre Club and Williamstown Theatre. She has also written for film/television, and is a graduate of Harvard and the David Geffen School of Drama at Yale.

# **Director**

## ****Jennifer Te Atamira Ward-Lealand****

Since training at Auckland’s Theatre Corporate, Jennifer has worked extensively in theatre, film, television, musicals and radio for 40 years. She is also an accredited Intimacy Coordinator (Intimacy on Set, UK) for stage and screen.

Jennifer was a founding board member of the Watershed Theatre and a co-founder of the drama school, The Actors' Program. She is President of Equity New Zealand, Patron of Q Theatre, Theatre New Zealand and Te Manu Tīoriori Trust, and serves as a trust board member of the Actors' Benevolent Fund.

Her stage work includes: *Twelfth Night*, *August: Osage County*, *Six Degrees of Separation* and *Two Ladies* for Auckland Theatre Company; and *The Goat*, *Brel*, *The Book of Everything* and *Here Lies Love* for Silo Theatre.

She has toured her cabaret, *Falling in Love Again*, throughout New Zealand and Australia.

Jennifer’s film work includes: *The Footstep Man*, *Desperate Remedies*, *The Ugly*, *Fracture*, *Vermilion* and *Dead*. Television and web series include: *Full Frontal, Xena: Warrior Princess*, *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys*, *Auckland Daze*, *The Almighty Johnsons*, *Friday Night Bites*, *The Ring Inz II*, *Dirty Laundry* and *The Brokenwood Mysteries*. She also voices the character Dorable Duck on the TV series *Buzzy Bee*, and plays a variety of characters in the children’s web-series *Tākaro Tribe*. She can be seen as Arkadina in Auckland Theatre Company's online version of Chekhov’s *The Seagull*.

In the 2007 New Year’s Honours List, she was named an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit (ONZM) for services to theatre and the community. In 2018, she was named SPADA Industry Champion and, in 2019 New Year’s Honours List, she was named a Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit (CNZM) for services to theatre, film and television, and presented with a Women of Influence award (for arts and culture). Most recently, Jennifer was honoured as the Kiwibank New Zealander of the Year 2020.

# Cast

## Roy Billing Bill

Roy Billing is a veteran of the New Zealand and Australian acting industry

with more than 45 years of experience.

Theatre highlights: *Art* and *Foreskin’s Lament* for Auckland Theatre Company; *Ruben Guthrie*, *Run Rabbit Run* and *Cloudstreet* for Belvoir St Theatre, Sydney; and many plays for Theatre Corporate and Mercury Theatre.

Television highlights: *Underbelly: A Tale of Two Cities*, *Cops L.A.C.* and *Jack Irish*. In 2021, he appeared as Robert 'Piggy' Muldoon in TVNZ’s *The Panthers*.

Film highlights: *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Voyage of The Dawn Treader*, Australian classics *Rabbit-Proof Fence* and *The Dish*, and, more recently, romance-drama *Never Too Late*.

In 2015, he was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for his service to the performing arts. He has won and been nominated for many acting awards in both New Zealand and Australia.

## Todd Emerson Brian

Todd Emerson is a New Zealand stage and screen actor.

Theatre highlights: *Hudson & Halls Live!* for Silo Theatre; *The Brave* for Massive Theatre Company; *The Pitchfork Disney* for The Moving Theatre Company; and *Daffodils (A Play With Songs)* for Bullet Heart Club, which received the prestigious Scotsman Fringe First Award in 2016. *Grand Horizons* is his debut with Auckland Theatre Company.

Television highlights: *Outrageous Fortune*, *The Letdown* and, most recently, South Pacific Pictures' *Westside*.

Film highlights: *My Wedding and Other Secrets* and rock-opera *Romeo and Juliet: A Love Song*.

## Andrea Kelland Carla

Andrea Kelland is an actor, producer, director and casting agent with more than 30 years of experience in the industry.

She trained in physical theatre at the prestigious L’École Jacques Lecoq in Paris and performed feminist theatre in the ’80s and ’90s as part of Velvet Vipers, Bandana and Fanny Business.

Theatre highlights: *Speakeasy*, directed by Tom Sainsbury, which performed at Basement Theatre, and *Random Shagger*, which she wrote and performed as part of Auckland Pride 2018. *Grand Horizons* is her first production with Auckland Theatre Company.

Television highlights: *The Topp Twins*, *The Jaquie Brown Diaries*, *Outrageous Fortune*, *Nothing Trivial*, *Step Dave*, *Go Girls*, *Shortland Street*, *Fresh Eggs* and TVNZ’s *Black Hands*.

## Kevin Keys Ken

Kevin Keys is an Auckland-based performer, with a background in acting and music.

Theatre highlights: *August: Osage County*, *Once on Chunuk Bair*

and *To Kill a Mockingbird* for Auckland Theatre Company; *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Othello* for Pop-Up Globe; and *End of the Rainbow* for The Court Theatre.

Television highlights: *Black Hands*, *Shortland Street* and *Nothing Trivial*.

Kevin also freelances as a voice artist and concert announcer, working with Radio New Zealand, and regularly presents education and public concerts for various ensembles, such as the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra and the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. He sings and plays trombone in a six-piece outfit, Moongoat, and occasionally the 12-piece party band that is Soul Samba Circus.

## Esaú Mora Tommy

Esaú Mora is a Mexican-American actor, writer and performance artist.

Theatre highlights: *Wellesley Girl* and *Wondrous Strange* for the prestigious Humana Festival of New American Plays at Actors Theatre of Louisville; *[Porto]*, *Big Green Theater* for Bushwick Starr; *Harbored* for En Garde Arts; *Cymbeline* for The Back Room Shakespeare Project, NYC; and *Read to Me* for Portland Stage, which won the 2018 Clauder Competition. *Grand Horizons* is his debut with Auckland Theatre Company.

Esaú’s comedy and performance art pieces have been performed at the notable Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics, the NYU

Department of Performance Studies, Oregon Fringe Festival, Actors Theater of Louisville, New Masculinities Festival at The LGBT Center, The Men's Story Project at Nuyorican Poets Cafe, House of Yes, Club Cumming, New Zealand International Comedy Festival and No Homo: Queer Comedy in Auckland.

IG+TW @esausitomorando

## Amy Usherwood Jess

Amy Usherwood is a 2007 National Institute of Dramatic Art acting graduate. She has appeared on stage and screen in both Australia and Aotearoa.

Theatre highlights: Shannon in *Thieves Like Us* for Merrigong Theatre Company; Emilia in *Othello*, Banquo in *Macbeth* and Titania in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* for Sport For Jove Theatre Company; Lori in *The River at the End of the Road* for HotHouse Theatre and Nurse in *Romeo & Juliet* for Pop-up Globe.

Film and television highlights: Emma Franklin on *Shortland Street*, Louise Hillary in *Hillary*, and Helpdesk in feature film *Eternity*, for which she was nominated for Best Supporting Actress at the 2013 New Zealand Film Awards. Most recently, Amy played Frankie in *Mystic* and Vita *in The Brokenwood Mysteries.*

*The role of Jess was played by Beatriz Romilly in the premiere season of*

Grand Horizons.

## Annie Whittle Nancy

Annie Whittle is a New Zealand actor, singer, presenter and comedian, with a career that spans more than four decades.

Theatre highlights: *The Lady Killers*, *Four Flat Whites in Italy* and *Taking Off* for Auckland Theatre Company; *Groundswell*, *Calendar Girls*, *Putting it Together*, *Duet* *for One* and *Side by Side* by Sondheim for The Court Theatre; and *A View from the Bridge*, *Blood Brothers* and *The Glass Menagerie* for Peach Theatre Company.

Television highlights: *A Week of It*, *Shortland Street*, *Kai Korero*,

*Go Girls*, *Outrageous Fortune* and, most recently, *The Brokenwood Mysteries*.

Film highlights: *Piece of My Heart*, *Trial Run*, *The World’s Fastest Indian*, where she starred alongside Anthony Hopkins, and *Bellbird*, which premiered at New Zealand International Film Festival in 2019.

# Creative

## Tracy Grant Lord Set Designer

Tracy Grant Lord is a New Zealand scenographer of ballet, opera and theatre. She has worked with the region’s major performance companies and her work has toured internationally to critical acclaim.

Recent designs include: *The Audience* and *Billy Elliot the Musical* for Auckland Theatre Company; Lindy Hume’s *The Marriage of Figaro* and Thomas de Mallet Burgess’ *Semele* and *The Turn of the Screw* for New Zealand Opera; Liam Scarlett’s *Dangerous Liaisons* for Queensland Ballet and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* for Royal New Zealand Ballet; *The Nutcracker* for Tulsa Ballet; Loughlan Prior’s *The Firebird*, *Cinderella* and *Romeo and Juliet* for Royal New Zealand Ballet; *A Doll’s House Part 2* for Melbourne Theatre Company; and *Twelfth Night* for Queensland Theatre.

Tracy’s work has been nominated for Helpmann Awards (Australia) and Olivier Awards (UK), and she is a Winston Churchill Fellow. She has a bachelor's degree in Spatial Design and has exhibited at both the World Stage Design and the Prague Quadrennial.

## Sean Lynch Lighting & Sound Designer

Sean Lynch is a musician, actor, and a lighting and sound designer, with more than 30 years' experience in professional New Zealand theatre.

Previous works for Auckland Theatre Company include: lighting and sound design for *Two Ladies*, *The Daylight Atheist*, *Joan*, *Winding Up* and *Rendered*; sound design for *Single Asian Female* and *Polo*; and lighting design for *The Audience*, *Once on Chunuk Bair* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*. Other lighting designs include: *Hir*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Hudson & Halls Live!*, *The Book of Everything*, *Angels in America* and *Speaking in Tongues* for Silo Theatre; and *Chicago*, *Belleville*, Live Live Cinema’s *Little Shop of Horrors* and *The Wolves.* Previous sound designs include: *Hir* and *Brel* for Silo Theatre; Massive Theatre Company's *Havoc in the Garden*; Kirk Torrance's *Flintlock Musket*; Albert Belz’s *Yours Truly*; *I Love You Bro*; *Tribes*, *The Pitchfork Disney* for The Moving Theatre Company; and *The Heretic*.

## Siobhan Ridgley Costume Designer

Siobhan Ridgley is an Auckland-based textile artist and costume designer. Their previous theatre work includes production dressing for Auckland Theatre Company’s The Life of Galileo and sourcing costumes for Brilliant Adventure’s *Everything After*. Siobhan's embroidery project, Lunatype, has popped up over Auckland in the form of exhibitions, curatorship and workshops at Monster Valley Gallery via 'Broidery Bitches', and public workshops at final\_final and Studio One Toi Tū.

# Wohl People

In this essay, Anna Rawhiti-Connell explores

the bonds and the bounds of familial roles

Of all the questions parents have about their children, there is one I believe persists in the mind of my father: "At what age will my children stop trying to give each other a dead leg while sat in the back of my car?" His children are 42, 40 and 36 years old.

Within this small, persistent question of my father lies one of the bigger questions playwright Bess Wohl asks in *Grand Horizons*. Are we forever destined to revert to type around our families and in our long-term relationships? No matter how 'whole' we may be in different areas of our lives and around other people, why is it so impossible to escape familial typecasting? Why do I try so hard to be a chilled-out, laid-back person around friends and yet, when confronted with a family event, strap on the self-appointed shackles of being the eldest daughter, sending out spreadsheets

for no one to read?

Wohl interrogates the idea that we end up trapped in roles

assigned to us within our long- term relationships and family units, which are then reinforced by societal expectations. No matter how many moulds we break and how many conventions we smash, these expectations survive like cockroaches in a nuclear winter. She asks what it takes to reject these roles and what to do about the collateral damage.

Psychologists posit that the reason these roles are so influential and all-encompassing is that the family unit is meant to be the pinnacle of safety and security. No matter how much resentment an eldest child, or ‘parental child’, may carry about having to make school lunches for her brothers (to be brought up at least once a year, in perpetuity), there is safety in this role.

Even as we move away from traditional, perfect ideals of family and the notion that you must be related by blood, we still seek out tight units into which we retreat: 'urban whānau' as my friends and I call it. Family is familiar.

But that familiarity is also the breeding ground for contempt.

Though written before the start of the pandemic, Wohl’s examination of a 50-year marriage will feel familiar to those of us who have been married for fewer years but feel as though we have seen and heard a lifetime of our partners. This may explain the proliferation of relationship advice searches online recently, as many seek out solutions to the problem of ‘spending too much time with my partner’.

Wohl is particularly focused on the inability of adult children to comprehend their parents as whole people. There is not a child I know, no matter their age, who doesn’t prefer to envision their parents as Barbie and Ken – smooth, neutral and without desire. This is true despite a full awareness of the well-established prelude to the birth of a child.

More pointedly, recent generations have been awash in encouragement and advice about being happy, more emotionally whole people and how to express their feelings and needs.

The self-help industry is worth around $11.3 billion in the US alone. Despite all this, children remain stunted when it comes to applying this education to understanding their parents. "Please be happy but do not tell me why or how, and let me tell my app-based therapist that you are to blame for everything."

Wohl wrote *Grand Horizons* after having her second child and she hands the detonator in *Grand Horizons* to Nancy, mother and wife, who at 80 years old, blows up her role in a true act of bravery. It is Nancy who best understands that despite the weariness she feels in a long marriage, the judgement she may face or the fact that her children will respond like children, families are a very elastic phenomenon. Families are also funny and Wohl gives Nancy the powerful gift of humour to puncture tension, push through and light up new pathways.

Nancy’s burden is arguably the heaviest but she carries it lightly. It’s perhaps only after someone breaks out or breaks free, that we realise how accommodating families can be. They can stretch and grow to make room for new roles and whole people.

***Anna Rawhiti-Connell is an award-winning writer, social media consultant and board member of the Auckland Writers Festival. She is a contributor at The Spinoff and* North & South *and won Best General Columnist at the 2021 Media Awards for her work at* Newsroom*. She worked at Auckland Theatre Company from 2006 to 2011 in fundraising roles and remains a committed fan of the Company.***

# Accessibility Proudly presented by Dentons Kensington Swan

## Audio-Described Performance & Touch Tour Grand Horizons Sat 21 May, 2:00pm

The audio-described performance is open to all and includes a live audio

commentary relayed to blind and low-vision patrons in the audience via an

earpiece. Patrons with accessibility tickets can also attend a touch tour 90 minutes before the performance. The touch tour is only occurring under Orange and Green COVID-19 Protection Framework.

## NZSL-Interpreted Grand Horizons Wed 18 May, 8:00pm

The NZSL-interpreted performance is open to all and features an interpreter

on stage signing the show for Deaf and hard-of-hearing patrons in the audience.

## How to Book

Deaf/hard-of-hearing and blind/ low-vision patrons can buy tickets to

NZSL-interpreted and audio-described performances for $20. One companion ticket per theatre-goer is also available for $20.

Please contact the box office to book accessible performance tickets or if you

have any special requirements.

## Wheelchair Access

ASB Waterfront Theatre has eight seats and three wheelchair spaces in

the auditorium, reserved for customers with special access requirements. There is step-free level access to all tiers of the building and to seating in the stalls. Wheelchair-accessible toilets are located on the ground floor; accessible parking is available on Madden Street.

## Assistance Dogs

Assistance dogs are welcome at ASB Waterfront Theatre. We can find a seat that’s comfortable for you and your dog or arrange for the theatre staff to look after your dog during the show.

## Hearing Assistance

The theatre has a T-Loop radio frequency system to amplify the sound of the performance. If you don’t use a hearing aid or your hearing aid does not have a T setting, there is a listener unit available on request from the box office.

# ATC in Focus

## Backstage Story

Discover the world behind the curtain at Backstage Story. During the rehearsal period for each mainstage show, we invite you into the studio for a behind-the-scenes presentation with the director, designers and cast. Backstage Story is free to attend at our studios at 487 Dominion Road.

*Only occurring under Green COVID-19 Protection Framework.*

• Dawn Raids: Mon 1 Aug, 6:00pm

• The Made: Mon 5 Sep, 6:00pm

• North by Northwest: Mon 10 Oct, 6:00pm

## Sunday Forum Join us at 3:00pm in the auditorium on the first Sunday of each show's season, before the 4:00pm performance, to hear from a special guest speaker and enrich your experience of the show you are about to see. This is your chance to dive deeper into the world of theatre and gain new insights into the work.

*Free to attend with a ticket to the 4:00pm performance. Only occurring under Orange and Green COVID-19 Protection Framework.*

• Grand Horizons: Sun 22 May, 3:00pm

• Scenes from a Yellow Peril: Sun 26 Jun, 3:00pm

• Long Day's Journey Into Night: Sun 10 Jul, 3:00pm

• Dawn Raids: Sun 21 Aug, 3:00pm

• The Made: Sun 25 Sep, 3:00pm

• North by Northwest: Sun 30 Oct, 3:00pm

Youth Night

Youth Night explores new ways to connect young people to the transformational magic of theatre, with a dedicated youth performance of each production, curated and hosted by our Youth Company. Each Youth Night features pre-show entertainment and exploration of the play and its themes from a young person’s perspective.

*Only occurring under Orange and Green COVID-19 Protection Framework.*

• Scenes from a Yellow Peril: Tue 28 Jun, 7:00pm

• Long Day's Journey Into Night: Tue 12 Jul, 7:00pm

• Dawn Raids: Tue 23 Aug, 7:00pm

• The Made: Tue 27 Sep, 7:00pm

• North by Northwest: Sun 1 Nov, 7:00pm

# Auckland Theatre Company

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## Contact Box Office

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# Acknowledgments

Grand Horizons

By Bess Wohl

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Co-commissioned by and the Broadway premiere produced in December 2019 by Second Stage Theatre (Carole Rothman, Artistic Director; Casey Reitz, Executive Director).