

PLAYBILL

The Belrose

GRITOT
THEATER COMPANY

How
**THE GRINCH STOLE
KWANZAA**

Written and Directed by Andre K. Jefferson

December 19th-21st, 27th-28th

1415 Fifth Ave, San Rafael

7 pm; 3 pm on Sundays

griottheatercompany.org



GRIOT

Artistic Director's Note

Welcome to Griot. We are honored to have you with us this evening.

Six years ago, I could not have imagined this moment. What began as handwritten Post-it notes covering the walls of my apartment—ideas sketched out during lunch breaks as a classroom teacher—was meant to be nothing more than a lunch club. Today, Griot is a fully functioning nonprofit organization, sustained by a community that believes in the power of our young people and the stories they carry.

Griot Theater Company was founded in response to the desegregation mandate between Sausalito and Marin City schools. Since then, our work has grown beyond what we ever imagined. We now serve Black students across Marin County and throughout the Bay Area, exposing youth to the richness and healing power of storytelling rooted in oral traditions. Along the way, we have produced over 15 productions, taken 28 of our students to experience Broadway, and we proudly provide scholarships to Griot alumni as they transition into higher education.

Tonight's production marks an important milestone in Griot's history. For the first time, we are presenting a production under the direction of a director outside of myself. This play—conceived over 11 years ago by a fifth grader—remains a timeless and powerful work. Under the visionary leadership of our Pathways Director, Andre K. Jefferson, it has been thoughtfully reimagined and shaped for this generation of students.

We invite you to continue supporting Griot Theater Company and to learn more about the work we are doing in the community. Your presence and contributions fuel our mission and allow us to grow, dream, and expand opportunities for our youth.

We truly hope you enjoy tonight's performance and leave inspired.

LeShawn Holcomb
Artistic Director



GRIOT

Pathways Director's Note

This piece is for us.

And by us, I mean those who have ever been excluded, discriminated against, felt left out, lost, hurt, or out of place. In other words, this story is for everyone. This is not the traditional Grinch story. This is not the familiar Grinch you may remember. Our Grinch, or rather, Grinch Jr, better yet, GJ, the son of the legend, is a normal college student trying to find his place in a new world.

This choice was important to me. I wanted to tell a story that today's youth can truly relate to, one where audiences can see themselves not only in the characters, but in the experiences woven throughout this adaptation. Another intention was to subtly explore racial prejudice and other forms of exclusion, using the color green as a visual and symbolic language. Through this lens, we examine identity, belonging, and what it means to be seen.

I invite you to listen closely to the words and sit with the simple yet profound messages within this piece. I invite you to reflect, to recognize yourself, and perhaps each other. I invite you to let the music move you, sing along to the catchy tunes, learn about Kwanzaa and its principals, and simply enjoy the show.

I hope this story sparks joy and motivates us to move with love because regardless of color, even if you're green, we're all human

Andre K. Jefferson
Pathways Director

The Grinch Who Stole Kwanzaa: A Living History (2014, 2024, 2025)

2014: The Origin Story & Intergenerational Collaboration

Conceived through a powerful collaboration between myself and Jeremiah Moultry, a brilliant 5th-grade storyteller from Martin Luther King Jr. Academy.

As a teaching artist with Marin Theatre Company and MLK Academy, I centered Jeremiah's voice, co-developing the script over six weeks with original text and community chants.

Built with love, urgency, and community care, with support from Bettie Hodges of The Hannah Project and Oshalla Diana Marcus of Marin City Arts & Culture.



2024: The 10-Year Reunion & Evolution

Returned for its 10-year reunion, reimagined alongside a new generation of youth.

Adapted script reflected the current moment, touring Tamalpais High School and Marin City.

Introduced fresh dialogue, contemporary references, and newly written raps, expanding the musical and narrative landscape.

2025: A Bold New Chapter & Youth Leadership

Re-adapted and directed by Andre K. Jefferson.

Offers a fully realized vision of a Historically Black University in We-Ville.

Dives deeper into themes of race, identity, belonging, and discrimination.

Features original raps and songs developed collaboratively by Jefferson and the students, centering youth voice and creative leadership.

A LIVING WORK, growing alongside our community. Each adaptation reflects the evolving realities, questions, and brilliance of our youth, ensuring the story remains relevant, courageous, and rooted in collective truth.

GRIOT

Cast



Adrian Wilson
Brother-Lou-We



Anais Bitton
Thing 1



Andre K. Jefferson
Iman-Lou-We



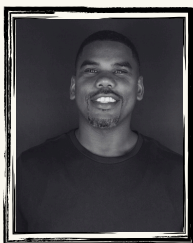
Arista D'Nae
Iman-Lou-We



Jamie Kelly
Thing 2



Jordan R. Gomes
Grinch Jr.



LeShawn Holcomb
Iman-Lou-We



Natalie Ford
Brandy-Lou-We



Shamar Mitchell
Homie-Lou-Who



Sundiata Ayinde
Sista-Lou-We



Xavi Bennett
Little Thing

GRIOT

Crew



Andre K. Jefferson
Writer & Director



Arista D'Nae
Production Manager



Emily Caiuch
Stage Manager



Adrian Garcia
Lighting



Caetano Andrade
Costumes



Valentino B. Herrera
Sound

Set

Eric Christ & Nar Hammari



Staff

Artistic Director.....LeShawn Holcomb

Pathways Director.....Andre K. Jefferson

Production Manager..... Arista D’Nae

Marketing Director.....Ben Henderson

Executive Assistant.....Chizzi Daniels

Board of Directors

Vester Wiggins

Ida Green

Kristen Wolslegel





Adrian Garcia

Adrian, an incoming senior at Tamalpais High School, is a passionate actor and designer dedicated to creating theatre that challenges perspectives. His acting credits include roles in *Pinocchio*, *Macbeth*, and *Hamlet*. Behind the scenes, Adrian's technical work is extensive: he served as Set Designer for *War of the Roses*, Director/Designer for *Whoosh!*, Master Electrician for *The Government Inspector*, and Sound Operator for *The House of Bernarda Alba*. He aims to continue merging design and performance to tell transformative stories.

Adrian Wilson

Adrian is a 17-year-old native of Novato and a senior at both Novato High School and the Marin School of the Arts (MSA). Over the past three years, he has performed in five musicals, including *Into The Woods*, *Follies*, *Mary Poppins*, *Anything Goes*, and *Mean Girls*. Adrian currently works with the Griot Theater Company, an opportunity he values as he advances his skills for a future career as an actor and singer. After high school, he plans to attend either SRJC or COM to join their theater programs. He is open to future casting opportunities for shows or vocal performances.

Anais Bitton

Anais Bitton Williams is a 12th grader at Tamalpais High School, where she has been an active member of the drama program for four years. Theatre is one of her biggest passions, and she hopes to pursue it in the future. She has performed in productions such as *The Lion King*, *Frog and Toad*, *The Hobbit*, and various improv shows. When she's not onstage, Anais loves writing cards, spending time at the beach with friends, and enjoying her favorite ice cream flavor—dark chocolate. She is thrilled to be part of this show and hopes you enjoy the performance!



Andre K. Jefferson

Andre K. Jefferson graduated from Xavier University of Louisiana, earning his bachelor's in Psychology. For over a decade, he has toured the U.S. in several stage play productions and performing in theatre festivals.

Andre is the author of the children's book "Big Kid Book," the Producer of "Brother's Keeper," and the writer of the feature film "Karter Hall," which has been nominated for best action film. Andre is the founder of "Dre'lentless Productions" and "Brain Unchained," a mental health and suicide prevention organization that supports creatives, and he has been featured on The Disney Channel, Amazon, Netflix, ABC, NBC, and HULU. Andre K. Jefferson is an actor, director, writer, author, poet, producer, and advocate whose mission is to change the world- one production at a time.

Arista D'Nae

Arista D'Nae doesn't chase applause—she chases truth. Actor. Voice Artist. Stunt Performer. She's about the grind, the grit, and the grace of real stories told from real places. No flex, just facts. Guided by faith and grounded in purpose, she brings lived experience and spiritual depth to every role. Whether on stage, behind the mic, or in motion, Arista shows up with power, presence, and prayer in her pocket.

Ben Henderson

Ben serves as Marketing Director for The Griot Theater Company. A Southside Chicago native and U.S. Air Force Veteran, he holds a B.A. in Psychology from Chapman University and studied fine arts at PAFA. His diverse background spans crisis counseling in San Francisco to creating murals in Barbados. Ben enjoys archery, gospel, video games, and his dog, Viola.





Chizi Daniels

Chizi Daniels is the Executive Assistant of Griot. He moved to San Francisco in 2021 after graduating from Indiana University. His main interests are soccer, electronic music, and animated shows and movies. He's originally Nigerian and moved to the U.S. when he was 3. He lived in Asia for 6 years from 10-16 before moving back to the U.S.

Caetano Andrade

Caetano Andrade is a sophomore at Tam High interested in art and philosophy, and working towards his goal of become a fashion designer. Born in San Francisco, Tano moved around and lived in Amsterdam for six years before returning back to the Bay. For fun he skateboards, listens to music, and makes clothes. He's always had an interest in creative pursuits and an obsession with design. He hopes to pursue a career in fashion and one day start his own clothing brand

Emily Caiuch

Emily is a junior at Tamalpais High School and a dedicated member of the Conservatory Theatre Ensemble (CTE). This marks her second time serving as a Stage Manager, though she is also passionate about acting and lighting design. Her performance credits include Carrie: The Musical, Richard III, and The Government Inspector. A versatile artist, Emily's interests span gymnastics, sailing, dancing, and drawing. She views the stage as a living, breathing space where every performance is unique, and she dreams of pursuing a future career in film and on Broadway.





Jamie Kelly

Jamie started his acting career in his home town of Birmingham, Michigan in high school as a sailor in the musical 'South Pacific' and playing Ferdinand in Shakespeare's 'The Tempest.' He joined an acting club in his teenage years to complement his other favorite hobby of golf. Jamie made his film debut in 1999 in a student project loosely based on Samuel Beckett's play 'Waiting for Godot'. Jamie is very grateful to be acting in a second project of Andre K. Jefferson's, in 2025 to resurrect his acting career with 'The Grinch Who Stole Kwanzaa' - now that his "stay at home" dad roles have passed.

Jordan R. Gomes

Jordan Gomes, known professionally as StunnaMan02, is an energetic San Francisco native, artist, and philanthropist dedicated to raising the collective equilibrium through love and positivity. He creates unique music including the songs "Eat a Salad," "Keep God In Your Life," and the viral hit "Big Steppin," which became a global anthem featured in NBA 2K23 and used by the San Francisco 49ers and Golden State Warriors. As an actor, Jordan has appeared in the films Freaky Tales and The Last Black Man in San Francisco, as well as the TV show Blindspotting. Holding a B.S. in Neurological Psychology, he combines his "Still Winnin'" movement with a passion for health, community, and empowering others to live their best lives.

LeShawn Holcomb

LeShawn Darnell Holcomb is a dedicated educator and artist serving as the Dean of Students at Tamalpais High School. As the Founding Artistic Director of The Griot Theater Company, he established a creative safe haven for Black and Brown youth from Martin Luther King Jr. Academy. LeShawn holds an M.S. in Urban Education and Social Justice from USF and actively collaborates with regional companies as a playwright and performer, championing the arts as a vehicle for healing and hope.





Natalie Ford

Natalie Ford (she/her) is thrilled to return to Griot Theatre Company in the original production *The Grinch Who Stole Kwanza*, playing BrandyLou-We. Natalie is a Bay Area actress whose recent credits include the Bay Area premiere of *Big, Scary Animals* at Masquers Playhouse, where she portrayed Sophia, and the feature film *Sweet Chariot with School Dismissed LLC*, in which she starred as the lead, Chariot. Natalie is excited to share the holiday cheer with the Griot community!

Sundiata Ayinde

Sundiata Ayinde (she/her/hers), is an Oakland raised performer passionate about universal access to the arts. She spent two years as an assistant dramaturg working under Philippa Kelly on work such as *As You Like It* adapted by Shaina Taub at Sf Playhouse. Sundiata's latest work includes *The Watermelon Cabaret* directed by Mylo Cardona at Magic Theatre for FnFProductions and *The Cake* directed by Lisa Mallete at City Lights Theater.

Shamar Mitchell

Shamar, a 16-year-old student at Tamalpais High School from Marin City, is a thinker who bridges the gap between numbers and words. Equally passionate about complex math and spoken-word poetry, he believes both disciplines demand clarity and imagination. Shamar aspires to attend Stanford University and eventually become a professor and writer. Driven to exceed the expectations often placed on Black youth, he is committed to mastering his craft and reaching a level of greatness that inspires others to set their own limits.





Valentino B. Herrera

Valentino Bertolucci Herrera is a 17-year-old senior at Tamalpais High School. Originally from Buenos Aires, Argentina, Valentino has a strong passion for music and creativity. He enjoys music production and engineering, as well as staying active through sports.

Valentino aspires to become a music producer because he values high-quality sound and meaningful musical experiences. He hopes to help create music that people can enjoy in many settings—whether at home, at concerts, or with friends. Looking ahead, Valentino plans to attend college in California, where he can continue developing his skills and pursuing his goals in the music industry.

Xa'viar "Xavi" Bennett

Xa'viar "Xavi" Bennett is a dynamic 13-year-old actress, model, CEO, and youth leader. Her acting credits include the African American Shakespeare Company's *Cinderella*, The Griot Theatre Company's *The Grinch Stole Kwanzaa*, and lead roles in the films *The Policy* and *Eyes in the Hall*. A featured model for Macy's fashion shows, Xavi has extensive training in acting, vocals, and dance. Beyond the spotlight, she is the Student Body President, CEO of the HERPower App, and author of the HERPower Teens workbook. Passionate about empowering others, Xavi is an unstoppable rising talent.

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& Golden Gate Village

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GRIOT

THEATER COMPANY

Apprenticeship



We're looking for 5 passionate high school students from southern Marin to join us and help shape the future of Griot
Applications are due Jan 31st

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Support Griot

The Griot Theater Company is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit celebrating artists of color and empowering Marin City youth. Your donation helps us nurture the next generation of storytellers, amplifying their unique voices in the arts & beyond. Thank you for your support!

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