ALLEY THEATRE

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Alley Theatre Announces Leadership Appointments

HOUSTON, TX - Tony Award-winning Alley Theatre today announced key artistic and administrative leadership appointments, strengthening the organization's leadership team. **Artistic Director Rob Melrose** and **Managing Director Jennifer Bielstein** shared the appointments as part of the Alley's continued investment in its artistic vision, organizational growth, and future.

After conducting national searches, **Tasha Criss** was promoted to the role of Chief Financial Officer, **Julie Fancher** joined the Alley as General Manager, and **Courtney Luff** joins the team as Chief Human Resources Officer. The Artistic Department has implemented a shared leadership structure with the promotion of **Amber D. Gray, Michael Locher,** and **Bradley Michalakis** as Associate Artistic Directors of Producing, Dramaturgy and Design respectively.

Melrose mused, "For the past few years, I have been blessed with a wonderful brain trust of thoughtful and creative people in Alley Theatre's Artistic Department. When the opportunity came to find a new Associate Artistic Director, I knew that I wanted to promote from within and to create a triumvirate of Associate Artistic Directors. I am excited to announce our new team: Amber D. Gray, Michael Locher and Bradley Michalakis. Amber previously held positions at The Public Theater in New York and Arena Stage in Washington, D.C. She has been directing the remount of our production of *A Christmas Carol* for the past two years and has been essential in casting and producing for the Alley. Michael has designed sets for the Guthrie, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, St. Louis Rep, California Shakespeare Festival, and The Cutting Ball Theater. At the Alley, he has been creating breathtaking scenery for shows like *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Da Vinci Code*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Dear Alien*, *The Servant of Two Masters*, *Dead Man's Cell Phone*, and *The Glass Menagerie*. He has also been essential in putting together design teams and shaping the aesthetic of the Alley under my leadership. Bradley worked previously at Resident Ensemble Players and the Foxboro Company. At the Alley, he has been dramaturging productions and running our Alley All New Initiative which includes the Alley All New Festival, the Alley at Ucross, and our commissioning program. Amber, Michael, and Bradley bring a diversity of experiences and perspectives to our team, and I couldn't be more excited about the direction of the Alley with this trio of Associate Artistic Directors in place."

Bielstein shares, "As Rob and I lead the Alley into its next chapter, it is exciting to be able to make such strong additions to our senior leadership team. Tasha Criss has been able to seamlessly step into the role of Chief Financial Officer ably stewarding our financial resources and providing continuity in this time of transition. Julie Fancher's move to the Alley with her deep experience in theater management ensures that we are able to build upon our strong operations, producing capabilities, and on being a supportive environment for artists and staff. Courtney Luff's vast human resources experience will enable us to build upon our human resources function to ensure we have a welcoming and inclusive workplace for all."

A self-professed professional theatre nerd, **Tasha Criss** is the CFO of Alley Theatre. Since starting as Controller in 2022, she has been a force for change, revolutionizing the Alley's accounting approach to place organizational insights center stage. She holds graduate and undergraduate degrees accounting degrees from the University of Houston-Downtown. An enthusiastic supporter of various performing arts, Tasha spends her free time actively engaged in the industry, having attended over 165 unique productions in 2025.

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A native Texan, **Julie Fancher** studied Theatre at Baylor University, where she discovered her passion was the business side of theatre. She received her master's degree in Arts Management from the University of Sheffield in England, where she worked as part of Sheffield city council's Major Events Team, and with the production management team at Sheffield Theatres (the UK's largest producing theatre outside of London). She spent six years at The Montgomery, a 420-seat theatre and arts center, ultimately becoming the Managing Director. She was a founding board member of the Sheffield Creative Guild, which networks and supports creatives across the city. She also spent four years in Istanbul, Turkey (and learned Turkish!). After nearly 14 years overseas, Julie moved back to the United States in late 2021, and soon after became the General Manager at Arizona Theatre Company. She loves travel, hot tea with milk, hiking, and the Oxford comma.

Amber D. Gray's prior credits are the Company Manager at Washington DC's Arena Stage Theater and the Assistant Line Producer at NY's Public Theater. Houston credits include: Assistant Director for *High School Play: A Nostalgia Fest*, *A Christmas Carol* (Assistant Director 2022/ Associate Director 2023), Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None, Noises Off, The Glass Menagerie*, Ken Ludwig's Baskerville: *A Sherlock Holmes Mystery* and *Primary Trust* at Alley Theatre and *cullud wattah* (Assistant Director) and *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* (Marcy) at Stages Repertory Theatre. She is also currently the Associate Artistic Director/General Manager for the Black Motherhood and Parenting New Play Festival and Associate Artistic Director/General Manager for Detroit's Obsidian Theatre Festival. She holds a BFA from Rockford University.

Michael Locher is Alley Theatre's Associate Artistic Director of Design and made his Alley debut with Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*. Recent regional credits include productions for the Guthrie Theater, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, Yale Repertory Theatre, and more. Michael's designs have been seen Off-Broadway and at venues throughout New York and the Northeast. Michael served as a professor at San Jose State University for six years. Graduate: University of California San Diego, Yale School of Drama.

Courtney Luff joins Alley Theatre as Chief Human Resources Officer, bringing more than 15 years of executive leadership experience in human resources and business operations. Throughout her career, she has held senior HR leadership and Chief Operating Officer positions, partnering with executive teams to strengthen organizational culture, develop leaders, improve employee engagement, and drive business performance. Courtney brings a unique perspective to HR leadership, having worked on both the people and operational sides of organizations ranging from smaller, growing businesses to large national companies. She is passionate about building strong teams, developing leaders, and creating workplaces where employees feel valued, supported, and empowered to do their best work. Courtney holds the Senior Professional in Human Resources (SPHR) certification, a bachelor's degree in Human Resource Management, and has completed executive education in Strategic Leadership at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management.

Bradley Michalakis is the Associate Artistic Director of Dramaturgy at Alley Theatre in Houston, where he serves as a member of the artistic team and produces the annual Alley All New Festival. Before relocating to Houston Bradley worked as Director of Literary Development at the Foxboro Company, the producing office behind the Broadway productions of *for colored girls...* by Ntozake Shange, and John Leguizamo's *Latin History for Morons*. His work as a dramaturg, playwright, and director has been seen at Alley Theatre, Contemporary American Theatre Festival, Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival, Theatre for a New Audience, Resident Ensemble Players, Delaware Shakespeare Festival, STAGES, Rec Room Arts, and Catastrophic Theatre.

Headshots are available here.

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ABOUT ALLEY THEATRE:
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.

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