

Knox College

*theatre*  
presents

# *Birthday Candles*

by **Noah Haidle**  
directed by **Jeff Grace**



# WELCOME TO KNOX COLLEGE THEATRE

Welcome to the Winter Term faculty-directed production of the Department of Theatre's 2025-2026 Season. We are pleased to celebrate with you our work in the field of live theatre. Every year, we seek to enlarge the classroom experience by manifesting on stage the ideas and skills investigated in books and discussions, with computers and construction tools, and through critical papers and experiential work in text and performance. Each year we choose plays that are in conversation with the human experience — past, present, and future. We select a range of plays, which, if considered over the four-year tenure of a Knox student, will expose that student to a wide range of lenses with which to view and experience the human condition.

Our current season examines human thought, experience, and action through three plays from the modern and contemporary American theatre. The fall play, *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder and directed by Liz Carlin Metz, is considered an American classic. Its deceptively simple take on community in a small American town "in our growing up, in our marrying, in our living, and in our dying" considered the mundane miracles of ordinary living that make human beings luminously extraordinary. The winter play, *Birthday Candles* by Noah Haidle and directed by Jeff Grace, chronicles nearly a century of a woman's life through a whirlwind succession of birthday celebrations marking the challenges, joys, and transformational moments that are the fabric of her being. Humor and poignancy and baking a cake take the audience on this journey of personal discovery and revelation. The spring play, *Men on Boats* by Jaclyn Backhaus and directed by Deana Nichols, re-envisions the John Wesley Powell 1869 expedition down the Colorado and Green Rivers through a sometimes hilarious sometimes moving lens that turns expectations upside down and sinks the traditions of who gets to tell and who gets to embody history.

Faculty designers Craig Choma and Allison Smith Hahn take the lead positions in designing the sets, lights, properties, video, and costumes, working alongside approximately 50 students designers, actors, and technicians to realize Knox Theatre productions.

— Liz Carlin Metz, Chair

## THEATRE DEPARTMENT FACULTY

Smith V. Brand Distinguished Professor .....Liz Carlin Metz  
Chancie Ferris Booth Distinguished Service Professor .....Craig Choma  
Associate Professor of Theatre .....Jeff Grace  
Associate Professor of English & Theatre .....Sherwood Kiraly  
Assistant Professor of Theatre .....Deana Nichols  
Director of Costume & Makeup .....Allison Smith Hahn

Knox College Theatre  
presents

# BIRTHDAY CANDLES

BY NOAH HAIDLE

DIRECTED BY JEFF GRACE

SCENIC DESIGN BY CRAIG CHOMA

COSTUME DESIGN BY ALLISON SMITH HAHN

LIGHTING DESIGN BY CRAIG CHOMA & NIDA BAIG

SOUND DESIGN BY KEYERA WILLIAMS

PROPS DESIGN BY GRACE DINGES

HARBACH THEATRE, CFA  
FEBRUARY 26, 27, 28 (2026)

***Please:***

**Turn off all cell phones, notification alerts, or anything that may emit light or sound. The use of any recording device, either audio or video, and the taking of photographs is strictly prohibited by copyright law.**

*Birthday Candles* is presented by arrangement with Concord Theatricals on behalf of Samuel French, Inc. [www.concordtheatricals.com](http://www.concordtheatricals.com)

Originally produced on Broadway in 2022 by Roundabout Theatre Company.

*Birthday Candles* was originally commissioned and produced by Detroit Public Theatre, Detroit, Mi. Producing Artistic Directors: Courtney Burkett, Sarah Clare Corporandy, and Sarah Winkler.

Developed as part of Chautauqua Theatre Company's New Play Workshop series, 2017, underwritten by the Roe Green Foundation.

## **THE CAST** *(in order of appearance)*

ERNESTINE .....Jax Maharry  
ALICE / MADELINE / ERNIE .....Gill Falco  
KENNETH .....Quin Jones  
MATT / WILLIAM .....Abhishek Gaurav Sharma  
BILLY / JOHN .....Jack Olech  
JOAN / ALEX / BETH .....Zan Peterson

## **TIME & PLACE**

A kitchen in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

A Moment

A Lifetime

A Cake

A Universe

90 years in 90 minutes.

Hold on! ... Life goes by in 3... 2... 1...

*"An hour to pause and notice all we have."*

*BIRTHDAY CANDLES IS PERFORMED WITHOUT AN INTERMISSION*

## **CONTENT NOTICE**

Please be aware that this play includes discussions of death and grief. It contains scenes depicting mental illness, infidelity, Alzheimer's, dementia, and the struggle with destiny. There are various moments of strong language, and recurring loud sounds.

## PRODUCTION STAFF

Director .....	Jeff Grace
Assistant Director .....	Kai/Foggy Woitalla
Technical Director .....	Craig Choma
Stage Manager .....	Elijah Ladd
Scenic Designer .....	Craig Choma
Scenic Artist .....	Beckett Andersen
Scene Shop TAs .....	Beckett Andersen, Nida Baig Leah Binzel, Viola Bocker, Grace Dinges Martin Herrera, Eli Ladd, Andreas McDonald Alan Plascencia, Chasyn Pollard
Scene Shop Volunteers .....	Sid McCasland, Nati Mulcahy Deisy Santos, Cassie Wefel Students in THTR 121
Costume Designer .....	Allison Smith Hahn
Costume Studio TAs .....	Vishnupriya Acharya, Mack van Lier Wynn Khuri, Emily Kunkel, Carissa Medlock Malia Mei Nells, Katie (Tam) Nguyen Soran Rubio, Aspen Sorenson
Costume Studio Volunteers.....	Sy Quoc Vy Vo, Onyx Novak, Lilly Slick Max Russell, Eleanor Decker, Tra Nguyen
Lighting Designer .....	Craig Choma
Assistant Lighting Designer .....	Nida Baig
Lead Electrician.....	Elijah Ladd
Lighting Board Operator .....	Kai/Foggy Woitalla
Sound Designer .....	Keyera Williams
Sound Board Operator .....	Elijah Ladd
Props Designer .....	Grace Dinges
Assistant Props Designer .....	Chasyn Pollard

## ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

Chairperson .....	Liz Carlin Metz
Box Office .....	T.A.B. & Student Volunteers
House Management .....	T.A.B. & Student Volunteers
Contract Licensing .....	Jennifer Lazarz
Publicity .....	Madelyn Pellegrino, Cast & Crew
Poster Design .....	Craig Choma
Program .....	Jeff Grace
Ushers .....	T.A.B. & Student Volunteers

## WHO'S WHO IN THE CAST

**GILL FALCO** (Alice, Madeline, Ernie) is a first-year student intending to double major in Music and Political Science. She was recently seen on stage at Knox in *Our Town* (Jo Stoddard). Some of her favorite roles include *Wait Until Dark* (Suzy), *Into the Woods* (Cinderella), and *Things I Know to be True* (Fran). Outside of theatre, Gill loves to sing, scrapbook, and grab coffee with a friend. She is grateful for this opportunity and would like to thank Jeff Grace for his trust in her. She would also like to thank her friends new and old, her loving family, and her amazing high school directors, Sara Corkery and Regina Wathier, for pushing her to believe in herself. Gill is from Lombard, Illinois.

**QUIN JONES** (Kenneth) is a sophomore majoring in Elementary Education. He was recently seen on stage in Knox's production of *Our Town* (Howie Newsome). Other productions he's starred in include *Mamma Mia* (Sam) and *Legally Blonde* (Callahan). Outside of theatre, Quin loves to collect and listen to vintage vinyl records, and he is the treasurer for Students 4 Sustainability. He'd like to shout out his brother, Iain, for keeping it real, always. Quin is from Chicago, Illinois.

**JAX MAHARRY** (Ernestine) is a sophomore majoring in Asian Studies and Creative Writing. She has been involved in other plays at

Knox, including *Our Town* (Josie Crowell) and *Twilight Bowl* (Maddy). Jax would like to give a huge thanks to her amazing parents who are always looking out for her and supporting her. She couldn't have gotten this far without them. She would also like to thank Jeff Grace and the whole cast of *Birthday Candles*. Jax is from Chicago, Illinois.

**JACK OLECH** (Billy, John) is a sophomore majoring in Environmental Science. He was recently seen on stage at Knox in *Our Town* (Ensemble) and in the student-directed production of *Savage in Limbo* (Tony). Jack also enjoys acting and directing for the Knox New Plays Workshops, and has even experienced the joy of seeing one of his own plays performed there. He would like to thank his family, especially his mother, father, sister, brother, grandpa, and grandmas for their constant love, care, and support. He truly couldn't have done this without all of them, and he is very grateful for them. Jack is from Chicago, Illinois.

**ZAN PETERSON** (Joan, Alex, Beth) is a first-year student who intends to major in Creative Writing. She previously operated the follow-spot for Knox's production of *Our Town*. She would like to thank her parents, sister, and friends, especially Gavin and Kailey, for their continued support throughout the years. Zan is from Commerce City, Colorado.

**ABHISHEK GAURAV SHARMA**

(Matt, William) is a first-year student majoring in Computer Science and Theatre. He is excited to be appearing in *Birthday Candles*, his first production at Knox College. Abhishek has been involved in acting, theatre, and filmmaking from a young age, with experience across stage performance, short films, and advertisements, including projects with major organizations such as

Microsoft and Mebaz Manyavar. He is also a national-level award winner in STEM and has worked with reputed international organizations such as SPIC MACAY, contributing to creative and cultural initiatives alongside leading artists and intellectuals. He would like to thank: his director Jeff Grace, the cast and crew of *Birthday Candles*, and his family for their constant support. Abhishek is from Hyderabad, India.



Gill Falco  
(Alice / Madeline / Ernie)



Quin Jones  
(Kenneth)



Jax Maharry  
(Ernestine)



Jack Olech  
(Billy / John)



Zan Peterson  
(Joan / Alex / Beth)



Abhishek Sharma  
(Matt / William)

## WHO'S WHO ON THE PRODUCTION TEAM

**NIDA BAIG** (Assistant Lighting Designer) is a senior majoring in Biology and minoring in Theatre Design. She has worked in the scene shop since her first year and has helped build every mainstage set since. She is the current Co-Assistant Facilities Manager for the theatre department. At Knox, Nida has worked on *Our Town* (lead electrician), *Dorothy and Alice* (stage manager), and *The Rat Play* (Judy the Rat). She has also acted for the Albany Park Theater Company in their productions of *Port of Entry* and *Homecoming*. When she is not in the theatre, Nida can be found scurrying around in the SMC B(io) wing or frolicking at Green Oaks. Nida is from Chicago, Illinois.

**CRAIG CHOMA** (Scenic Designer, Lighting Designer, Technical Director) is the Chancie Ferris Booth Distinguished Service Professor of Theatre, and Knox Theatre's resident designer and technical director. Favorite Knox designs include *Twilight Bowl*, *Clyde's*, *The Wolves*, *The Thanksgiving Play*, *The Laramie Project*, *The Drowning Girls*, *The Secret in the Wings*, Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere*, *Rapture Blister Burn*, *The Caffè Cino Project*, *In the Next Room or the vibrator play*, *The Green Bird*, *Under Construction*, *A Lie of the Mind*, Euripides' *Medea*, *Intimate Apparel*, *The Skriker*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *War and Peace*, and *Macbeth*. Craig has designed both sets and/or lights professionally in Chicago, Milwaukee, New Orleans, Minneapolis, Ohio, Toronto, Canada, and Avignon, France. Craig designs for both theatre and dance, and he enjoys each equally. He has designed in proscenium, thrust, and arena spaces, small storefront theaters,

converted churches and libraries, and site-specific locations. He has been the production designer for various fundraising events, and he has collaborated on court cases, creating forensic models to be used in the presentation of evidence. Craig holds a B.A. in Theatre and Philosophy from Knox College (1993), and M.F.A.'s in both Scenic and Lighting Design from Carnegie Mellon University (1996). Craig is originally from Chicago, Illinois.

**GRACE DINGES** (Props Designer) is a senior majoring in Theatre and minoring in Classics and Ancient Mediterranean Studies. They have been involved in theatre both onstage and off since 2013. Previous Knox credits in props design include *Laundromat*, *The Language Archive*, *The Aliens*, *Clyde's 4.48 Psychosis*, *She Kills Monsters*, and *Antigone*. They have served as the scenic artist for *The Wolves*, *Twilight Bowl*, *She Kills Monsters*, and *Antigone*. Grace is from Pullman, Washington.

**JEFF GRACE** (Director) is an Associate Professor of Theatre at Knox College. He received both his M.S. in Education (2004) and his Ph.D. in Theatre History, Theory, and Literature (2008) from Indiana University. Directing credits at Knox include *Twilight Bowl*, *The Coast Starlight*, *The Wolves*, *Dear Elizabeth*, *Mrs. Harrison*, *A Doll's House Part 2*, *The Laramie Project*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *The Nether*, *The Secret in the Wings*, *Rapture Blister Burn*, *The Caffè Cino Project*, *Next Fall*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, *Under Construction*, *Medea*, and *The Serpent*. Jeff is excited to present *Birthday Candles* at Knox, and he is thankful to such a wonderful cast and crew for all

their hard work. He would also like to thank his husband, Zack, for the love, support, and patience through the countless hours away from home. Most importantly, Jeff dedicates this production to his mother (who just turned 80 years old). Mom, thanks for everything! "I wish you so many beautiful hours." Jeff is originally from Pleasant Grove, Utah.

**ALLISON SMITH HAHN** (Costume Designer) is an instructor, resident costume designer, and Costume Studio manager. She received her B.A. from Knox, studying under the mentorship of Margo Shively and serving as a Post-Baccalaureate Fellow in the Costume Studio. Chicagoland costume designs include *Multitudes* and *pool (no water)* (Vitalist Theatre), *Good People*, *The American Clock*, *Red, I and You*, *Another Bone* (Redtwist), *Rhinoceros* (Theatre Heist), *Miles Away*, *Mike and Seth*, *Hello Failure*, *Through the Leaves*, *Request Concert* (Side Project Theatre), *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, and *You're a Good Man Charlie Brown* (Wilmette Center for the Arts), and *Next Fall* (AstonRep). Allison holds an MLIS from the University of Illinois, and is most recently from Chicago, Illinois.

**ELIJAH LADD** (Stage Manager) is a sophomore who is studying Theatre and Computer Science. He was recently the assistant stage manager for *Our Town*, and works in the Knox College Scene Shop. When he's not working in the theatre, you can find him playing various board and card games with his friends. He wants to thank everyone in the theatre department for letting him have all of these amazing opportunities, and cannot wait to keep learning and working on what he loves! Eli is from Mountain View, California.

**CHASYN POLLARD** (Assistant Props Designer) is a sophomore with a double major in Theatre and Computer Science. He last worked in Harbach as the production stage manager for *Our Town*, and next term he will stage manage *Trifles*. Chasyn is a member of the Theatre Advisory Board, serving as house manager, and he also works in the scene shop. Outside of theatre, he can be seen running in the gym or around Galesburg as part of Knox's cross country and track team. He would like to thank all his friends in the theatre department who make him feel welcomed and supported. Chasyn is from Sibley, Illinois.

**KEYERA WILLIAMS** (Sound Designer) is a junior majoring in Music and minoring in Theatre Playwriting. Her previous credits include the sound design for *Twilight Bowl*, and acting in *The Coast Starlight* (Liz), *Clyde's* (Letitia), *Aladdin* at Peoria Players (Manal), and more. Outside of theatre, she enjoys composing and producing music. She would like to thank her friends, family, and director for always giving her supporting and opportunities. Keyera is from Peoria, Illinois.

**KAI/FOGGY WOITALLA** (Assistant Director) is a senior majoring in Theatre and minoring in Education. he has worked previously on *Antigone* (Assistant Director) and *She Kills Monsters* (Evil Tina). They have also worked on set construction, lighting, and props for these and several other productions. They can often be found in the green room of CFA working on something or just hanging out. He would like to thank their friends and family for constant encouragement and support for what they do. Kai is from Fort Wayne, Indiana.

## NOAH HAIDLE



Noah Haidle's plays for the theatre include *Kitty Kitty Kitty*, *Bleachers*, *Saturn Returns*, *Rag and Bone*, *What Is the Cause of Thunder?*, *Mr. Marmalade*, *Vigils*, *Persephone or Slow Time*, *Smokefall*, and *Birthday Candles*. He has also written the screenplays for *Gym Short*, *High Street Plumbing*, *Kidding*, and *Stand Up Guys*.

Noah is a graduate of Princeton University and The Juilliard School, where he was a Lila Acheson Wallace playwright-in-residence. He is also the recipient of three Lincoln Center

Le Compte du Nuoy Awards, the 2005 Helen Merrill Award for Emerging Playwrights, and an NEA/TCG Residency Program for Playwrights Grant.

During the 2017-2018 season, he was the writer-in-residence at the National Theater of Mannheim, Germany, a position first held by the esteemed dramaturg Friedrich Schiller in 1785.

Noah is originally from Grand Rapids, Michigan (where *Birthday Candles* is set), and lives with his perfect wife Kelsey, their heaven-sent son Butch, a dog, a bunny, and a blue lobster named Suzanne.

### **A VERY SPECIAL THANKS TO:**

Knox Facilities, Janell Johnson, Liz Carlin Metz  
Zack Wahlquist, Flores Printers, Goodwill Industries  
Knox Theatre Advisory Board (T.A.B.)

*Join us next term for the following Spring Productions:*

APRIL 10 & 11  
Studio Theatre

# NEW PLAYS WORKSHOP

WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY **KNOX STUDENTS**

MAY 7, 8, 9  
Harbach Theatre

# MEN ON BOATS

BY **JACLYN BACKHAUS**  
DIRECTED BY **DEANA NICHOLS**

MAY 15 & 16  
Studio Theatre

# *TRIFLES*

BY **SUSAN GLASPELL**  
DIRECTED BY **KAI/FOGGY WOITALLA**

Knox productions are supported in part by the

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[knoxtheatre.org](http://knoxtheatre.org)

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