



THEATER 86
165 WEST 86TH STREET
NEW YORK, NY 10024

CAST AND CREATIVES

EVGENY SCHWARTZ (PLAYWRIGHT)



Born in Kazan, Russia, Evgeny Lvovich Schwartz (1896–1958) became one of the most imaginative and daring dramatists of the Soviet era. He wrote more than twenty plays and numerous screenplays, often in collaboration with fellow satirist Nikolai Erdman. Originally trained in law at Moscow University, Schwartz soon turned to poetry, theater, and satire. He became known for transforming fairy-tale forms into sharp political parables — works that function both as comedies and as biting critiques of authoritarian power. His play *The Dragon* was first staged in 1944 but swiftly banned for its thinly veiled allegory. Over time, Schwartz fell into disfavor during Stalin’s purges and the Soviet campaign against “*rootless cosmopolitans*,” which curtailed the performance of much of his later work.

Despite censorship, Schwartz’s legacy endures. His plays — especially *The Dragon*, *The Shadow*, and *The Ordinary Miracle* — remain celebrated for their fearless satire, moral urgency, and ability to fuse whimsy with sharp political critique.

ALEKSEY BURAGO (DIRECTOR | LIGHTING DESIGN)



A graduate of the Russian Institute of Theatre Arts (GITIS), Aleksey Burago studied under the world-famous theater director Pyotr Fomenko. *The New York Times* has called his work “visually stunning...its simplicity is like a tiny, finely honed blade.” Aleksey has directed many productions to critical acclaim in Europe and America, including *Beyond Recognition*, a play about Grand Duchess Anastasia Nikolaevna, which had a sold-out run at the prestigious Hermitage Theatre in St. Petersburg. His television production of Alexander Pushkin’s *Queen of Spades* (Moscow TV) was broadcast across the country and received rave reviews.

In the early 1990s, Aleksey left Russia and emigrated to New York for a better life. He founded Theater 86, then known as the Russian Arts Theater and Studio, hoping to share his love and knowledge of Russian literature and the rich traditions of

theater training with American audiences. In the capital of the theater world, Aleksey has directed over sixty productions, among them *On the Eve* (Obie Nominee), *Ah, My Dear Andersen* (Time Out NY Critic's Pick), *Gamblers*, *The Overcoat*, *Crime and Punishment*, *Uncle Vanya*, *Dante's Inferno*, and *Mozart and Salieri*.

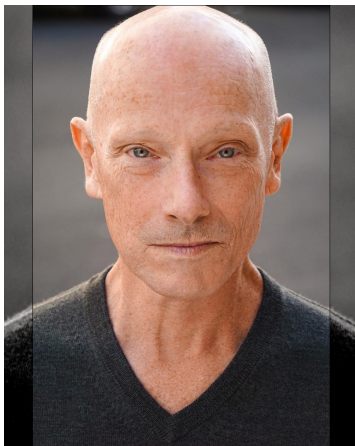
As a teacher, Aleksey has taught around the world, including at the Theatre Academy and Conservatory in St. Petersburg, GITIS Scandinavia in Denmark, the Acting Without Acting Festival in Mexico, the Theater Communications Laboratory in Japan, Bilkent University in Turkey, Manhattanville College, and HB Studio in New York City. He is currently on faculty at Fordham University, where he teaches the works of his favorite writer, Anton Chekhov.

HAZEN CUYLER (HEINRICH)



Hazen is an actor, director, teacher, and filmmaker. He is the Founder and Artistic Director of *The Greenhouse Ensemble*, a theatre, film, art, and music company based on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. He also serves on the board of *Impact Theatre Company*, teaches acting and theatre to students from kindergarten through high school in New York City Public Schools, and develops educational programming with *Goddard Riverside Community Centers*. Hazen teaches professional acting classes at *The Greenhouse Ensemble*. Beyond his work with Greenhouse, Hazen collaborates with organizations and individuals to create video content for diverse projects. As a writer, he has been published in *The West Side Rag*, *The Independent*, *I Love The Upper West Side*, *East Side Feed*, and *Theatre Pizzazz*.

MICHAEL DONALDSON (CAT)



Michael Donaldson (Cat) is an actor based in New York City. His previous work at Theater 86 include *The Gamblers*, *The Seagull*, *Three Sisters*, *Crime and Punishment*, *Lady with the Lap Dog*; *My Uncle Chekhov* and three productions of *The Master and Margarita*.

JAMES HALLETT (DRAGON)



James is delighted to be working once again under the direction of Aleksey Burago, having previously collaborated on *The Queen of Spades*, *An Absolutely Happy Village*, and *Uncle Vanya*. His career spans Broadway, Off-Broadway, regional theater, television, and film. Recent screen credits include *021*, a thriller set in Afghanistan; *Body Complete*, a Bosnian thriller; and Universal's *The Little Rascals Save the Day*.

James made his Broadway debut under the direction of James Lapine in *The Diary of Anne Frank*, opposite Natalie Portman. Favorite stage roles include *Uncle Vanya*, *Macbeth*, Trigorin, Sir Toby Belch, Captain Scott (*Terra Nova*), Lopakhin, and George Tesman. He earned a B.A. in English Literature from Wesleyan University and an M.F.A. in Acting from the Yale School of Drama.

SARAH O'DONNELL (CHARLEMAGNIA | COSTUME DESIGNER)



Sarah is a graduate of NIDA (*National Institute of Dramatic Art*) and worked extensively in Australian theater, television, and radio. Stage credits include Desdemona in *Othello* for the Elizabethan Theatre Trust, Stella in *A Streetcar Named Desire* for the Melbourne Theatre Company, Masha in *The Seagull* for the South Australian Theatre Company, a national tour with Barry Humphries' *Life and Death of Sandy Stone*, and various contemporary Australian works at Malthouse Theatre, Kickhouse Theatre, and La Mama.

Her time living in Russia immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union and discovering Russian theater, art, and culture was a life-changing experience. She now lives in New York and is realizing a long-cherished dream to study acting from this tradition, under the tutelage of Aleksey Burago at Theater 86.

Previous appearances at Theater 86 include *Animal Farm*, *Diary of a Madman*, *Viy*, *The Master and Margarita*, *The Three Musketeers*, and *Dante's Inferno*.

ARIEL POLANCO (DONKEY)



Ariel is thrilled to return to Theater 86. His work as an artist has taken him beyond New York City, with performances in North Carolina and Texas, as well as internationally in Italy, Turkey, and Japan. He was last seen performing in NYC and Provincetown in Tennessee Williams' *Battle of Angels*.

Select stage credits with Theater 86 include *The Snow Queen*, *Dante's Inferno*, *The Rise and Fall of Macondo*, *Enemies of the People*, *The Master and Margarita*, *Lady with a Lap Dog with Jokes and a Happy Ending*, *Three Sisters*, and *Avenue of Wonder*. Ariel would like to extend his gratitude to Aleksey Burago, Di Zhu, and his fellow cast mates and theater crew.

MARK K. SIMMONS (BURGOMASTER)



Mark is ecstatic to return once again to the stage for the seventh time with his Theater 86 family! He was last seen here as Cardinal Richelieu in *The Three Musketeers* and has previously appeared as the Master in *The Master and Margarita*, pig-tator Napoleon in *Animal Farm*, and Virgil in *Inferno*.

In his over forty years on stage, Mark has played everything from Count Dracula to Jesus. He remains grateful for the love and support of his wife, Teresa, and his son, Michael.

TOM SCHUBERT (LANCELOT)



Tom was last seen in *The Three Musketeers*. Other credits at Theater 86 include *The Master and Margarita* (Woland), *Dante's Inferno* (Dante Alighieri), *Diary of a Madman* (Poprishchin), *Viy* (Homa Brut), and *The Seagull* (Trigorin), among others. He studies voice with Dr. Elena Mindlina. More on his stage, voice, and screen work can be found at www.tomschubert.com

DI ZHU (ELSA | TRANSLATION)



Di Zhu is a Chinese-American actress and classical pianist. Her work in the theater has taken her to stages throughout New York City, as well as London, Scotland, Turkey, and Japan. Select stage appearances include *The Three Musketeers*, *The Master and Margarita*, *Dante's Inferno*, *Mozart and Salieri*, *Viy*, *The Waiter & The Slut*, *The Overcoat*, *Lambs for Slaughter*, *The Rise and Fall of Macondo*, *Enemies of the People*, *Three Sisters*, *Crime and Punishment*, *Uncle Vanya*, and *The Seagull*. She has also performed in *Selected Shorts Live* at Symphony Space (with Rainn Wilson and Cynthia Nixon).

Her film and television credits include *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* (opposite Tina Fey and Margot Robbie), *Blindspot*, *Katy Keene*, *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood* (opposite Tom Hanks), and *WeCrashed* (opposite Jared Leto). More at www.whoisdi.com