

# OUTLIERS

THEATRE COLLECTIVE

LIFE  
SLUCKS.

BY  
AARON  
POSNER

SORT OF ADAPTED  
FROM *LINCLE VANYA*  
BY ANTON CHEKHOV

SMALL WORLD CENTRE  
@ 180 SHAW STREET, TORONTO  
APRIL 30-MAY 10, 2025

FEATURING: HILARY ADAMS, HAYDEN FINKELSHTAIN,  
SEAN JACKLIN, SCOTT MCCULLOCH, LISA NORTON,  
JADA RIFKIN, & KIANA WOO

DIRECTED BY TOM MCHALE  
PRODUCED BY ALESSANDRO SIMARI  
& JANICE PETERS GIBSON

STAGE MANAGER: LEAH WILTON  
POSTER & IMAGE DESIGN BY SARAH SANDOVAL



TICKETS

## LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

**Outliers Theatre Collective** acknowledges the land on which our work is created is the traditional territory of many Nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples, and is home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. We acknowledge them and any other Nations who care for the land (acknowledged and unacknowledged, recorded and unrecorded) as the past, present, and future caretakers of this land, the traditional territory named Tkarón:to, the Mohawk word for “the place in the water where the trees are standing.” We recognize and honour the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt covenant and our responsibility for the stewardship of the land and the community that surrounds us. This agreement made amongst Indigenous nations governs how to share the resources that the land and water provide. At the centre of the agreement is the image of a single dish that holds all the bounty and one spoon to draw from that dish. The agreement: everyone will only take what they need, always ensuring that something is left for those who follow. The Dish With One Spoon agreement remains in effect to this day. All nations are invited to live by its terms.


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## ABOUT OUTLIERS THEATRE COLLECTIVE

**Outliers Theatre Collective** is a new Toronto-based, independent theatre collective with a mandate to present and curate new, neglected, undiscovered, and forgotten theatrical works that have ‘flown under the radar’ of the theatre community — stuff that lies outside the norm and doesn’t easily fit categorization. *Life Sucks*. by Aaron Posner is our inaugural production. We aim to present works that challenge us, challenge our audiences, and create productions of the highest calibre. We are an ensemble of theatre artists that collectively strive to boost theatrical life in Toronto. We are committed to making theatre that is vibrant, exciting, accessible, diverse, inclusive, welcoming and safe. We strive to build a safe space for our artists, our audiences and our extended community that is free of harassment, violence, and discrimination.

**Outliers Theatre Collective** is a member of **TAPA** (Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts).

# OUTLIERS

THEATRE  COLLECTIVE

presents

## LIFE SUCKS.

by Aaron Posner

Sort of Adapted from *Uncle Vanya* by Anton Chekhov

### THE CAST

**VANYA** ..... Hayden Finkelshtain  
**SONIA** ..... Kiana Woo  
**ELLA** ..... Hilary Adams  
**BABS** ..... Lisa Norton  
**THE PROFESSOR** ..... Scott McCulloch  
**DR. ASTER** ..... Sean Jacklin  
**PICKLES** ..... Jada Rifkin

**Directed by** ..... Tom McHale  
**Co-Produced by** ..... Alessandro Simari  
Janice Peters Gibson  
Tom McHale  
**Stage Manager** ..... Leah Wilton  
**Assistant Director** ..... Alessandro Simari  
**Fights/Intimacy** ..... Jack Davidson

*Life Sucks.* is presented by special arrangement with Broadway Licensing, LLC, servicing the Dramatists Play Service imprint. ([www.dramatists.com](http://www.dramatists.com)).

First produced by Theater J at the Aaron and Cecile Goldman Theater in Washington, DC.  
*Life Sucks.* runs approximately 2 hours and 20 minutes, including one 15 minute intermission.

Content Advisory: This production contains mature themes & content, coarse language, audience interaction & engagement, staged violence, talk of death & suicide, and gunshots.

**This is a Canadian Actors Equity Association production under the Artists' Collective Policy.**

## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

There is a great line from a Clifford Odets and George Seaton 1954 screenplay *The Country Girl* that is often credited to Anton Chekhov. In the film, Frank Elgin (played by Bing Crosby) remarks that "Just about anybody can face a crisis. It's that everyday living that's rough." The quote has evolved over time and it's now popularly presented as "any idiot can face a crisis, it's this day-to-day living that wears you out" and is credited as words from Chekhov. As great a writer as Chekhov was, he never actually wrote those words. But that's no matter. It is easy to see why it's often misattributed to him because it fits so well with his writing and sums up many of his characters with pinpoint accuracy.

The people in Chekhov's plays and in Posner's are dealing with the crisis of everyday living. Real life is often messy, complicated, and relentless. Yet, at the same time, it can be joyful and beautiful. It is these contradictions that I find fascinating. It is our continued pursuit of happiness and struggle to find our purpose that is the noblest of all our pursuits. Throughout hardship, grief, and being forced to face a world that sometimes keeps kicking us when we are down, our basic need to find love, purpose, and meaning endures.

We are living in pretty tumultuous times. With all that is going on in the world, it might feel appropriate at times to give into cynicism and despair. Choosing to exist, carving out a place for yourselves, and trying to find your happiness is an act of defiance. Real life can wear you down; we keep moving. Being resilient and having perseverance is sometimes the ultimate act of bravery.

Yes, there is a terrible amount of bleakness and cynicism in the world right now, but I try to lean toward hope and optimism. Obviously, the title of the play is *Life Sucks.*, but the question is: Does it really? I am more focused on asking, "how can we make it not suck?"

Life sucks some of the time, but not all of the time. With this production, we are inclined to be optimistic, and we believe that the play leans us toward a more hopeful way forward.

Thank you for coming. We are delighted that you can join us.

**Tom McHale**

Director, *Life Sucks.*

Co-Artistic Director, Co-Producer, **Outliers Theatre Collective**

# WHO'S WHO

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## The Writers

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### **AARON POSNER**

#### ***Playwright***

Aaron Posner is a Helen Hayes and Barrymore award-winning director and playwright. He is a founder and former Artistic Director of Philadelphia's Arden Theatre, is an Associate Artist at the Folger Theatre and Milwaukee Repertory Theatre, and has directed at major U.S. regional theatres from coast to coast. *Life Sucks* is his second re-imagining of a Chekhov play. His first was *Stupid Fucking Bird* [a re-imagining of *The Seagull*] which has received more than 250 productions worldwide. His adaptations include Chaim Potok's *The Chosen* and *My Name Is Asher Lev* (both of which has enjoyed successful runs at more than 50 theatres across the U.S.), Ken Kesey's *Sometimes A Great Notion*, Mark Twain's *A Murder, A Mystery And A Marriage*, an adaptation of three Kurt Vonnegut short stories, entitled *Who Am I This Time? (And Other Conundrums of Love)*. Aaron was raised in Eugene, Oregon, and now lives near Washington, DC.



### **ANTON PAVLOVICH CHEKHOV**

#### ***Famous Dead Playwright***

Anton Chekhov was one of the greatest dramatists of the nineteenth century. From Chekhov, many contemporary playwrights have learned how to use mood, apparent trivialities, and inaction to highlight the internal psychology of characters. Chekhov's four major plays — *The Seagull*, *Uncle Vanya*, *Three Sisters*, and *The Cherry Orchard* — are frequently revived in modern productions. *Uncle Vanya* was first staged at the Moscow Art Theatre in 1899. In 1904, after the first production of *The Cherry Orchard*, Chekhov suffered two heart attacks, and most agree that this was an ill-advised decision on Chekhov's part. He died at the age of 44 in the German spa town of Bradenweiler and was buried in Moscow. Along with Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg, he is often referred to as one of the three seminal figures in the birth of naturalism in the theatre.

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## The Cast

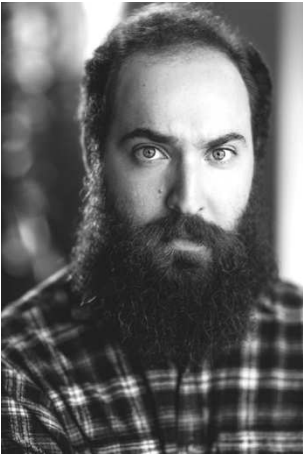
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### HILARY ADAMS

#### ELLA

**Selected Theatre:** *Twelfth Night*, *London Assurance*, *Grand Magic*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Miser*, *Hamlet* (Stratford Festival); *Schoolhouse*, *Macbeth*, *The Ruins*, *As You Like It*, *Iliad by Fire* (Two Planks); *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *As You Like It* (Shakespeare BASH'd); *Old Man and The River* (Theatre Direct); *Goodnight Moon* (Mermaid Theatre); *As You Like It*, *King Lear*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Taming of the Shrew* (Shakespeare by the Sea). **Film/TV:** *Lakeview*, *Compulsus*, *King & Pawn* **Recordings:** 'Wildflower: Lakeview Version', 'Hold Me' (Lakeview), 'Ophelia', 'Sending Love' (Spotify, Apple Music) **Composer:** WOLF, Flimsy (Hurricane Productions) *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Shakespeare BASH'd) **Awards:** Merritt Award for Outstanding Performance in a Leading Role (*Schoolhouse*) **Training:** Birmingham Conservatory, Dalhousie University. **Online:** @hilary\_adamss.



### HAYDEN FINKELSHTAIN

#### VANYA

Hayden is a performer and writer based in Toronto; recent theatre credits include Mark and Others in *Dead Elephants* (Good Old Neon), Samuel Rosenthal in *The Riot at Christie Pits* (The Hogtown Collective), and Ron Bloom in *Taking Liberties* (Dave Carley / Campbell House). Hayden has also been featured in several film and television projects including *SEE*, *Ghosts*, *Murdoch Mysteries*, and *Bakugan: Battle Planet*.

He has two cats: Jack Black and Egg.

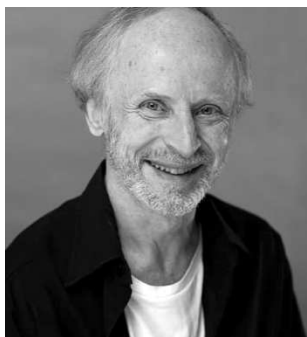
**Online:** @haydenfinkelshtain



## SEAN JACKLIN

### DR. ASTER

Sean is an actor / writer / musician based in Toronto. He is also the co-artistic director of The Lakeside Players and has had the privilege of escaping Toronto now and then to perform and create with them throughout the country. Thanks to all who have helped along the way. **Recent Credits:** Marc in 'Art' (El Kabong Theatre), Working Stiff in *Rear Window* (Bygone Theatre), Titius Tatus/Iracundus in *Fatal Charade* (El Kabong Theatre / Toronto Fringe Festival), and Cruikshank in *Robin Hood* and *Cyrano in Cyrano de Bergerac* (The Lakeside Players).



## SCOTT McCULLOCH

### THE PROFESSOR

Scott has been a professional actor since 1984, performing in more than 150 plays and over 50 film and television productions. His last Toronto stage appearance was at the Assembly Theatre pre-pandemic in *Shakespeare* (which had only two performances before the first lockdown forced its closure), but he has appeared in the Ottawa based Odyssey Theatre's production of *The Miser* in 2023, as well as their staged readings of *The Girl With No Hands*. This production is Scott's first Posner, but his fifth Chekhov. Two examples of his recent film work: *Dada* and *Darkest Miriam* are currently making the film festival rounds. He holds a BFA from the University of Windsor and an MFA from Northern Illinois University.



## LISA NORTON

### BABS

Lisa Norton is a Scarborough-raised, Toronto and Meaford-based actor who's been pretending all over the country for twenty-eight years. T.O. most recently saw her in Eldritch Theatre's *Requiem for a Gumshoe*. Some favourite Toronto appearances: *Space Opera Zero!* (also Eldritch), *Blood of Our Soil* (Pyretic Prod. at the Tarragon), *The Model Apartment* (Harold Green Jewish Theatre), *And Up They Flew* (Theatre Columbus), *Better Living* (Factory), *Of Mice and Men* (Canadian Stage). Lisa acted at the Blyth Festival for three summers and the Shaw Festival for five. **Select TV Credits:** *FUBAR*, *Bomb Girls*, *Carter and Murdoch Mysteries*. You can also hear her in tons of ads and in cartoons like *Transformers: Botbots*, *Glowbies*, and right now as Dr. Repairo on *Go Togo* (CBC Kids).



## JADA RIFKIN

### PICKLES

Jada is thrilled to be part of *Life Sucks*. **Selected Recent Theatre:** *The Thanksgiving Play* (Mirvish/Pop-Up Theatre Canada), *GoldiRocks! Tour* (Education Arts Canada), *Tape* (Toronto Fringe Festival), *Merrily We Roll Along* (Shifting Ground Collective), *Jada Rifkin: I'M PERFECT\** (Now Toronto Critic's Pick), *Alice in Wonderland* (Creativiva Inc - Qatar, Singapore Tour), and *Every Silver Lining* (Next Stage Festival). **Selected TV / Film:** Discovery Channel 2, Amazon, OutTV/Go Button Media, Whistler Film Festival, and multiple national/international commercials. Rifkin is a graduate of Randolph College for the Performing Arts. **Online:** @jadarifkin



## KIANA WOO

### SONIA

Kiana is a Dora Award winning Chinese-Canadian actor, mover and creator with a special love for clown, physical theatre, and classical works. She attained her BFA in Acting from the University of Alberta and has since worked across Canada. Kiana has also been an ensemble member for the Shaw Festival and is a graduate of the Soulpepper Academy. She creates her own work, in clown, cabaret and devised creation. This summer you can catch Kiana in *The 39 Steps* with Guild Festival Theatre. She sends love to her family and partner, Alex. **Selected credits include:** *Les Zinspiré.e.s : le nombre sublime* (Théâtre Français de Toronto), *Prince Caspian*, *The Playboy of the Western World*, *A Christmas Carol* (Shaw Festival), *King Lear*, *Peggy Picket Sees the Face of God* (Soulpepper Theatre), *The Fiancée* (Citadel Theatre), *Alice in Wonderland* (Guild Festival Theatre), and *Cymbeline* (Shakespeare Bash'd). **Online:** @\_kikibird



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## The Creative and Production Team

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### **TOM McHALE**

#### **Director, Producer**

Tom is the Co-Founder, Co-Artistic Director, and Co-Producer of Outliers Theatre Collective. Past Directing work include two seasons and eight plays at The Newmarket National 10 Minute Play Festival (NNPF), highlights at NNPF include *Break In*, *On Beauty* and *Iphigenia*. **Other Directing credits:** *Charlie Blake's Boat* (Social Capital Theatre Short Short Play Festival/Eastern Front STAGES Festival), *U.S. Drag* (Zaw Theatre/Toronto Fringe), *The Good German* (Shadowpath Theatre), *Look Back In Anger* (Shiftless When Idle Theatre), Co-Director of *As You Puppet* (Hank's Toy Box Theatre /Toronto Fringe {Best of Fringe and Now Toronto Critic's Pick}/Young People's Theatre /Springworks Festival in Stratford). **Assistant Director Credits:** *Blue/Orange* (Canadian Stage), *Fool for Love* and *The Zoo Story* (Soulpepper). Tom is a Graduate of The University of Windsor with an Honours B.A. in Drama.



### **ALESSANDRO SIMARI**

#### **Producer, Assistant Director**

Dr Alessandro Simari the Co-Founder, Co-Artistic Director, and Co-Producer of Outliers Theatre Collective. He is an award-winning researcher and university lecturer who has taught Theatre Studies and English Literature in the United Kingdom and Canada. His research on Shakespeare performance histories and the political economy of theatre has been published in leading academic journals and has been presented at international conferences. He is a member of the Performance & Political Economy Research Collective ([www.pperesearch.com](http://www.pperesearch.com)). Alessandro has extensive experience writing and directing devised performances for children's community theatre and amateur theatre. He is currently writing his first full-length play. **Assistant Director credits:** *Midnight Coachman* (short film, 2024).



## **JANICE PETERS GIBSON**

### ***Producer***

Janice Peters Gibson is an arts manager, freelance producer, and award-winning stage manager who has been a theatre maker for as long as she can remember. Originally from PEI/Epekwitk, Janice has worked with various companies across Toronto including That Arts Group (*Angels in America, That Choir*); Shakespeare in the Ruff (*Otîhêw, Richard Three, A Witch in Algiers*); The Company Theatre (*The Test, Speaking in Tongues, Belleville, Domesticated, The Seagull, John, Jerusalem, Things I Know to be True*); and Theatrefront (*The Orange Dot, Mules*).



## **LEAH WILTON**

### ***Stage Manager***

Leah Wilton (she/her) is a graduate of the School of Toronto Dance Theatre, where she trained in contemporary dance. Wilton has enjoyed performing in events such as Meaningful Movement's *@profile*, *Short&Sweet* at Sappyfest14, and the Common Ground Dance Festival. She was shortlisted for the Winchester Prize for choreographic excellence, and maintains her choreographic practice through residencies such as the Town of Sackville's *Performing Artist in Residence*, and ArtsLinkNB's *Introspect: A Nature Residency*. Wilton is also an emerging stage manager with credits including *Alice, A Dance Tale* (Perpetual Motion Dance Studio); *gutted* (Toronto Fringe Festival); and *Prove A Villain* (Panoply Theatre Collective). Currently, Wilton lives and works between Toronto and Atlantic Canada.



## **JACK DAVIDSON**

### ***Fight Director & Choreographer, Intimacy Co-Ordinator***

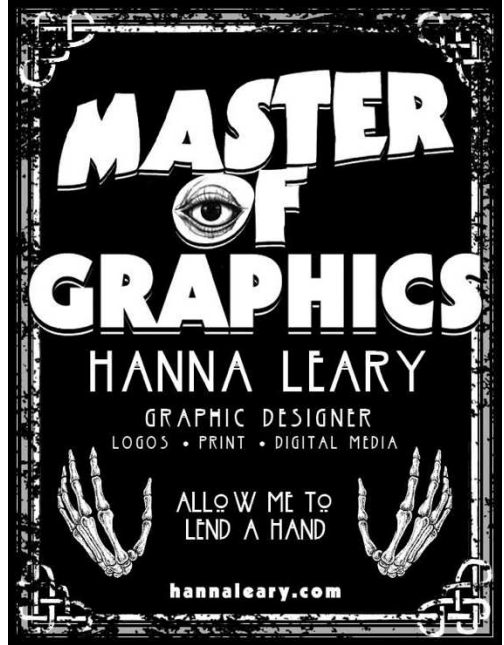
Jack Davidson (née Rennie) is an actor, dancer, and Dora award-winning theatre creator from Toronto, Canada. He performs frequently with the Canadian Opera Company, including the world premier of Rufus Wainwright's opera, *Hadrian*. He performed five consecutive seasons at Opera Atelier and was a company member of Corpus Dance Projects. Additionally, he worked as a fight/flight director in the Bad Hats' production of *Peter Pan* (Dora Award), remounted at Soulpepper for three years. His play *Fatale Charade*, which he also directed, was a hit of the 2023 Toronto Fringe Festival and nominated by MyEntertainmentWorld as one of the best new plays of the year. He is co-artistic director of The Lakeside Players, which has toured their irreverent outdoor shows from coast to coast in Canada. Jack trained at the National Ballet School of Canada and is a graduate of George Brown Theatre School, where he now teaches.



# Sarah Sandoval

Print Media & Digital Artist

[www.sloom.home.blog](http://www.sloom.home.blog) | [@seasloom](https://twitter.com/seasloom)



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TORONTO, CANADA

# OUTLIERS

THEATRE COLLECTIVE

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Become an OUTLIER

Want to work with us?

We are always looking to expand our collective.  
Get in touch with us if you are a theatre artist interested in  
collaborating with us.

Want to comment on our production?

Email your thoughts, comments, and ideas to us at:  
**[outlierstheatrecollective@gmail.com](mailto:outlierstheatrecollective@gmail.com)**

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### ***Special Thanks To***

*Small World Centre, especially Reza Moghaddas, Jieun Jung, and Armaan Dutta  
Sarah Valerie Sandoval, art and poster ([@seasloom/sloom.home.blog](https://www.instagram.com/seasloom/))*

*Hanna Leary, logo ([hannaleary.com](http://hannaleary.com))*

*Chantal Bible, knitted props ([@the.knittykitty](https://www.instagram.com/the.knittykitty))*

*Enrico Ferri, Stanley Wood Films ([@stanleywoodfilms](https://www.instagram.com/stanleywoodfilms))*

**Thanks to all our friends, family, and colleagues for their love and support.  
And “thank you” to you – our audience – for being here!**