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## **OLNEY THEATRE CENTER ANNOUNCES THREE WORLD PREMIERES, ONE U.S. PREMIERE IN ITS 25-26 SEASON**

**Premiere lineup includes *Carla Hall - Please Underestimate Me* alongside new musicals *I And You* and *Little Miss Perfect*; further highlights include the American premiere of West End drama *Red Pitch*, Nova Y. Payton in *Hello, Dolly!*; *Appropriate* in the intimate 150-seat Theatre Lab, and the regional resident premiere of *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder***

Olney, MD — April 4, 2025 —Olney Theatre Center announced an ambitious, premiere-forward lineup for its 2025-26 Season that includes **two world premiere musicals, one world premiere play, and one U.S. premiere drama**. The season unites established theater luminaries like **Lauren Gunderson, Zhailon Levingston, and Nova Y. Payton**; rising star writer/composers **Ari Afsar** and **Jorjah Kwamé**; award-winning UK theater artists **Daniel Bailey** and **Tyrell Williams**; and DMV resident (and celebrity chef) **Carla Hall**, all in one expansive season.

The program begins in the Mulitz-Gudelsky Theatre Lab with the U.S. Premiere of ***Red Pitch*** (Sep. 17 - Oct. 19, 2025) by Tyrell Williams and directed by Daniel Bailey, which transferred to the West End from London's Bush Theatre in 2024. Next, DMV-favorite and internationally renowned vocalist Nova Y. Payton tackles the title role in ***Hello, Dolly!*** (Nov. 6, 2025 - Jan. 4, 2026), directed by Kevin S. McAllister, for the holiday season. The rescheduled World Premiere of ***Little Miss Perfect*** (Feb. 12 - Mar. 15, 2026) by Jorjah Kwamé and directed by Zhailon Levingston (*Cats: The Jellicle Ball*) follows on the Roberts Mainstage in February 2026. One month later, Artistic Director Jason Loewith directs Branden Jacobs-Jenkins' Tony Award-winning *Appropriate* in the 150-seat Mulitz-Gudelsky Theatre Lab (Mar. 18-Apr. 19, 2026), starring DMV stars Kimberly Gilbert and Cody Nickell. ***I And You - The Musical*** (Apr. 23 - May 25, 2026) is the season's second World Premiere at Olney Theatre, where its source play received its Rolling World Premiere in 2014, now with a new book by playwright Lauren Gunderson and Lyrics and Music by Ari Afsar, co-produced with McCarter Theatre Center. The season's final World Premiere, ***Carla Hall - Please Underestimate Me***

(May 27 - Jun. 28, 2026) features the celebrity chef in a one-woman show co-written by Hall, Lori Kaye & Leslie Thomas. The season concludes with the resident regional premiere of ***A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder*** (Jul 2 - Aug. 23, 2026), directed by Olney favorite Eleanor Holdridge and starring Tom Story.

### **“A Season of Tentpoles...”**

is what **Artistic Director Jason Loewith** called this, his 13th season at Olney Theatre Center. “Like my fellow artistic directors around the country, I start season planning in search of two or three tentpoles to anchor the year. These are shows that, by virtue of their name value or the artists attached or the brilliance of their artistry, will attract enough patrons and press to get folks to sit up and pay attention to everything else. In any given year, I’m lucky to get two or three tentpoles... but this season, remarkably, extraordinarily, amazingly — I think every show fits that description!

“The U.S. Premiere of a West End hit? Check. **Nova Y. Payton** tackling the title role in *Hello, Dolly?* Absolutely. A viral hit transforming into a new musical in *Little Miss Perfect*, producing a show like *Appropriate* in a 150-seat theatre that **leaves the audience no place to hide**, the premiere of the musical version of a play we did the Rolling World Premiere of a decade ago, collaborating with **a major television star** to bring her amazing life story to the stage, watching **Tom Story** play all seven doomed D’Ysquiths in *A Gentleman’s Guide*... I mean, **those are all tentpoles!**”

In addition to the seven-show member season, Loewith announced two add-on productions: Paul Morella’s solo ***A Christmas Carol: A Ghost Story of Christmas***, returning to the Multz-Gudelsky Theatre Lab (Nov. 28 - Dec. 28, 2025), with **Michael Russotto** returning for a second year. And finally, the theater’s national tour of Michael Shayan’s ***Avaaz*** wraps up with a three-week engagement at **Theater J** in Washington, DC, from June 6-26, 2026.

– more –

## TITLES, CREDITS, KEY DATES, VENUES & DESCRIPTIONS

**#1**

**U.S. Premiere**

**RED PITCH**

By **Tyrell Williams**

Directed by **Daniel Bailey**

**Mulitz-Gudelsky Theatre Lab**

**September 17 - October 19, 2025**

Invited press: Saturday, September 20, 2025, at 8:00 pm  
and Sunday, September 21, 2025, at 1:30 pm

**Winner of all five Off-West End Awards for Best New Play**

Bilal, Joey, and Omz have been friends their whole lives, growing up together playing soccer on their small pitch outside their south London apartments. But change is coming. Professional teams are signing up prospects, and they all harbor dreams of being chosen. And “the endz” is changing, with lots of new apartments and franchise coffee shops pushing out longtime residents and local favorites. Can their friendship survive the demise of their beloved “red pitch” and all it represents? This engrossing new play was such a hit in its initial run at London’s Bush Theatre (the same theatre that premiered *Sleepova*) that it earned a West End transfer, playing to critical and popular acclaim.

Starring: **Ty'Ree Hope Davis** (Bilal), **Terrence Griffin** (Joey), **Angelo Harrington II** (Omz)

“Tackling gentrification, change, and ambition, Tyrell Williams’s writing creates a convincing bond in a play that is fierce, affectionate and effortlessly funny.” - The Guardian

“So good ... It’s a brilliant bit of writing about friendship, masculinity, and aspiration, without ever being heavy-handed.” - Time Out London

**#2**

**HELLO, DOLLY!**

Book by **Michael Stewart**

Music and Lyrics by **Jerry Herman**

Based on the play *The Matchmaker* by **Thornton Wilder**

Original Production Directed and Choreographed by **Gower Champion**

Music Directed by **Christopher Youstra**

Choreographed by **Eamon Foley**

Directed by **Kevin S. McAllister**

**Roberts Mainstage**

**November 6, 2025 - January 4, 2026**

Invited press: Sunday, November 9, 2025 at 8:00 pm

Starring **Nova Y. Payton as Dolly**

Dolly Gallagher Levi is a woman on the make. And what's she making? Whatever you need. A husband? A wife? Dance lessons? Pierced ears? There's never been a more indefatigable figure in American musical theatre, and perhaps that's why the role has served as a vehicle for some of our greatest stars, from Carol Channing to Pearl Bailey to Bette Midler. Now, the DMV's reigning musical superstar, Nova Y. Payton, takes on the title role of a musical that churns out laughs, songs, and over-the-top antics as fast as humanly possible...and then goes a little faster. Audiences of all ages are guaranteed a great time at this classic musical about love, second chances, and the magic of an adventure to the big city!

**#3**

**World Premiere**

**LITTLE MISS PERFECT**

Book, Music, and Lyrics by **Joriah Kwamé**

Music Supervisor & Music Director **Patrick B. Phillips**

Directed by **Zhailon Levingston**

**Roberts Mainstage**

**February 12 - March 15, 2026**

Invited Press: Sunday, February 15, 2026, at 8:00 pm

In association with **Straighten Your Crown Productions, Inc.**

**Joriah Kwamé became a viral TikTok star with his song "Little Miss Perfect," which garnered millions of views and launched this new musical with Broadway aspirations.**

High school kids today are under a lot of stress. Just ask Noelle, the daughter of a prominent local deacon who has lived up to local expectations of social and academic excellence all her life. But now it's senior year, and she's barely holding on. Her GPA is in the dumps, college applications are looming, and now an exchange student from the Philippines living under her roof has her questioning her sexuality. Can Noelle make it to graduation, achieve her dreams, and still stay true to herself? Can anyone? *Little Miss Perfect* distills her experience with earworms aplenty and genuine warmth for even its most calculating characters. Along with the title song, Joriah's hit, "**Ordinary**," figures in the show, and his newest songs - like "Black Girl Magic," "Malaya's Words," and "Legendary," are sure to go just as big.

**#4**

**Tony Award-Winner**

**APPROPRIATE**

By **Branden Jacobs-Jenkins**

Directed by **Jason Loewith**

**Mulitz-Gudelsky Theatre Lab**

**March 18 - April 19, 2026**

**Invited Press:** Saturday, March 21, 2026 at 8:00 pm and  
Sunday, March 22, 2026 at 1:30 pm

Branden Jacobs-Jenkins' searing satire of a family digging through their recently deceased patriarch's crumbling estate is both gut-splittingly funny and shocking in its confrontation of conveniently forgotten family history. DC luminaries **Kimberly Gilbert** (*Angels in America*) and **Cody Nickell** (*Ink*) star as siblings battling over the possession and meaning of their father's dark patrimony. As the rest of the family descends on the ancestral property in rural Arkansas, old rivalries and grudges are eclipsed by the moral weight of what they find. Staged in our black box Theatre Lab, in alley configuration with audiences on two sides, this will be a unique staging of one of the most important American plays of the past 15 years.

**#5**

**World Premiere**

**I AND YOU – THE MUSICAL**

Based on the play by **Lauren Gunderson**

Book by **Lauren Gunderson**

Music and Lyrics by **Ari Afsar**

Directed by **Sarah Rasmussen**

**Roberts Mainstage**

**April 23 - May 24, 2026**

**Invited Press:** Sunday, April 26, 2026 at 8:00 pm

**Co-produced with McCarter Theatre Center**

In 2015, Olney Theatre produced the Rolling World Premiere of *I And You* by Lauren Gunderson, which went on to become one of the most-produced plays in America. Now, we're bringing you **the World Premiere of the musical adaptation of her hit play**. Anthony turns up in Caroline's bedroom one night bearing waffle fries, a beat-up book, and a homework assignment they're supposed to do together: explore Walt Whitman's poem "Song of Myself." Chronically sick, Caroline hasn't been to school in a while... and can't even remember meeting some kid named Anthony, which dials up both her suspicions and her "snark-o-meter." But as the two get to know each other, they finally learn of the deeper mystery that brought them together. Whitman's powerful poetry inspires the music and lyrics by *American Idol* and *Hamilton* veteran Ari Afsar, which expands the magic of Gunderson's remarkable story.

**#6**

**World Premiere**

**CARLA HALL**

**PLEASE UNDERESTIMATE ME**

By **Carla Hall, Lori Kaye & Leslie Thomas**

**Mulitz-Gudelsky Theatre Lab**

**May 27 - June 28, 2026**

Invited Press: Saturday, May 30, 2026 at 8:00 pm and  
Sunday, May 31, 2026 at 1:30 pm

**Carla Hall is a judge on Food Network's *Harry Potter: Wizards of Baking, Summer, Holiday & Halloween Baking Championships*, host of Max's *Chasing Flavors* & ABC's *The Chew*, competed on *Bravo's Top Chef & Top Chef: All Stars* and so much more.**

Award-winning chef, best-selling author, and beloved TV personality Carla Hall is at the top of her game. But getting there was no picnic. In this theatrical one-woman show, Carla Hall invites you to “strap in” for a wild, hilarious, and emotional ride as she reveals how she learned to embrace her own authenticity, “work her quirk” and finally step into her power. From her Tennessee roots as an awkward theater camp kid, to Howard University, to a stint on the runways of Paris, to her irreverent takes on the confusing expectations of Black excellence, crushing sexism, and the many attempts to erase her uniqueness, Carla has had to battle every step of the way to find her true voice -- and wait till you hear it. In this insightful and inspiring World Premiere, Carla reveals the secret ingredients to her greatest creation: herself. This intimate exchange will leave audiences laughing, thinking, feeling and... maybe even discovering a little of their own power in simply being themselves.

“We can all catch some measure of [Carla Hall's] infectious energy and exceptional joie de vivre.” - Marie Clare

**#7**

**Tony Award-Winner**

**A GENTLEMAN'S GUIDE TO LOVE AND MURDER**

Music by **Steven Lutvak**

Lyrics by **Steven Lutvak and Robert L. Freedman**

Book by **Robert L. Freedman**

Music Directed by **Christopher Youstra**

Choreographed by **Ashleigh King**

Directed by **Eleanor Holdridge**

**Roberts Mainstage**

**July 2 - August 23, 2026**

Invited Press: Sunday, July 5, 2025 at 8:00 pm

This **Tony Award winner for Best Musical** is a hilarious and lyrical satire of money, manners, morals, and, yes, murder. After his mother's death, Monty Navarro is shocked and delighted to learn that she had a secret: she's related to the absurdly wealthy and aristocratic D'Ysquith family. And if, at first, Monty hoped his new relations might provide a sorely needed cash infusion, as eighth in line to the title of Earl of Highhurst, there isn't much hope for him inheriting the family treasure. When Monty's reunion with one of his long-lost kinfolk suddenly results in him moving into seventh place, he wonders to himself, “Why stop there?” Thus begins one of

the funniest and most outrageous murder sprees in musical theatre history. Even better, in this production, *all* seven ill-fated D'Ysquiths are played by DMV-favorite **Tom Story** (Mrs. Trunchbull in *Matilda*).

“Bloodlust hasn’t sung so sweetly, or provided so much theatrical fun, since Sweeney Todd first wielded his razor” – The New York Times

### **Special Event in its 16th Year**

### **A CHRISTMAS CAROL: A GHOST STORY OF CHRISTMAS**

By **Charles Dickens**

Originally Conceived, Adapted, and Staged by **Paul Morella**

Directed by **Hallie Gordon**

**Mulitz-Gudelsky Theatre Lab**

**November 28 - December 28, 2026**

Invited Press: Saturday, December 6, 2025 at 8:00 pm

Starring **Michael Russotto**

Michael Russotto returns for a second holiday season in this solo show that is a masterclass in theatrical storytelling. As he portrays nearly 50 different characters from the Charles Dickens classic, you’ll find yourself swept up in a story that is funnier, more timely, and far more familiar to our modern-day circumstances than you could ever imagine. Even more impressive, Paul Morella’s beloved adaptation stays true to Dickens’ original language – making this perhaps the most authentic *Christmas Carol* out there. There’s a reason our audience has made this part of their holiday tradition for the past 16 years.

### **Conclusion of the National Tour!**

Olney Theatre Center’s production of

### **AVAAZ**

Written and Performed by **Michael Shayan**

Directed by **Moritz von Stuelpnagel**

**Theater J**

**Edlavitch DCJCC**

**June 6-26, 2026**

After productions all over the country, **the National Tour of Avaaz comes home to the DMV!** *Avaaz* invites you to meet Roya, our fabulous hostess, as she welcomes you into her home to celebrate Nowruz, the Iranian New Year. She’s preparing dinner, but the true feast is the story of her life: beginning in Iran as part of that country’s small but ancient Jewish community, her epic journey out of Tehran after the revolution, and the challenges she faces as an immigrant and the single mother of a queer son in "Tehran-geles" (formerly known as Westwood). As a Jew in Iran and an Iranian in America, Roya relies on a heavy dose of humor, both in her storytelling and her survival. Most significantly, Roya is portrayed by her adult son and the author of *Avaaz*,

Emmy-nominee Michael Shayan, in a solo performance that combines masterful storytelling with a loving tribute.

## **ABOUT OLNEY THEATRE CENTER**

### **Mission**

Olney Theatre Center for the Arts produces and curates theatrical performance for the diverse audiences in our community, and educates, learns from, supports and inspires a more inclusive generation of theater-makers.

### **Vision**

We strive to become an arts and culture powerhouse, redefining the American regional theater movement by cultivating and sharing the creativity of our community.

### **History**

Founded in 1938 as a summer playhouse, Olney Theatre Center now produces world and American premieres of plays and musicals, and reimaginings of familiar titles year-round; presents the work of leading companies and artists; tours nationally and locally; teaches students of all ages; and mentors a more inclusive generation of theatremakers. For more than 8 decades, Olney Theatre has brought impactful theater performance and education to our community, helping to grow the vibrancy and vitality of our home in the Washington, DC region.

Over the years, some of the biggest names in theater and film have appeared on our stages, including Tallulah Bankhead, Helen Hayes, Jessica Tandy, Hume Cronyn, Bob Fosse, Phillip Bosco, Eve Arden, Eva Gabor, Burl Ives, Jose Ferrer, Carol Channing, Olivia d'Havilland, Tony Randall, Paulette Goddard, Dorothy and Lillian Gish, Jane Seymour, Anne Revere, Frances Sternhagen, Arthur Treacher, James Broderick, Olympia Dukakis, Sir Ian McKellen, Marica Gay Harden, John Colicos, Uzo Aduba, Alan Cumming, Cheyenne Jackson, Robin de Jesus, Wilson Jermaine Heredia, and Bernadette Peters, among many, many others.

Olney Theatre is now the cultural anchor of a rapidly changing region and serves one of the most diverse, best-educated, and wealthiest counties in the country. Situated on the unceded land of the Piscataway-Conoy people, the Olney area was once a rural farming community with a unique Quaker heritage. Now the area is occupied by every kind of family that makes up 21st Century America, along with major corporations, shopping districts, civic associations, nonprofit organizations, and a diverse collection of houses of worship. Montgomery County's 1 million residents play a dynamic role in the Baltimore-Washington corridor and are a driving force behind the region's creative economy.

Olney Theatre Center employs 45 full-time staff, 20+ part-time positions, 13 early career apprentices, and more than 400 professional artists annually. The Theatre is currently in the final phase of a \$36M capital campaign to build new infrastructure that better meets the needs of our community.



For more information, please visit [olneytheatre.org/history](https://olneytheatre.org/history)

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