

# Local actors put the Denver in the Denver Center in 2022 | John Moore

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John Moore

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True West  
AWARD 2022

30 DAYS • 30 BOUQUETS



Putting the Denver in the  
**DENVER CENTER**

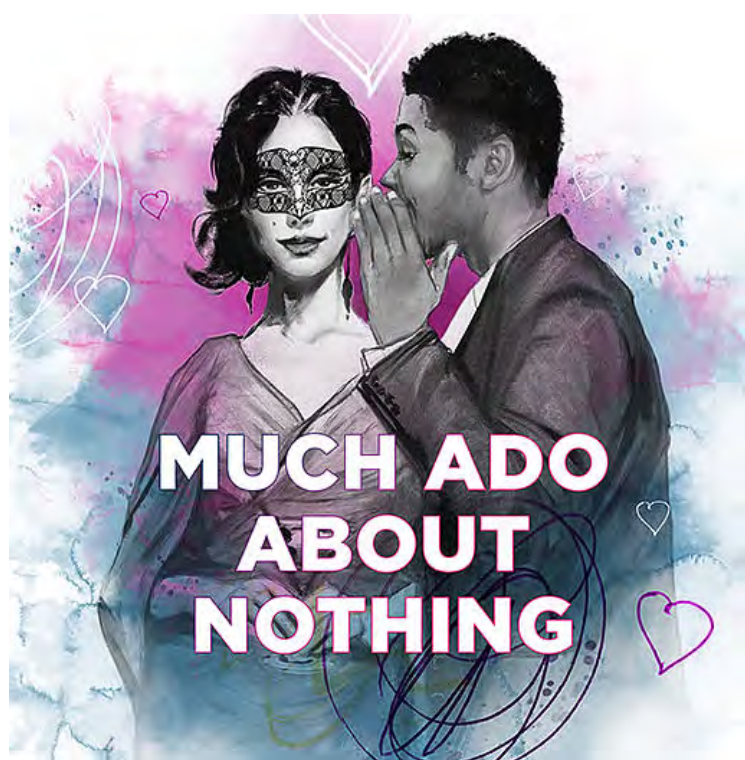
The Denver Center for the Performing Arts came roaring back from the pandemic in 2022, and it did so in partnership with local performers at a scale not seen before. In all, at least 58 Colorado actors made appearance in nine different Denver Center productions, ranging from educational theater to the DCPA Theatre Company. And it was only because Colorado has become such a fertile training ground for immersive theater that the grand David Byrne experiment 'Theater of the Mind' could be entirely locally cast.

YEAR 22 • PRESENTED BY DENVER GAZETTE SENIOR ARTS JOURNALIST JOHN MOORE •

The Denver Center for the Performing Arts came roaring back from the pandemic in 2022, and it was an infusion of local performers that put the “Denver” in the Denver Center at a scale perhaps not seen before.

In all, at least 58 Colorado actors made appearances in nine different Denver Center productions ranging from a young-audiences staging of “Little Red” to mainstage DCPA Theatre Company productions of “Much Ado About Nothing” and “A Christmas Carol” – and that doesn’t even include all the local children appearing in that show.

“After nearly two years of darkness, this return feels all the more triumphant to have so many actors from our local community celebrated across all of our programming lines,” said Grady Soapes, a Denver Center artistic producer and director of casting.



The 2022 infusion of local talent was a boon for local actors who, over the years, have sometimes found it hard to break into the nation’s largest regional performing-arts center. But this year, in particular, it was a mutually beneficial partnership, especially considering the ongoing grand immersive experiment “Theater of the Mind,” which has drawn media interest from around the world.



“Theater of the Mind,” the creative passion project of Talking Heads frontman David Byrne, is essentially a solo play that is being performed by a rotating group of 14 actors, all from Denver, in 12 intricately designed rooms over 15,000 square feet at the York Street Yards.

It’s the largest immersive theatrical adventure ever attempted in Denver, and the fact is, Denver – and the Denver Center – probably don’t get it if not for two things: The DCPA Theatre Company was uniquely well set-up to execute a project of this creative scale. And there was no need to bring in New York actors to perform the show “because the talent pool here in Denver is incredible,” director Andrew Scoville said.

As Byrne put it: “For me, the level of the creative team here in Denver equals anything in the world that I have ever experienced. It is absolutely on the level of anything on Broadway. And the folks here are even more adventurous, even more willing to try new things out than people on Broadway are.”

Byrne said Denver's growing reputation as a hotbed for immersive theater played a role in his decision to develop the piece here. That's happening largely because unconventional local theatermakers like Amanda Berg Wilson, founder of an immersive company called The Catamounts, regularly presents narrative stories everywhere from a golf course to a riverbed to an abandoned dairy farm.



Denver native Jenna Moll Reyes as 'David' in 'Theater of the Mind.'  
Matthew DeFeo/DCPA

“Denver is ‘it’ right now,” said Berg Wilson, who is both a “Theater of the Mind” actor and assistant director.

“Because of the work being done by DCPA Off-Center, The Catamounts, Control Group Productions and others, we now have a whole body of actors who have not only done immersive work, they have a skill set that other national actors probably don't. I think you would be challenged to find a community that has actors who can do this kind of work at the level that they can in Denver.”

This year, the opportunities for actors to work at the Denver Center came in a wide variety of ways, from performing “Shakespeare in the Parking Lot” at local high schools to a contemporary cabaret musical called “The Other Josh Cohen,” staged in the Galleria Theatre.

“I am thrilled to work with such a high level of talented actors in Colorado,” Soapes said. “Watching them grace so many of our stages only reinforces that Denver is a ‘must-see’ city for the performing arts.”

There is never going to be enough work at the DCPA for all of the talented actors in this community, Wilson added. “But there is no way for an actor to build a robust career in Denver without the Denver Center being part of the equation.”



Denver actor Chloe McLeod is playing Belle in the DCPA Theatre Company's 'A Christmas Carol' after having been an understudy for the past several years. Her wife, Susannah McLeod, is also in the cast.

Jamie Kraus Photography



Veteran Denver actor Steven J. Burge performs in DCPA Education's young-audiences production of 'Little Red.'  
Michael Ensminger/DCPA

## Denver Center lineup of 2022 Colorado connected actors:

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Name, Show title(s)

- Shannon Altner, Shakespeare in the Parking Lot, Colorado New Play Summit ("Rubicon")
- Brett Ambler, "The Other Josh Cohen"
- Jessica Austgen, "Theater of the Mind"
- Annie Barbour, "Theater of the Mind"
- Iliana Barron, Shakespeare in the Parking Lot, Colorado New Play Summit ("Cebollas")
- Amanda Berg Wilson, "Theater of the Mind"
- donnie l. Betts, "Theater of the Mind"
- Brian Bohlender, "A Christmas Carol," "The Other Josh Cohen"
- Grant Bowman, Shakespeare in the Parking Lot
- Landon Tate Boyle, Shakespeare in the Parking Lot, "A Christmas Carol"
- James Brunt, "Theater of the Mind"

- Steven Burge, "Little Red"
- Janae Burris, "Theater of the Mind"
- Alex Campbell, "Little Red"
- Vi Dang, "A Christmas Carol"
- Nicole deBree, "The Other Josh Cohen"
- Seth Dhonau, "The Other Josh Cohen," "A Christmas Carol"
- Jacob Dresch, "A Christmas Carol"
- Logan Ernstthal, "Much Ado About Nothing"
- Kristina Fountaine, "Theater of the Mind"
- Abner Genece, "Theater of the Mind"
- Sam Gilstrap, "Theater of the Mind"
- Kate Gleason, "Much Ado About Nothing," Colorado New Play Summit ("Rubicon")
- Ben Hilzer, "Little Red"
- Steph Holmbo, "Theater of the Mind"
- Lisa Hori Garcia, "Theater of the Mind"
- Christopher Hudson, "A Christmas Carol"
- Isaac Huerta, "Rattlesnake Kate"
- Valerie Igoe, "The Other Josh Cohen"
- Geoffrey Kent, "Much Ado About Nothing," Colorado New Play Summit ("Rubicon")
- Rodney Lizcano, "Much Ado About Nothing"
- Sheryl McCallum, "Rockin' and Rollin' with Miss Rhythm"
- Timothy McCracken, "A Christmas Carol"
- Chloe McLeod, Shakespeare in the Parking Lot, "A Christmas Carol"
- Susannah McLeod, "The Other Josh Cohen," "A Christmas Carol"
- Desirée Mee Jung, "Much Ado About Nothing"

- Brittany Mendoza-Peña, "Little Red"
- Jihad Milhem, "Much Ado About Nothing"
- Leigh Miller, "Much Ado About Nothing"
- Jenna Moll Reyes, "Theater of the Mind"
- Michaela Murray, "Little Red"
- Camryn Nailah Torres, Shakespeare in the Parking Lot
- David Nehls, "Rockin' and Rollin' with Miss Rhythm"
- Neyla Pekarek, "Rattlesnake Kate"
- Jasmyne Pierce, Shakespeare in the Parking Lot
- Christian Ray Robinson, Shakespeare in the Parking Lot, "A Christmas Carol"
- Marco Robinson, "Rattlesnake Kate," "A Christmas Carol"
- Jamie Ann Romero, Colorado New Play Summit ("Cebollas")
- Gareth Saxe, "Much Ado About Nothing"
- Sean Scrutchins, "Little Red"
- Ryan Omar Stack, Shakespeare in the Parking Lot
- Peter Trinh, "Theater of the Mind"
- Neil Truglio, Colorado New Play Summit ("American Fast")
- Emily Van Fleet, "A Christmas Carol"
- Aaron Vega, "The Other Josh Cohen"
- Justin Walvoord, Shakespeare in the Parking Lot, "A Christmas Carol"
- Maggie Whittum, "Theater of the Mind"
- Erin Willis, Rattlesnake Kate, "A Christmas Carol"

*Note: The True West Awards, now in their 22nd year, began as the Denver Post Ovation Awards in 2001. Denver Gazette Senior Arts Journalist John Moore celebrates the Colorado theater community by revisiting 30 of the best stories from the past year without categories or nominations.*