

ALLEY THEATRE

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Alley Theatre Announces Next Step of University of Houston/Alley Theatre MFA in Acting

The MFA acting cohort will work alongside the Alley's Resident Acting Company

HOUSTON, TX - Tony Award-winning Alley Theatre, Artistic Director **Rob Melrose** and Managing Director **Jennifer Bielstein** announce the next step of the **University of Houston/Alley Theatre MFA in Acting**. The program expands the existing MFA in Acting program at the University of Houston by adding a third year placing acting students in residence at the Alley, working directly with the Alley's Resident Acting Company and having access to the entire organization.

The inaugural class entered the expanded program at the University of Houston in fall 2024, and during the 2026–27 academic year, will become the first cohort to begin their residency at the Alley. Prior to this collaboration, the University of Houston's MFA program was completed in two years. This partnership adds an additional year in residence at the Alley, working on shows, learning from staff members across multiple disciplines, and a direct mentorship with a member of the Alley's Resident Acting Company. Through this relationship, MFA candidates gain invaluable professional experience.

Artistic Director **Rob Melrose** shares, "I could not be more excited about this partnership between Alley Theatre and the University of Houston. We've now created a path for MFA actors to capitalize on the excellent two-year arc of training that UH has offered for the past 15 years by now adding a third year where they serve as a kind of apprentice company at the Alley, observing, understudying, and playing roles on our Hubbard and Neuhaus stages in shows along with our Resident Acting Company. I'm also excited that *Romeo and Juliet* is our first production with the new MFA in Acting program with third-year acting students in the cast and serving as understudies, the fight captain, and the dance captain. They are already bringing new energy and ideas into the building and it is inspiring us all."

Managing Director **Jennifer Bielstein** adds, "We are thrilled to partner with the University of Houston on this MFA program, sharing the expertise of a premier regional theatre with the next generation of theatre artists. We are equally excited to welcome these talented actors into our building. Their unique perspectives, bold choices, and fresh energy will invigorate our entire organization, bringing a vibrant new lens to our work. Education has always been core to the Alley's identity and this partnership cultivates talent important to the future of our institution and industry."

University of Houston Director of the School of Theatre and Dance **Sharon Ott** shares, "After leadership positions at LORT theatres similar to the Alley for 21 years followed by leadership positions in the academy for the past 16 years, I have seen first hand the alchemy that can exist when talented young artists work side by side with seasoned professionals. I am deeply indebted to Alley leadership and to the tireless commitment of Adam Noble, Head of MFA Acting at the University of Houston. This partnership has been many years in the making, and I am thrilled to now see it come to fruition. It will benefit not only the Alley and the University of Houston, but also the rich eco-system of the Houston theatre community."

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Head of MFA Acting **Adam Noble** adds, "It may be more appropriate to think of the PATP as a graduate-level technical school, where we train performers in the myriad of skills and attributes that underpin a successful career in the arts, then connect them directly with the industry. By galvanizing their talents in the classroom, testing their integration of those skills in powerhouse productions, and then nurturing their connection to a professional network, we seek to forge the next generation of American theatre artists."

This unique partnership makes the MFA program vastly more competitive by giving students the opportunity to work at a professional level alongside leading professionals in the industry. Collaborations between MFA programs and regional theatres have become a true rarity. It is especially significant that the organizations established this in Houston, made possible by the exceptional caliber and artistic standard of the Alley.

The program admits eight students annually. Students receive a comprehensive financial support package that includes a UH Graduate Tuition Fellowship covering tuition and mandatory fees each semester, as well as a graduate assistantship with a stipend.

During their third year, MFA candidates will gain professional experience in residence at Alley Theatre in downtown Houston, working alongside members of the Alley's Resident Acting Company and nationally and internationally recognized actors, directors, playwrights, designers, and other theatre artists. This immersive experience gives students the opportunity to apply their training within a leading professional theatre, build meaningful relationships across the industry, and develop the experience and connections that can help launch the next stage of their careers.

The students this year are **Mason Dowd, Bryan Jahnke, Claire Metusalem, Woody Minshew, Callee Miles, Allysia Peine, Micah Weese, and Forrest Stringfellow**. Students will be featured in *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Shark is Broken* and Agatha Christie's *Death on the Nile*.

Learn more about the program and its students at alleytheatre.org/MFA

Photos of MFA Candidates in rehearsal for *Romeo and Juliet* are available [here](#).

ABOUT:

Alley Theatre, one of America's leading nonprofit theatres, is a nationally recognized performing arts company led by Artistic Director Rob Melrose and Managing Director Jennifer Bielstein. The Alley is committed to developing and producing theatre that is as diverse as the Houston community. The Alley produces 11 plays and nearly 350 performances each season, ranging from the best current work and classic plays to new plays by contemporary writers. Home to a full-time resident company of actors and expert artisans in all theatre crafts, the Alley engages theatre artists of every discipline – actors, directors, designers, composers, playwrights – who work on individual productions throughout each season as visiting artists. Additionally, the Alley delivers a robust array of education and community programs reaching people Pre-K through adulthood.

Alley Theatre performs at the Meredith J. Long Theatre Center, which is comprised of two state-of-the-art theatres: the 774-seat Hubbard Theatre and the 296-seat Neuhaus Theatre. The Alley reaches over 200,000 people each year through its performance, education, and community engagement programs.

ABOUT:

The University of Houston / Alley Theatre MFA in Acting - *Professional Actor Training Program* expands upon the rigorous and innovative training espoused by the UH School of Theatre & Dance by placing graduate acting students in residence at the Alley Theatre during the third year of their degree program.

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This partnership is designed to train the next vanguard of the American theatre, forging skilled performers through a two-year arc of training, then providing them with exclusive opportunities to collaborate with the accomplished actors and directors employed by the Alley Theatre. Through this collaboration, students create meaningful networking relationships and garner experiences that launch their professional careers like no other program in the country.

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