

THE PUBLIC.

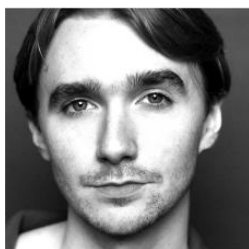
FOR IMMEDIATE
RELEASE
press@publictheater.org



Olivia Rose Barresi



Marisa Brau-Reyes



Brandon Burk



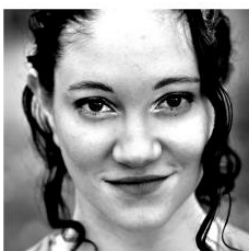
Greg Cuellar



Harrison Densmore



Carson Higgins



Andrea Lopez Alvarez



Jamie Sanders



Jose Useche



Christopher Dylan White

CAST OF INITIATIVE IN REHEARSAL
COMPANY PHOTOSHOOT
CAST & CREATIVE TEAM HEADSHOTS

PREVIEWS BEGIN FOR THE WORLD PREMIERE OF ELSE WENT'S *INITIATIVE*

By Else Went
Directed by Emma Rosa Went

**Performances Begin with a Joseph Papp Free Performance
on Tuesday, November 4 and Run Through Sunday, November 30;
Official Press Opening on Thursday, November 20**

October 28, 2025 – The Public Theater (Artistic Director, Oskar Eustis; Executive Director, Patrick Willingham) begins previews for the world premiere of **INITIATIVE**, an epic new play by Emerging Writers Group alumnus **Else Went** and directed by The Public Theater's inaugural Directing Fellow **Emma Rosa Went**. **INITIATIVE** begins performances in The Public's LuEsther Hall on Tuesday, November 4 with a Joe Papp Free Preview Performance. The production will run through Sunday, November 30, with an official opening on Thursday, November 20.

Playwright **Else Went**, alumnus of The Public's acclaimed Emerging Writers Group, brings her transformative new play **INITIATIVE** to The Public this fall. A bittersweet reflection on adolescence at the dawn of the new millennium, **INITIATIVE** charts the intertwined lives of seven teens from 2000-2004, as they become friends and more than friends, wrestle with their potential, face incalculable loss, and struggle

to find their way in (and get out of) “Coastal Podunk, California.” **Emma Rosa Went** directs this epic world premiere guaranteed to make you remember the most difficult and beautiful things about growing up.

“For us to arrive as a company after working so hard and for so long feels like a rare and perfect gift,” shares playwright **Else Went** about **INITIATIVE**'S debut. “This play, which boasts over a dozen Public Theater debuts, represents the arrival of a new generation of mature and passionate artists.”

INITIATIVE features **Olivia Rose Barresi** (*Clara*), **Marisa Brau-Reyes** (*Understudy Clara/Kendall*), **Brandon Burk** (*Offstage Voice/Understudy Em/Lo/Tony*), **Greg Cuellar** (*Riley*), **Harrison Densmore** (*Ty*), **Carson Higgins** (*Lo*), **Andrea Lopez Alvarez** (*Kendall*), **Jamie Sanders** (*Tony*), **Jose Useche** (*Understudy Riley/Ty*), and **Christopher Dylan White** (*Em*).

“It is an enormous honor to lead this company, who have built a real home inside Else's magical script, through its world premiere at the Public,” shares director **Emma Rosa Went**. **INITIATIVE** is a monumental undertaking, and we are so grateful not only for the Public's developmental support of the play, but also for championing Else and myself through our positions as full-time artists at the theatre, and for the belief in our company that ensured we get to arrive here as a group. The extraordinary 7+ year journey of this script has brought not only us but our whole community to this moment where we get to share it. This play is a deeply personal offering for us, and we feel proud to realize it at this theatre, with these actors and these incredible designers, with its scale and its vision intact. That was always the dream.”

INITIATIVE features scenic design by **Mikiko Suzuki MacAdams**, costume design by **Kindall Almond**, costume design dramaturgy by **Susan Hilferty**, lighting design by **Christopher Akerlind**, sound design by **Angela Baughman**, prop management by **Aisha Hamida**, projection design by **S. Katy Tucker**, fight direction by **Dan Renkin**, intimacy direction by **Laura Hackman**, and dramaturgy by **Sarah Lunnie**. **Janelle Caso** is the production stage manager and **Molly Foy** is the stage manager.

The Public's 2025-26 Season is underway with Emmy Award winner **John Leguizamo**'s return to The Public with the family drama **THE OTHER AMERICANS**, a gripping tale about the American dream directed by Tony Award winner **Ruben Santiago-Hudson**. Tony Award-nominated writer and director duo **Jordan E. Cooper** and **Stevie Walker-Webb** have also returned to The Public with **OH HAPPY DAY!**, featuring original music by Grammy Award-winning gospel artist **Donald Lawrence** for this biting new play about confronting the divine.

The Public's collaboration with **Ma-Yi Theater Company** continues with the first of two plays in this season's residency, **DID YOU EAT?** (밥 먹었니?), featuring playwright and performer **Zoë Kim**'s autobiographical journey through love's many forms, directed by **Chris Yejin**. Additionally, **THE SEAT OF OUR PANTS**, Obie Award winner **Ethan Lipton**'s irreverently funny musical adaptation of **Thornton Wilder**'s Pulitzer Prize-winning play *The Skin of Our Teeth*, is currently making its world premiere in The Newman Theater, directed by Tony nominee **Leigh Silverman**.

The Library serves food and drink beginning at 5:00 p.m. and closing at midnight. The Library is closed on Mondays. For more information, visit publictheater.org.

BIOS:

OLIVIA ROSE BARRESI she/her (*Clara*) is an actor and multidisciplinary artist. Recent theatrical credits include workshops of Else Went's *Degenerates* (The Public), *Unresolved Rage Game* (Soho Rep), *Why Taylor Swift is Gay: A Presentation* directed by Alex Keegan, Emma Went's *Twelfth Night* and *Three Sisters* (Decatur Audio Lab), and *The Cause* (WP Theater). BRIClab Video Art Resident for *Dogman I*. Mercury Store resident acting company member. MA: LAMDA, BFA: Boston University. oliviarosebarresi.com. @obarresi55

MARISA BRAU-REYES (*Understudy Clara/Kendall*) is delighted to be performing at The Public Theater. Off-Broadway: *Cymbeline*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Other credits: *As You Like It*, *Gregor*, *The Gothic Hour*. Brau-Reyes also writes and performs sketch and improv comedy and has trained with both UCB and The P.I.T. TV: "Law & Order: SVU" (NBC), "Billions" (Showtime), "Bull" (CBS), "New Amsterdam" (NBC), "Mozart in the Jungle" (Amazon). Film: *Bel Canto* starring Julianne Moore. Thanks to Pantera/Murphy and Prevail Artists.

BRANDON BURK (*Offstage Voice/Understudy Em/Lo/Tony*) is making his Public Theater debut! Recent: *Daytime* (People's Light), *The Hypochondriac* (NYU), *Major Barbara* (NYU). Film/TV: "The Gilded Age" (HBO Max). MFA: NYU Grad Acting. BA: Fordham University. Thanks, Emma!

GREG CUELLAR [kway-yar] (*Riley*) is honored to share Initiative at The Public with its original feral company. Off-Broadway: *Comedy of Errors* (Classic Stage Company), *Play On!* Shakespeare Festival (CSC/OSF), LAMBDA finalist for *I Wanna Fuck Like Romeo and Juliet* (New Light). Regional: *The Mousetrap* (Guthrie Theater and Berkshire Theatre Group), *It's Only a Play* (George Street Playhouse), *As You Like It* (St. Louis Shakespeare Festival). TV: "New Amsterdam" (NBC). Training: Columbia University. Of Lipan Apache descent. For my brother, Justin. gregcuellaractor.com

HARRISON DENSMORE they/them (*Ty*) is a performer, director, and visual artist. Their work focuses on new plays and collaborating with emerging playwrights. They are grateful and proud to have been with INITIATIVE since its inception in 2016, and excited to share it with you. Thanks and love to Mom & Dad, Jan, Bruce, & Dan. hdensmore.com

CARSON HIGGINS he/they (Lo) is thrilled to be making his Public debut! Higgins has been with the show since one of its earliest readings. This show means so much to this company and we appreciate you giving us the opportunity to share it with you. Credits include Damien Chazelle's *Babylon*, *Joker: Folie à Deux*, Green Day's *American Idiot* (St. Jimmy), *Memphis the Musical* (Huey Calhoun), and *Golem Owned a Tropical Smoothie*. Thanks to Mom, Dad, Lauren, and every teacher that got me to this moment. @carsonhiggins

ANDREA LOPEZ ALVAREZ she/her (*Kendall*) is a Puerto Rican actress. INITIATIVE is one of the coolest things that's ever happened to her, and she will owe The Wents everything forever. She loves reading, ranting, and crocheting and when she figures out how to do them simultaneously, she'll rule the world. Theater: *Echo*, *Ribbon About a Bomb*, variety of Shakespeares. Film: *Gog*, *Regreso de Ernesto Pagan*, *Unfinished*. Thanks to mom, papi, Core4, and Mike for putting up with me.

JAMIE SANDERS he/him (*Tony*) is overjoyed to be making his Public Theater debut with *Initiative*. Other credits include *Henry IV/Richard II* (TFANA), *Curious Incident* (Kansas City Rep, Portland Center Stage), *Ranchich* (Storyhorse Theater), *Misalliance* (Stars in the House). He is a proud ensemble member of TFANA's New Voices Project in NYC Schools. Sanders is also an outspoken advocate and educator on Tourette Syndrome awareness.

JOSE USECHE (*Understudy Riley/Ty*) is a writer and actor from Queens, NY. Work he has either written, produced or performed in has appeared at Sundance Film Festival, Official Latino Film Festival, Lower East Side Film Festival, and Fantasia Film Festival, among others. Broadway: *The Inheritance*. Television: "FBI: Most Wanted" and "High Maintenance." As a writer, his pilot "30 Days in Bayside" was recognized by the Black List's LGBTQ list, the GLAAD List, as one of Hollywood's "most promising unmade scripts." He currently has two TV projects in development with Elliott Page's Page Boy Productions and Destin Daniel Cretton's Hisako Productions. Mucho amor to my family – *Initiative*, chosen, and otherwise; LKC; my Zoob; Trent & Kate; and to DGRW for standing by me. Creativity is the universe's gift to us, using it is our gift back to the universe. @soyjoseuseche all platforms.

CHRISTOPHER DYLAN WHITE he/they (*Em*) has appeared in films such as *Miseducation of Cameron Post* (Sundance - Grand Jury Prize) and *Freak Show* (Berlin Film Festival). Their theatre credits include

Paris (Atlantic Theatre Company), *The Bridge Play* (59E59). They made their directorial debut with the short film *A Delicate Place* which they wrote, directed and produced. They are a writer, director, and actor based in New York City. They have two cats and an amazing partner.

ELSE WENT (*Playwright*) is the current Tow Foundation Resident Playwright at The Public Theater and has had work developed through labs and groups at The Public (EWG), Ars Nova (Play Group), WP (Lab), Playwrights Realm (Fellowship), and Trans Theatre Lab, among others. Recipient of new work commissions from MTC Sloan Foundation, South Coast Repertory, and Breaking the Binary Festival, among others. Her play *An Oxford Man* received a special commendation from the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize in 2025.

EMMA ROSA WENT (*Director*) is currently on staff as the inaugural Directing Fellow at The Public Theater. She is originally from coastal California. Other works with Else: *Degenerates* (workshops at Playwright Horizons, The Public, Ars Nova, NYTW), *An Oxford Man* (workshops at MTC, South Coast Rep,) *I Am the Most Beautiful Bird* (workshops with Breaking the Binary, Mercury Store). Classical work including: Hudson Valley Shakespeare, Opera House Arts, Red Bull Theater, Public Shakespeare Initiative, Coffey St. Studio. Drama League alum. SDC member. Rep: WME. emmawent.com.

THE PUBLIC continues the work of its visionary founder Joe Papp as a civic institution engaging, both on-stage and off, with some of the most important ideas and social issues of today. Conceived over 60 years ago as one of the nation's first nonprofit theaters, The Public has long operated on the principles that theater is an essential cultural force and that art and culture belong to everyone. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Oskar Eustis and Executive Director Patrick Willingham, The Public's wide breadth of programming includes an annual season of new work at its landmark home at Astor Place, Free Shakespeare in the Park at The Delacorte Theater in Central Park, the Mobile Unit touring throughout New York City's five boroughs, Public Lab, Public Works, Public Shakespeare Initiative, and Joe's Pub. Since premiering *HAIR* in 1967, The Public continues to create the canon of American Theater and is currently represented on Broadway by the Tony Award-winning musicals *Hamilton* by Lin-Manuel Miranda and *Hell's Kitchen* by Alicia Keys and Kristoffer Diaz. Their programs and productions can also be seen regionally across the country and around the world. The Public has received 64 Tony Awards, 195 Obie Awards, 62 Drama Desk Awards, 64 Lortel Awards, 36 Outer Critic Circle Awards, 13 New York Drama Critics' Circle Awards, 70 AUDELCO Awards, 6 Antonyo Awards, and 6 Pulitzer Prizes. publictheater.org

The Public Theater stands in honor of the first inhabitants and our ancestors. We acknowledge the land on which The Public and its theaters stand—the original homeland of the Lenape people. We acknowledge the painful history of genocide and forced removal from this territory. We honor the generations of stewards and we pay our respects to the many diverse indigenous peoples still connected to this land.

INITIATIVE was developed as part of The Playwrights Realm's Writing Fellowship: Katherine Kovner, Founding Artistic Director, Robert Pereira, Producing Director.

Developed by Else Went as the **2024-25 TOW PLAYWRIGHT-IN-RESIDENCE** at **The Public Theater**

TICKET INFORMATION

INITIATIVE begins performances in The Public's LuEsther Hall on Tuesday, November 4, with the Joe Papp Free Performance. The production officially opens on Thursday, November 20 and runs through Sunday, November 30.

Tickets are available now and can be accessed by visiting publictheater.org, calling **212.967.7555**, or in person at the Taub Box Office at The Public Theater at 425 Lafayette Street.

The Public's Joseph Papp Free Performance initiative will offer free tickets to the performance on Tuesday, November 4 through TodayTix. The Lottery will open for entries on Tuesday, October 28 and will close at

12:00 p.m. on Tuesday, November 4. Winners will be notified by email and push notification anytime from 12:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., and if selected, winners will have one hour to claim their tickets.

The performance schedule is Wednesday through Friday at 6:30 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday at 2:00 p.m. *(Please note: performances on Saturday will include a 90-minute dinner break between acts at 5:00 p.m. There will be no performance on Thursday, November 6 or Thursday, November 27. There will be a performance on Tuesday, November 25 at 6:30 p.m. The performance on Wednesday, November 26 will be at 2:00 p.m.)*

The **Audio Described** performance will be on Saturday, November 22 at 2:00 p.m. The **Open Captioned** performance will be on Sunday, November 23 at 2:00 p.m.

The full performance calendar can be found at publictheater.org.

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