

Backstage at the ALPLM

A Look Behind the Scenes of Our Theatre Department

Why Theatre?

How does theatre help people process history?

Theatre is a valuable illustrative tool that allows audiences to engage with topics, follow the plot and timeline of events, and form philosophical views about the information taken in.

Paired with history, theatre allows audiences to digest circumstances, events, and individuals within the parameters of the production's space, setting, and script.

Why Theatre?

How does theatre help people process history?

When historic events and/or lectures are framed through the lens of theatre, we are able to consider what is or isn't said in historic accounts.

The process of creating theatre in a historic setting certainly employs the use of dramatization and dramaturgy, but it also demands the consideration of the context and verity of the material.

What we do as Historic Actors

Day to Day tasks include:

- Performing the ghost show
- Performing maintenance on the costumes
- Interpreting stories and narratives within setting in the museum
- Voiceover work for exhibits and accessible narration

Special Projects and focuses include:

- Research and fact checking material
- Script writing and development of new shows
- Composing music for special programs, shows, and exhibits
- Q&A with audiences
- Creating supplemental art for performances alongside the tech staff, such as soundtracks or sound effects
- Remote performances and presentations
- Directing other special performances with local actors and talent

Ghosts of the Library at Holovision Theatre

One of our Flagship Shows here at the ALPLM, The Holovision theatre hosts the infamous “Ghosts of the Library” show.

The show features one actor portraying a Librarian giving a tour of the Library’s archive while sharing background about the Lincoln’s and Civil War times. As the show begins its conclusion, the actor reveals that he was a part of a battle in Vicksburg.

The runtime of the show is nine minutes and is coordinated to work in tandem with the other flagship show, “Lincoln’s Eyes.” This production takes about two to three months to train for.

Stage View from Audience





Lincoln's Eyes at Union Theatre

The other flagship show, “Lincoln’s Eyes,” is a 14 minute show that talks about the life, legacy, and impact of President Abraham Lincoln. This production runs as a companion piece to “Ghosts of the Library” and features various sensory experiences to help keep audiences engaged. It is completely automated and requires no live actors.



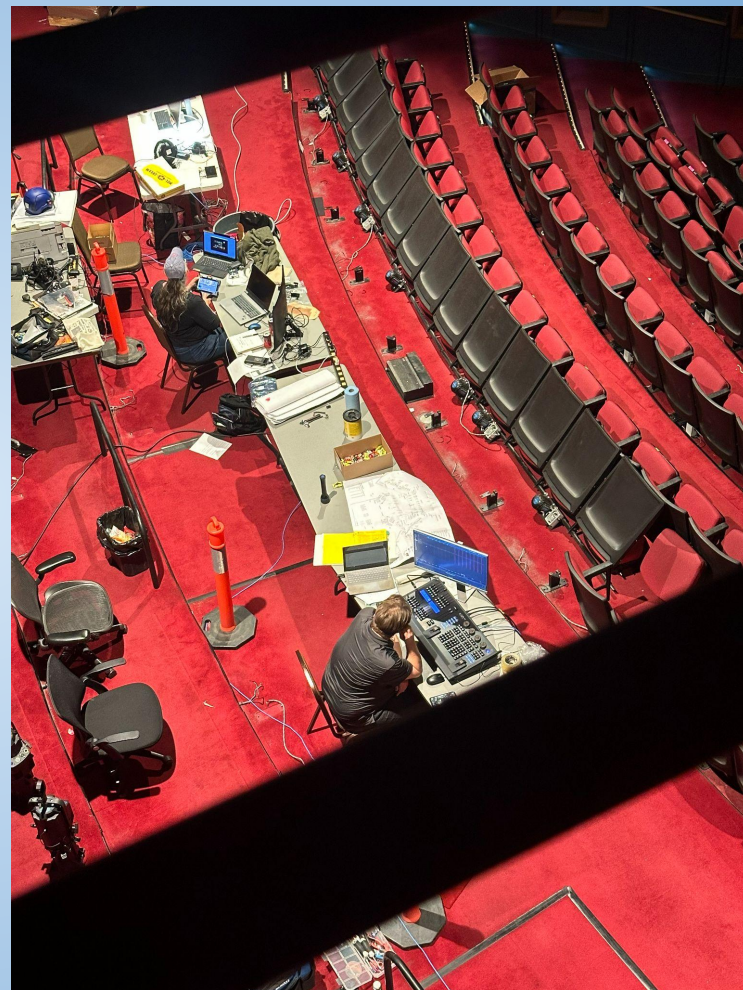
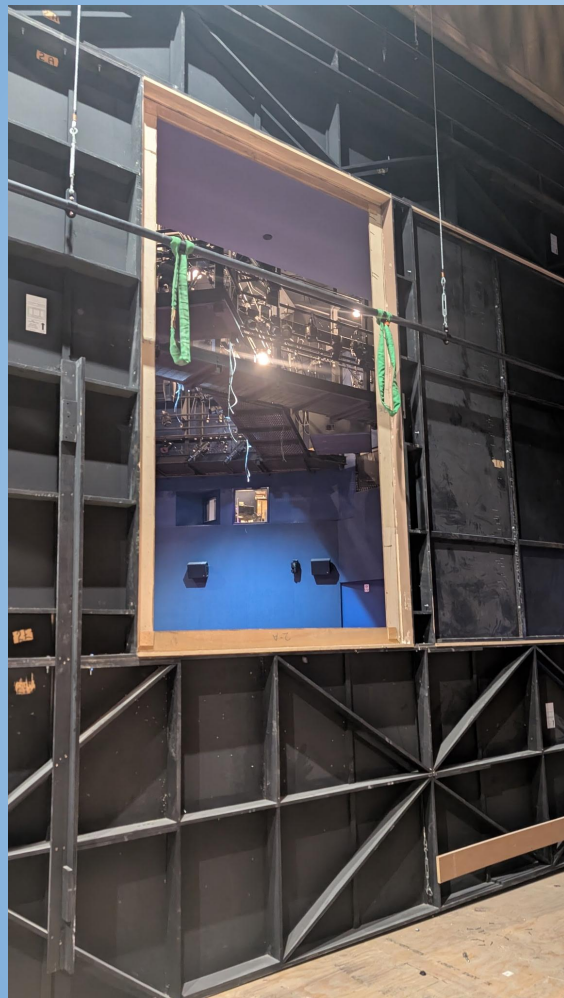
Behind stage at Union Theatre

Recently, the ALPLM Tech team collaborated on a project to replace the rigging of the Union Theatre. The project was extensive and necessary. Rigging is a technical aspect of many theaters and facilitates the swift movement of set pieces.





The process of replacing the rigging was extensive but it also allowed for upgrades to Union Theatre. Carpeting was replaced as were other furniture and accoutrements.



Tech Night for the Volunteers



Seasonal Shows

Currently there are three seasonal shows that run at the ALPLM

The first, “***Small Beginnings***,” was developed during and post Covid era. It follows the life and times of Robert Smalls, a man who escaped antebellum slavery and later became a prominent Black man post Civil War.

The second, “***Lilacs and Letters***,” follows famous poet and wartime nurse, Walt Whitman, as he tends to wounded soldiers in a D.C. hospital while working on his latest poetry.

The third, “***Private Albert***,” follows Albert Cashier who lived his life as a man until his later years. Cashier’s story is one of the few documented stories of Trans folks in major American History.

Each show is under 20 minutes to fit the needs of the every day schedules of the flagship shows.

“Small Beginnings” and “Lilacs and Letters” feature music that is composed by Randy Skalicky.

Small Beginnings

“Small Beginnings” follows the early life of Robert Smalls starting at the age of 12 as he begins to learn the social hierarchy of the Slave holding states. After learning the ways that Black people, especially those enslaved, were expected to behave, Robert was separated from his mother in his early adolescent years.

We learn about his life, what he did to survive, the family that he and his wife, Hannah, built, and the feat of commandeering a Confederate steamship to escape to freedom with 13 people.

It's noted that while this is the beginning of Robert's story, his life continued on and he defied many odds including becoming the first Black man to be a Navy Sea Captain and a US House Representative.

Small Beginnings

“Small Beginnings” was created out of a desire to artistically provide stories of Black people overcoming the adversity that dwelled inside of an incomplete Union.

As was previously stated, the writing process started during the Covid era lockdowns (2020-2021). During this time period, there was a lot of civil unrest happening in real time across the United States. This work was created to not only diversify the museum’s stories but also to emphasize the high hurdles that Black people had to overcome beyond enslavement alone.



Small Beginnings



Lilacs and Letters

Beginning during the first COVID lockdown in 2020, “Lilacs and Letters” was meant to highlight the remarkable life of Civil War poet, Walt Whitman.



Lilacs and Letters

The play had two other versions before settling on its final form. First, it was a 35 minute one man show (they are all “one man” shows) following him in his office in D.C. as he meticulously sorts through documents deciding which to save and which to discard - no matter how disparaging they may be. The second iteration was a 10 minute pop-up character in the plaza of the Museum, designed to engage 5th grade or older groups passing through. The final form was the 15 minute play which was set in a hospital with a proper set, including beds and furniture. It was also fully formed with original music composed by Randy Skalicky and lighting and sound effects created by our technical staff.



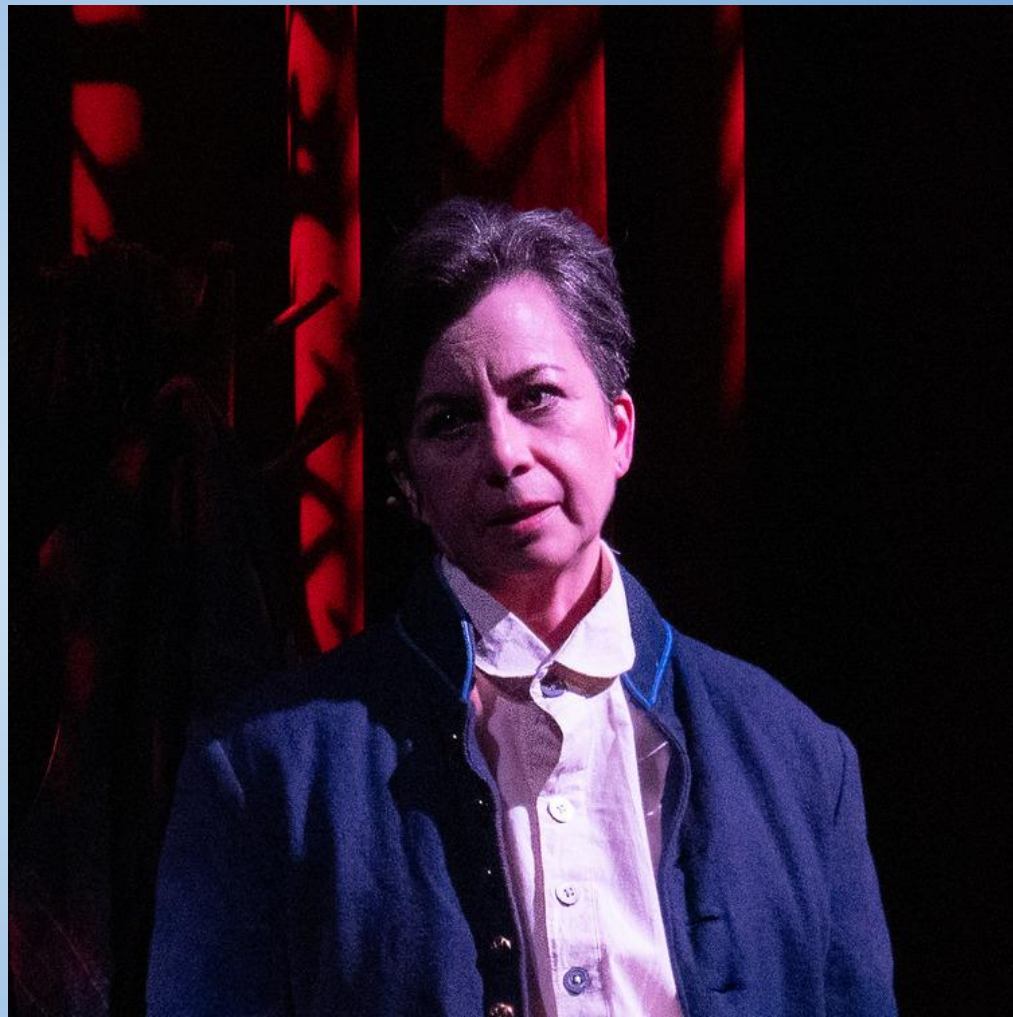


Private Albert

Written by Ed Macmurdo, Private Albert tells the story of Albert Cashier. Albert was a private in the Union Army and lived life as a man after immigrating to America although he was assigned female at birth in Ireland.

It was developed out of recognition that we owe it to ourselves as an authority on the life and times of President Lincoln **and** The Civil war, to tell authentic stories that represent everyone.







Special Occasion Shows and Presentations

Nature of Freedom— A literary commemoration of Juneteenth.

This production was created while also understanding that Juneteenth is a direct result of the after effects of the end of the Civil War. By understanding the events and shortcomings of the reconstruction period, we are able to contextualize events and their impact.



Special Presentations

Civil War The Musical by Frank Wildhorn, Gregory Boyd, Jack Murphy

Five Presidents by Rick Cleveland

One Destiny by Richard Helleeson

The Heavens Are Hung in Black by James Still

The Last Full Measure by Ken Bradbury

Mr. Lincoln by Herbert Mitgang



Civil War: The Musical
by Frank Wildhorn, Gregory Boyd,
and Jack Murphy

Five Presidents (left) & The Heavens
Are Hung in Black (right)





One Destiny
By Richard Hellesen

Mr. Lincoln by Herbert Mitgang





The Last Full
Measure
By Ken
Bradbury

Reader's Theatre

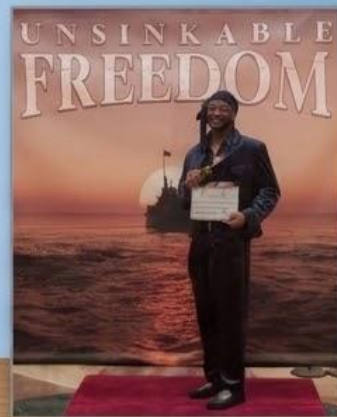
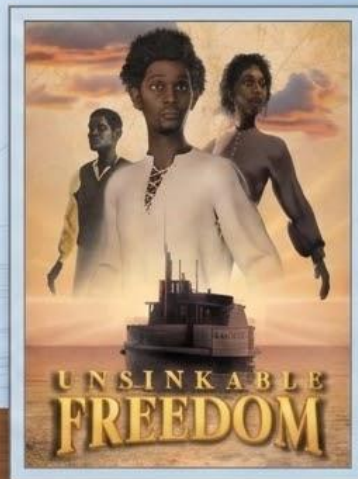
One of the other vehicles we are able to employ here in the museum is the use of Reader's Theatre. This style of theatre is stripped down to the minimum, meaning static lighting, microphones, and a script read onstage to emphasize the words and the stories being told.

Typically, what happens is that we seek out reading material that is relevant and can be read outloud to an audience. From there, we ask for permission to use the material from the author. After that, we divide the narration across a number of actors.

These shows are typically under 15 minutes in order to best accommodate guests.

Unsinkable Freedom

Our first animated feature produced entirely in the heritage area is an adaptation of *Small Beginnings* that focuses solely on the events leading up to and the actual escape of Robert Smalls and 12 other people. It premiered February 27, 2026.



Premiere: 2026