



Alex Edelman

JUST FOR US

**WOOLLY
HLOWMAM**

NOVEMBER 16–DECEMBER 23, 2022

A NOTE FROM MARIA MANUELA GOYANES



Welcome back to Woolly Mammoth and to the mind of brilliant artist, Alex Edelman.

Comedians have long graced Woolly's stage, most often with storied troupes like The Second City, Upright Citizens Brigade, and the Neofuturists. In fact, both Artistic Director Emeritus Howard Shalwitz and I have been consistently drawn to comedy as the means to explore those hard and sometimes uncomfortable conversations rarely discussed in public — the ones that stay with you long after you leave the theatre often because of the laughter they elicit. In other words, Woolly Mammoth uses comedy to produce plays about the elephant (or dare I say, MAMMOTH) in the room.

Bad puns aside, what I love about *JUST FOR US* is how seriously it takes this challenge. At a catalytic point early in the show, a fellow comedian tells Alex that the role of a comedian is “to illuminate the terrifying present for audiences and give hope for an even more terrifying future.” What is that future, when antisemitism continues to dominate the news cycle even as I write this, now in the form of an unapologetic celebrity rapper?

When I first heard that *JUST FOR US* was a show about a Jewish comic visiting a white nationalist meeting in Queens, my first thought was sincerely, “Isn't that dangerous?!”

Yes, it was.

Alex is pitch-perfect in unearthing the hierarchy of whiteness all around us, and masterfully troubling the notion of who “us” is in *JUST FOR US*. Oh, and he is superbly funny doing it.

I am incredibly excited about comedians moving more into the theatre world, stepping beyond their stand-up set and tackling one big idea, excavating it for all it is worth. Like Mike Birbiglia, Jaqueline Novak, and Kate Berlant, Alex is blazing a path in this new crossover world, and a bright harbinger of more to come.

Hasta la próxima,

Maria Manuela Goyanes, Artistic Director Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company

WOOLLY MAMMOTH THEATRE COMPANY

MARIA MANUELA GOYANES
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

TED DELONG
INTERIM MANAGING DIRECTOR

JUST FOR US

BY AND STARRING ALEX EDELMAN

LIGHTING DESIGN
COLIN K. BILLS + ~

DIRECTOR
ADAM BRACE

PRODUCTION SUPERVISOR
RACHAEL DANIELLE ALBERT

OPENING NIGHT: NOVEMBER 18, 2022

Filming, recording, or taking photographs of this performance by any means whatsoever is strictly prohibited. Please silence your cell phones and any other noisemaking devices.

JUST FOR US key art design by
Tristan Eaton Fine Art, Inc.

(~) Recognizes a company member



(+) The lighting designer for this production is represented by United Scenic Artists, Local USA-829 of the IATSE.

SHOW RUN TIME

This play runs for a duration of 90 minutes continuously, without an intermission.

CREW

COVID Safety Manager..... Briana Padgett
Production Assistant Ilana Simon-Rusinowitz
Lighting Programmer Danielle Shaw
Sound & Light Operator..... Jeffrey Stanley
Production Sound Engineer..... Phoenix Henkle
Scenic Charge Sarah Phillips
Electricians Jeffrey Stanley, Milan Robinson,
and Sydney Bronaugh

MASK REQUIREMENTS

All audience and staff members are required to wear a mask inside the building (when not actively eating or drinking). We encourage guests to wear a KN95 mask, but all masks covering the nose and mouth are accepted.

ALEX EDELMAN



Photo Credit Jesse Chieffo

ALEX EDELMAN is a comedian and writer whose Orthodox Jewish upbringing has informed critically and commercially acclaimed work for the stage and screen. He is known both for his solo shows—three, all award-winning, sell-out hits in London’s West End and the Edinburgh Fringe Festival—and for his TV writing. At the start of the pandemic, he served as the head writer and executive producer of *Saturday Night Seder*, a star-studded 70-minute special, posted on YouTube, that has so far raised \$3.5 million for the CDC Foundation (COVID-19) Emergency Response Fund. He’s so very grateful you’re here.

A NOTE FROM ALEX

Hey you. Yes, you. Thanks for coming to this. I can’t tell you how much I appreciate it.

JUST FOR US incubated at Melbourne Comedy Festival in Australia, the Edinburgh Fringe in Scotland, and at the Soho Theatre in London. Those will sound like just festivals and places but they represent warm audiences, wonderful staffs, well-made cappuccinos and administrators who took shots on a show that was not yet an off-Broadway offering.

One of my first shows back after a long COVID-break was at MASS MoCA in August of 2021. Instead of a typical stand-up set, I tried a rough version of this and tried to steal a valuable Anish Kapoor piece. Thank G-d for forgiving audiences and lazy security guards.

This is a solo show but it doesn’t, spiritually, belong to me only. My director Adam Brace—a rugby-loving genius equal parts gentle and gruff—and unquestioned master of the comedy-theater blend, Mike Birbiglia, have steered me in the correct directions. I also owe gratitude to literally dozens of comics and friends for their encouragement and thoughts.

I’m proud of this show. I hope you enjoy it. Thank you again for being here. Come say hi after.

CREATIVE TEAM

ADAM BRACE (*Director, he/him*) is currently Associate Director at Soho Theatre, London where he works across Comedy, Theatre and Performance Art in roles encompassing dramaturg, director, writer and producer. He has developed a varied range of work including 9 Edinburgh Comedy Award-nominated shows, 2 Herald Angel Award-winners, 3 Fringe First Winners, 2 nominees for the Melbourne Barry Award and 2 Southbank Sky Arts Awards. Credits include: all of Alex Edelman’s shows including *Just For Us* (Drama Desk Nominee 2022) extended six times Off-Broadway; *One-Woman Show* by Liz Kingsman (West End run 2022/23); *Age Is A Feeling* by Haley McGee (Fringe First 2022); all of Sh!t Theatre’s multi-award winning international shows; Leo Reich’s *Literally Who Cares?!* (Best Newcomer nominee 2022, NY run 2023). TV credits include Ahir Shah’s HBO Max special *Dots* and Creative Supervisor on two series of Soho Theatre Live on Amazon Prime. As a playwright he has been produced by The Almeida, the National Theatre and the Donmar Warehouse; his plays are published by Faber and Faber.

COLIN K. BILLS (*Lighting Designer, he/him*) is a Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company Member and an active member of Woolly’s equity, diversity, and inclusion working group. He has lit over fifty productions at Woolly Mammoth, including *Fairview*, *Gloria*, *Botticelli in the Fire*, *An Octoroon*, *Black Side of the Moon*, *Oedipus el Rey*, *Clybourne Park*, and *Dead Man’s Cell Phone*. As a Conspirator with the devised theater company dog & pony dc, he collaborated in the writing, direction, and design of *A Killing Game* and *Beertown*. His designs have been seen at nearly every theater in the Washington, DC, region, as well as nationally and internationally. Colin has won three Helen Hayes Awards and is a recipient of a Princess Grace Fellowship in Theater. He is a graduate of Dartmouth College.

RACHAEL DANIELLE ALBERT (*Production Supervisor, she/her*) is excited to return to Woolly Mammoth with *Just for Us*. Rachael works throughout the DC area as a production stage manager and as a corporate show-caller with ArchiteX. She believes in the innate intersectionality between life and art, and focuses her energy on new work regarding social justice, cultural relevance, and historical significance. Founding member: Oakland Theater Project. MFA: University of California, San Diego. BFA: University of Michigan. Proud AEA member.

WOOLLY & JUST FOR US TALKBACKS

JUST FOR US HAS LANDED IN D.C.! JOIN US AFTER THE PERFORMANCE TO EXPLORE THE CREATIVE PROCESS AND THEMES OF THE SHOW WITH WRITER AND PERFORMER ALEX EDELMAN, AS WELL AS WOOLLY STAFF.

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 20
Following the 7PM Show

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 2
Following the 8PM Show

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 11
Following the 2PM Matinee

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 18
Following the 2PM Matinee

Woolly Mammoth acknowledges that our theatre stands upon occupied, unceded territory: the ancestral homeland of the Nacotchtank whose descendants belong to the Piscataway peoples. Furthermore, the foundation of this city, and most of the original buildings in Washington, DC, were funded by the sale of enslaved people of African descent and built by their hands.

Language developed in consultation with Dr. Gabrielle Tayac

SIDE-SPLITTING AND SEMITIC: A CAPSULE HISTORY OF JEWS AND COMEDY

BY GRACE KESSLER OVERBEKE, PHD

Alex Edelman talks about being Jewish as a filter through which he sees the world, emphasizing two central values: empathy and questioning. But Edelman’s work as a comedian points to what is perhaps a third central value of being Jewish: a sense of humor. A 2013 Study by the Pew Research Center found that when answering the question, “What does being Jewish mean in America today?” over 40% selected the response, “Having a good sense of humor.”ⁱ

The history of Jews and humor hopscoches between ‘Judaism’ as a religion, and ‘Jewishness’ as an ethnic or cultural identity. The ties between Judaism and humor are tenuous—Jewish religious texts like the Torah and Talmud are not exactly knee-slappers. Granted, there are a few intrepid scholars who make a case for the Talmud’s funny-bone, citing a number of parables in which Jews are directed to resist Paganism through wit and ridicule.ⁱⁱ But it is in the cultural history of Jewishness that comedy looms largest.

Typically, this history dwells disproportionately in the Eastern European shtetls of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Popular texts spotlight the work of Sholem Aleichem, a Russian author whose comical Yiddish stories exemplified “laughter through tears.”ⁱⁱⁱ In a letter to his friends, Aleichem wrote that the source of his humor was the rage he felt at witnessing pogroms and other forms of antisemitic violence:

“It’s an ugly, evil world...I say to you that just to spite the world, one must not cry. If you want to know, this is my true source, the real reason for my ‘humor,’ as they call it—Just to spite the world, don’t cry! Just to spite the world—only laugh, only laugh!”^{iv}

Taking up that call, Jewish writers and performers in the United States have long made comedy out of their position as (relative) outsiders. In the early 1900’s, Fanny Brice called out and critiqued Jewish stereotypes with outlandish parody songs like “Sadie Salome go Home” and “The Yiddish Bride.” The ‘Golden Age of Radio’ of the 1930’s-40’s featured the popular



Fanny Brice, 1938

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Jewish comedy “*The Rise of The Goldbergs*,” in which creator Gertrude Berg meddled and malaproped her way into the hearts of mainstream America. In the mid-twentieth century, some Jewish comics like Jean Carroll and Milton Berle pioneered stand-up, delivering rapid-fire one-liners about the absurdities of suburbia, while others like Sid Caesar, Lucille Kallen, Selma Diamond, and Neil Simon wrote for lightly satirical TV comedies like *Your Show of Shows*.

Comedy of all forms thrived in the Catskill mountains. Not to be deterred by signs at vacation sites reading, “No Hebrews or Consumptives,”^v enterprising Jewish innkeepers set up their own resorts in Upstate New York with comedy galore, launching legends like Joan Rivers and Mel Brooks. The hyper-political ‘sick comic’ movement of the 1960’s was spearheaded by Jewish comics like Lenny Bruce, Mort Sahl, Elaine May and Mike Nichols. By 1978, Time Magazine printed Samuel Janus’s oft-quoted study finding that although Jews were only 3% of the American population, roughly 78% of the nation’s professional comedians were Jewish. Janus claimed that this overrepresentation resulted from ostracism that Jewish immigrants (and their descendants) faced in their new homeland, theorizing, “comedy is a defense mechanism to ward off the aggression and hostility of others.”^{vi}



Tiffany Haddish, 2013
(Public Domain).

The tradition of Jewish comedy continues into the twenty-first century. But thankfully, Jewish comedy today is far more likely to address the problems of sexism and “Ashke-normativity,” which privileges white Eastern European Jews, while ignoring Sephardic Jews and Jewish People of Color. Contemporary Jewish stand-up like Tiffany Haddish’s *Black Mitzvah* and Rain Pryor’s *Fried Chicken and Latkes* mine jokes from their experiences as Black Jews; and comic Joe Nguyen jokes about being a Dominican-Vietnamese American Jew in the Deep South.^{vii}

Whether central to Jewish identity or not, a sense of humor is a powerful instrument. When Alex Edelman jokes about trying to win people over with his “professionally charming” personality, he is riffing on a heightened version of a very real phenomenon. Jewish American comedians have long attempted to leverage laughter against antisemitism, playing the jester in order to gain acceptance in mainstream America. In many ways, it has been a successful project—in addition to being known as the ‘people of the Book,’ Jews are also increasingly known as the ‘People of the Joke.’ But an indelible imprint on American comedy is not the same thing as a stable position in American society. Jewish Americans are still living in a contested

and often confusing space—enjoying privilege and encountering prejudice; striving for the brass ring of ‘universality’ while also longing for recognition of cultural particularity. And so Jews like Alex Edelman still stand up in darkened rooms full of strangers, seeking the kvetchy catharsis and connectedness that comes with comedy.

GRACE KESSLER OVERBEKE, PHD, is an Assistant Professor in the Comedy Writing & Performance program of Columbia College Chicago. She is the author of NYU Press’s forthcoming *Jean Carroll, The First Lady of Laughs: The Scrapbook Story of America’s first Jewish Female Stand-Up Comedian*. Her Bat Mitzvah was on September 19, 1998.

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The Tony Award®-winning Woolly Mammoth creates badass theatre that highlights the stunning, challenging, and tremendous complexity of our world. Woolly is proud to be considered “a national champion of the new—and frequently provocative—American play” (*Washington Post*).

For over 40 years, Woolly has maintained a high standard of artistic rigor while simultaneously daring to take risks, innovate, and push beyond perceived boundaries. Woolly Mammoth was co-founded in 1980 by Roger M. Brady, Linda Reinisch, and Howard Shalwitz and is now co-led by Artistic Director Maria Manuela Goyanes and Interim Managing Director Ted DeLong. Located in Washington, DC, equidistant from the Capitol Building and the White House, this unique location influences Woolly’s investment in actively working our mission: To produce courageous and invigorating new work to radically redefine theatre as a catalyst for an equitable, creative, and engaged society.

One of the few remaining theatres in the country to maintain a company of artists, Woolly serves as an essential research and development role within the American theatre.

PLAYS PREMIERED HERE HAVE GONE ON TO PRODUCTIONS AT HUNDREDS OF THEATRES ALL OVER THE WORLD AND HAVE HAD LASTING IMPACTS ON THE FIELD.

A Strange Loop was produced at Woolly in 2021 and is currently on Broadway, having recently won the Tony Award® for Best Musical. Other notable highlights include the world premiere productions of Danai Gurira’s *Eclipsed* in 2009 that later went on to be the first Broadway play with a cast & creative team of all Black women; Bruce Norris’ Pulitzer Prize-winner *Clybourne Park* in 2010; and Anne Washburn’s *Mr. Burns: a post-electric play* in 2012. Woolly produces theatre beyond our building by sending productions like Aaron Posner’s *Stupid F*cking Bird* across the nation, bringing Aleshea Harris’ *What to Send Up When It Goes Down* to neighborhoods throughout DC, and launching a national tour of Madeline Sayet’s *Where We Belong*.

Woolly has built a reputation for innovation off the stage as well. Woolly values building relationships with its local community and resident artists in the DMV area. Our nationally-acclaimed Connectivity Department is one of the ways we accomplish this by linking Woolly to like-minded community organizations in order to generate mutually beneficial, impact and power-aware partnerships.

WE’VE EARNED OUR REPUTATION BY HOLDING FAST TO OUR CORE VALUES.

We are an anti-racist and radically inclusive community—across race, ethnicity, nationality, age, gender identity, sexual orientation, physical ability, socioeconomic background, and political viewpoint—in which all are encouraged to exchange ideas freely and reach for new understanding. We are a supportive home for creative risk-taking by our company and guest artists, staff, board, volunteers, audiences, donors, and colleagues. Through relentless inquiry and experimentation, we strive for world-class excellence and innovation in every aspect of our work.

OUR AUDIENCE COMPLETES OUR MISSION.

Woolly attracts one of the youngest and most diverse theatre audiences in DC, and we’re committed to making our work widely accessible. Woolly was the first to pioneer Pay-What-You-Will tickets in the DMV, which are now available at every single performance. We also offer \$20 day-of-show Stampede Seats, \$20 tickets for all patrons 30 and Under, and a variety of discounts for educators, members of the military, and artists.

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A Strange Loop: Jason Veasy (Thought 5), John-Michael Lyles (Thought 3), Jaquel Spivey (Usher), John-Andrew Morrison (Thought 4), James Jackson, Jr. (Thought 2), Antwayn Hopper (Thought 6)

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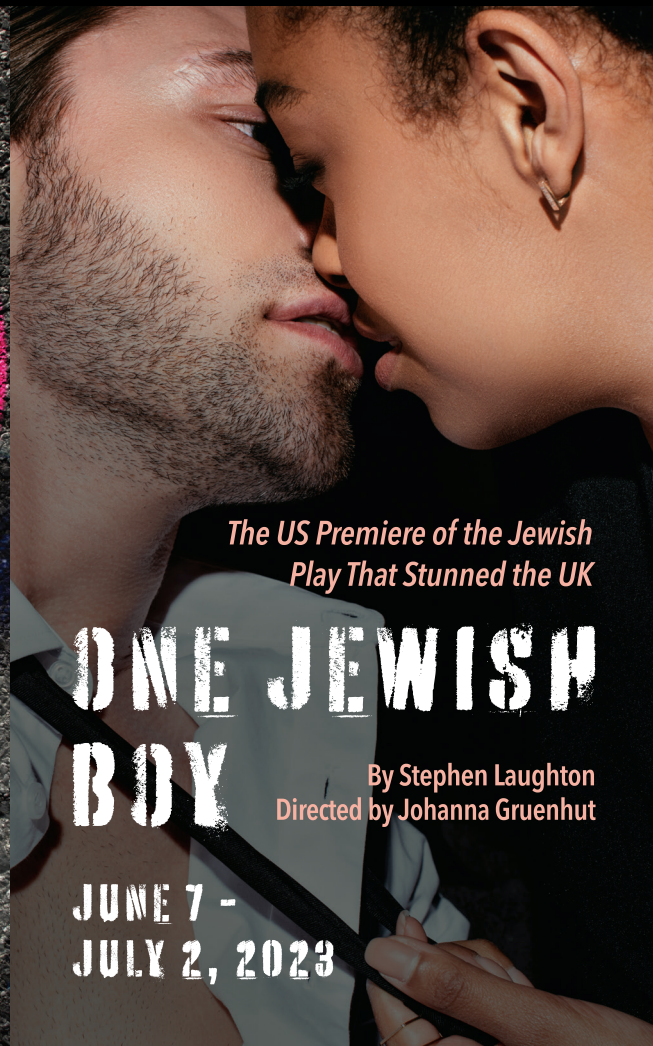
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WOOLLY LEADERSHIP



MARIA MANUELA GOYANES (*she/her*) is the **Artistic Director** of Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company. Prior to joining Woolly, she served as the Director of Producing and Artistic Planning at The Public Theater, where she oversaw the day-to-day execution of a full slate of plays and musicals at the Public's five-theater venue at Astor Place and the Delacorte Theater for Shakespeare in the Park. Earlier in her career at The Public, she managed some of the theater's most celebrated productions, including *Hamilton* by Lin-Manuel Miranda, *Josephine & I* by Cush Jumbo, *Straight White Men* by Young Jean Lee, *Barbecue* by Robert O'Hara, and *Here Lies Love* by David Byrne and Fatboy Slim. While at The Public, Maria also held a position on the adjunct faculty of Juilliard and curated the junior year curriculum of the Playwrights Horizons Theater School at NYU. She has guest lectured at Bard College, Barnard College, Brown University, Columbia University, Juilliard, the National Theater Institute at The Eugene O'Neill Theater Center, UCSD, the University of Texas-Austin, and Yale University, among others. Since 2015, Maria has also served as a member of the board of the National Alliance for Musical Theatre. From 2006 to 2008, she co-chaired the Soho Rep Writer/Director Lab with Jason Grote, and from 2004 to 2012, Maria was the Executive Producer of 13P, one of her proudest achievements. Maria is a first-generation Latinx- American, born to parents who emigrated from the Dominican Republic and Spain. She was raised in Jamaica, Queens, and has a collection of hoop earrings to prove it. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in 2001 from Brown University.



TED DELONG (*he/him*) is the **Interim Managing Director** of Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company. Ted comes to Woolly after a decade at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival as General Manager and Associate Producer. At OSF, Ted led OSF's contracting processes, capital facility planning and development, and oversaw a portfolio of operational departments. Ted has previously held positions at Yale Repertory Theatre, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, the Magic Theatre, the Berkshire Theatre Festival, Baltimore Center Stage, and AMS Planning & Research. Ted is a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Knox College and holds an MFA from Yale School of Drama, where he was the recipient of the Morris J. Kaplan Award for Theater Management.

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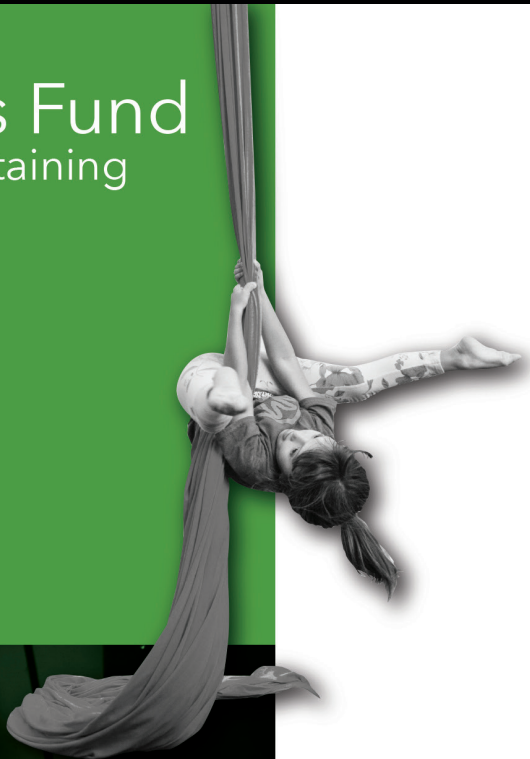
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