

**ADELPHI**

**UNIVERSITY**

Performing Arts Center

# Larson Legacy Concert Series: *Benjamin Velez*

**Saturday, September 25**  
**3:00 p.m.**



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# Adelphi University

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THE PERFORMING ARTS CENTER AT ADELPHI UNIVERSITY

presents

Larson Legacy Concert:

## Benjamin Velez

### PERFORMERS

**Soloists:** Florrie Bagel, Lincoln Clauss, KC Dela Cruz, Micaela Diamond,  
Troy Iwata, Jon-Michael Reese, Marissa Rosen, Vishal Vaidya

**Ensemble:** Paul Esswein, Joseph Fierberg, Bill Fitzpatrick, Alesha Jeter,  
Kianna Kelly-Futch, Joey Miceli, Alexia Sanchez

**Instrumentals:** Dan Berkery, David Gardos, Mark Verdino

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### COMPOSER'S NOTE

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It often feels a bit like Sisyphus to be a new musical theater writer. You try to keep writing new shows, rewriting old ones, putting passion and unpaid labor, and all you have into projects that take years and years, only to feel as though the ball rolls back down the hill each time someone passes on producing your work or you shelve a show before it's ever gotten a production. You keep going, because it's what you love more than anything, and you keep believing that one day your time will come, but each subsequent rejection can chip away at that resolve bit by bit. Not to mention the cost of fruitless labor chipping away at your checking account.

But then out of the blue, the theater gods give you a sign that you're doing something right, a "here's looking at you kid," and it is the most spectacular feeling you can imagine. I've been pursuing theater composing for over a decade, so to receive the Jonathan Larson Grant, and to be able to finally celebrate it at Jonathan's Alma Mater, is truly a gift. After growing up with Jonathan's words and music as the soundtrack to my childhood, it's an honor to be sharing my own work in his name. The angst, compassion, curiosity, and challenging of the status quo in his work inspired me to create bold musical storytelling in my own voice. Jonathan's work taught me to love every character I compose for, to love them for their flaws as much as their dreams. I'm grateful to Adelphi University for continuing to celebrate his legacy, and I'm honored to be a part of it. Today truly feels like a day where the ball isn't rolling down the hill. So cheers to Jonathan! To Musical Theater! "To days of inspiration... making something out of nothing, the need to express... to going against the grain, going insane, going mad... to La Vie Boheme."



Benjamin Velez

## MUSICAL NUMBERS

### FROM *BORDERLINE*

Music and Lyrics by Benjamin Velez, Book by Aryanna Garber

*A musical about Anna, a girl living with Borderline Personality Disorder and struggling for normalcy amidst a revolving door of therapists and more prescriptions than she can count. Anna's is a deeply personal story that explores the highs and lows, heartache and absurdity, of living on the borderline.*

#### **"Gonna Die Alone"**

Performed by Micaela Diamond and the Ensemble

#### **"Draw A Face"**

Performed by Micaela Diamond and the Ensemble

#### **"Wanna Go Out?"**

Performed by Micaela Diamond and Lincoln Clauss

#### **"Crazy Wonderful"**

Performed by Vishal Vaidya

#### **"Borderline"**

Performed by Micaela Diamond and the Ensemble

#### **"On Top of My Sundays"**

Performed by Lincoln Clauss

#### **"Land of Lost and Found"**

Performed by Florrie Bagel

### FROM *KISS MY AZTEC*

Music by Benjamin Velez, Lyrics by Benjamin Velez and David Kamp, Book by John Leguizamo and Tony Taccone

*A rebel band of Aztecs fight back against the Spanish Conquistadors in this farcical revenge tale of revisionist history.*

#### **"Punk-Ass Geek-A"**

Performed by Benjamin Velez and the Ensemble

### FROM *AFTERLAND*

Music and Lyrics by Benjamin Velez, Book and Lyrics by Katie Hathaway

*Set in the woods outside a decimated Philadelphia, this is the story of two teenagers, Theo and Lu, coming of age in the post-apocalypse, and the strangers who come together to forge a new family around them.*

#### **"Before the End"**

Performed by Jon-Michael Reese

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## MUSICAL NUMBERS

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### FROM UNTITLED YOUNG EINSTEIN MUSICAL

Music and Lyrics by Benjamin Velez

*Through the lens of time, space, and relativity, this story dives into the psyche of a Young Einstein and his first love, Mileva, as they learn the hard way that the complexities of marriage, divorce, and parenthood can be far more difficult to understand than science.*

#### “Still Waiting”

Performed by Florrie Bagel

### FROM BOOMERANGS

Music and Lyrics by Benjamin Velez, Book by Katie Hathaway

*Boomerangs is about a generation raised to believe in opportunity only to come of age in a post-recession America where financial security and childhood dreams feel beyond reach. Set at a run-down amusement park on the brink of closure, our heroes must take their futures into their own hands in order to save the park and themselves.*

#### “Prom Was A Promise”

Performed by KC Dela Cruz, Marissa Rosen and the Ensemble

#### “Two Suns Setting”

Performed by Troy Iwata

#### “Erica Save Me”

Performed by Marissa Rosen and Troy Iwata

#### “Rig the Game”

Performed by Jon-Michael Reese and the Ensemble

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## WHO'S WHO

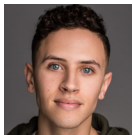
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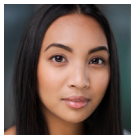
Benjamin Velez



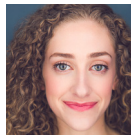
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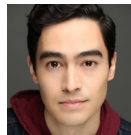
Lincoln Clauss



KC Dela Cruz



Micaela Diamond



Troy Iwata



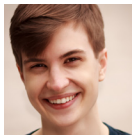
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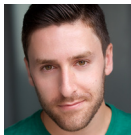
Marissa Rosen



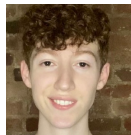
Vishal Vaidya



Paul Esswein



Joseph Fierberg



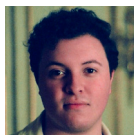
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Alesha Jeter



Kianna Kelly-Futch



Joey Miceli



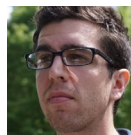
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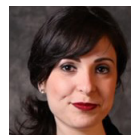
Dan Berkery



Mark Verdino



David Gardos



Ruthie Fierberg

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## WHO'S WHO

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**Benjamin Velez (Jonathan Larson Grant Recipient, Composer, Co-Producer, Soloist)** Benjamin Velez is a composer/lyricist and Columbia graduate (114th Varsity Show), born and raised in Miami, FL. Proud member of the Advanced BMI workshop (2012 Harrington Award), his work has been at MTF, Ars Nova, NAMT, NEO, the Civilians, 4@15, and Joe's Pub. He was a Sundance Artist at the UCROSS Foundation, and his musical *Afterland*, written with Katie Hathaway, was developed at the Yale Institute for Music Theater and the York Theater. He developed *Starblasters* (now *Boomerangs*) (also with Hathaway) at Dixon Place and Manhattan School of Music (2021). His musical *Borderline*, written with Aryanna Garber, won the 2018 Weston Playhouse New Musical Award, and opened the 2019 O'Neill Musical Theater Conference. He was a 2018-2019 Dramatist Guild Foundation Fellow, the 2019 Fred Ebb Award Winner, a 2020 Thom Thomas Award winner, and a 2020 Jonathan Larson Grant recipient. His musical *Kiss My Aztec*, written with John Leguizamo, Tony Taccone, and David Kamp, was developed at the Public Theater (2018), before premiering at Berkeley Rep (2019), followed by a run at the La Jolla Playhouse (2019). It will have its east coast premiere in June 2022. Benjamin is under commission by La Jolla Playhouse for an original musical he's writing with Harrison David Rivers.

**Florrie Bagel (Soloist)** Florrie Bagel made her Broadway debut in *The Rose Tattoo* with Roundabout Theatre Company. She loved to be part of the musical worlds of *Call Me Madam*, *Me and My Girl*, *Brigadoon*, and *The Golden Apple* with Encores! At City Center. She was Peaches in *Jerry Springer the Opera* with The New Group and adventured in National Tours of *Sister Act* and *Kinky Boots*, as well as *Footloose* at the Muny in St. Louis. Close to the heart is her solo show *Through the Smoke, the music of Amy Winehouse* (54 Below). TV/Film: *Orange is the New Black*, *Difficult People*, *Madam Secretary*. Upcoming joy: *The Gilded Age* (HBO) and sharing original music. Gratitude flows fully to share art in physical space together after such a deep collective breaking. Music is magic. And Benjamin Velez is such a wondrous Wizard of word and weaving in stunning song. It is an honor to BE and be HERE.

**Lincoln Clauss (Soloist)** Lincoln Clauss is an actor and singer based in New York City. He's thrilled to be here representing *Borderline*, a show he helped workshop at the Eugene O'Neill National Musical Theater Conference back in 2019. Select theater credits include: *FLY* (La Jolla Playhouse), Jim Steinman's *Bat Out of Hell* (New York City Center, North American Tour), *Burn All Night* (American Repertory Theater), *Evocation to Visible Appearance* (Actors Theater of Louisville, 42nd Humana Festival of New Plays), *Peter Pan* (Laguna Playhouse). He recently played the DC Comics villain, Wolf Spider, on the second season of *Batwoman* on The CW. He is a proud alum of Ball State University, and currently resides in Brooklyn. @lincolnclauss

**KC Dela Cruz (Soloist/Ensemble)** KC Dela Cruz is a Bay Area/New York actor, singer, and performer. Recent credits include: *Kiss My Aztec!* (Ensemble) with Berkeley Repertory/La Jolla Playhouse; *The Prince of Egypt* (Keturah) with TheatreWorks; *In the Heights* (Nina) with Woodminster Theatre; *Smokey Joe's Café* (DeLee) with Tri-Valley Repertory Theatre, *The Little Mermaid* (Ariel) with Tri-Valley Repertory Theatre; *West Side Story* (Maria) with City Lights Theatre; *Les Misérables* (Eponine) with Tri-Valley Repertory Theatre; and *Miss Saigon* (Kim) with Palo Alto Players.

**Micaela Diamond (Soloist)** Just after graduating high school, she played "Babe", the youngest Cher, in *The Cher Show* on Broadway. She then went to perform in *A Play is a Poem*, written by Ethan Coen in L.A. and starred in the world premier of the musical *Row* at the Williamstown Theater Festival this summer. TV: *Jesus Christ Superstar Live in Concert* (NBC). Upcoming EP for her band, The Two of Us, will be out this fall. @micaela\_diamond

**Troy Iwata (Soloist)** Troy Iwata is an actor of the stage and screen. His Netflix series *Dash & Lily*—in which he plays Langston, Lily's slightly immature, hopelessly romantic, big brother—garnered 12 Emmy nominations including Outstanding Casting. He made his Broadway debut in the viral sensation *Be More Chill* (Jeremy/Michael/Rich us) and can be heard on multiple musical theatre



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## WHO'S WHO

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albums. TV credits include co-starring roles on *New Amsterdam* (NBC), *Katy Keene* (The CW), *Ray Donovan* (Showtime), *Tell Me a Story* (CBS), *Quantico* (ABC), and *Time After Time* (ABC). His TV pilot *Truth Slash Fiction* has been a viral success, trending #1 worldwide on Twitter, featured in *Teen Vogue* and the UK's *Attitude Magazine* and won "Best Comedy" at both Series Fest and ITVFest. Keep an eye out for his latest film project *Summoning Sylvia*, a queer-horror-comedy in which he stars alongside Michael Urie and Frankie Grande. @mrtroyiwata

**Jon-Michael Reese (Soloist)** Jon-Michael Reese is an actor, musician, and catdad based in Brooklyn, NY. Favorite roles include James Baldwin in *Jimmy and Lorraine*, Thomas Edison in *Nikola Tesla Drops the Beat*, Man in *Marry Me a Little*, Padre in *Man of la Mancha*, Jesse Howard in *This Bitter Earth*, Edward Adu in *My Heart is the Drum* (Gregory Award, Outstanding Actor), and Cordelia in *King Lear*. BFA: Carnegie Mellon. Instagram: @thejmravatar.

**Marissa Rosen (Soloist)** Broadway: Kristin Chenoweth: *For the Girls*. Off-Broadway: *R.R.R.E.D.*, *The Marvelous Wonderettes*, *My Big Gay Italian Wedding*, *BedBugs the Musical*, *Tony n' Tina's Wedding*. Favorite regional/international/tours: *A Taste of Things to Come*, *Jawbreaker*, *Priscilla Queen of the Desert*, *Bare*, *Into the Woods* and *Grease*. She can be seen dancing alongside Anne Hathaway on the Amazon Prime show *Modern Love*. Marissa works as a recording artist and back up singer for some of New York City and Nashville's finest! She has had the honor of singing backup for Kristin Chenoweth, Shoshana Bean, Patti LuPone, Jessica Vosk, Betty Buckley, Ariana DeBose, Krysta Rodriguez, Jason Gotay, Marty Thomas and Lillias White—to name a few. Marissa has also released her debut album, "The Award Winning Holiday Album" with Marty Thomas, which is available on all streaming platforms! She is proudly represented by The Talent House. Follow her at @themarissarosen on all platforms!

**Vishal Vaidya (Soloist)** Vishal Vaidya is a voice teacher and performer based in New York City. He made his Broadway debut as Larry the cameraman in *Groundhog Day*. Vishal is passionate about new musicals and has worked on dozens of shows in development with Tidtaya Sinutoke, Anna Jacobs, Adam Gwon, Tom Kitt, Tina Landau, Cheeyang Ng, Jessica Kahkoska, Jahn Sood, and more. As a teacher, Vishal has a robust private voice studio and has lectured for Indiana University, CAP21, Point Park University, American University, and more. IG: @Vishgram www. Vishal-Vaidya.com

**Paul Esswein (Ensemble)** Paul Esswein is a recent Musical Theatre graduate from the Manhattan School of Music. Some of his favorite roles include Ernst in *Spring Awakening* at Manhattan School of Music and Homer in *The Human Comedy* workshop at New York City Center. He also was recently a part of the *Starblasters* workshop and is so thrilled to be a part of this concert!

**Joseph Fierberg (Ensemble)** Joseph Fierberg is a New York City based performer and teaching artist having appeared in various productions across the globe. Favorites: *A Chorus Line* (New York City Center), *Jerome Robbins' Broadway* (TUTS), *Chasing Rainbows* (Goodspeed), Disney's *The Little Mermaid* (MUNY), as well as the national tour of *Elf The Musical*, and the national and international tours of Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*. Joseph has also been featured in episodes of *Dickinson* (Apple TV+), *SC7NARIO* (BroadwayHD), and *Ways & Means* (CBS). BFA: Syracuse University. Endless thanks to Ben, Ruthie, and the entire team for the opportunity to be a part of this spectacular concert, and to create live art once again!

**Bill Fitzpatrick (Ensemble)** Bill Fitzpatrick is a Senior at the Manhattan School of Music. He was recently in *Starblasters* where he played the role of Neil. Bill will also be starring in Manhattan School of Music's *On the Brink of a Lovely Song* this November as Izzy. Bill would like to thank Ben for this amazing opportunity and he's grateful to work with him a second time.

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## WHO'S WHO

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**Alesha Jeter (Ensemble)** Alesha Jeter is a Junior Musical Theater Student at the Manhattan School of Music and she is so honored to be a part of this concert. After spending her entire sophomore year at home in Orlando, FL, she is more than ready to be back in the city doing what she loves, which is making art with like-minded individuals. Some of her previous roles include James in *James and the Giant Peach*, Mrs. in *Sunday in the Park with George*. She was lucky enough to originate the role of Noemi Oblie in a new musical entitled *Le Comte Noir*. Alesha would like to thank Benjamin Velez for reaching out to her to be a part of such a special occasion and she hopes you enjoy watching this performance as much as she enjoys being a part of it.

**Kianna Kelly-Futch (Ensemble)** Kianna Kelly-Futch, is a sophomore at Manhattan School of Music (NYC). She is pursuing her Bachelor's of Music degree in Musical Theatre. Her musical journey started at the age of five, gaining performance opportunities with Ottley Music School, Washington National Opera Children's Chorus, Urban Change Productions, and Duke Ellington School of the Arts (Washington, DC). She is the former Miss District of Columbia's Outstanding Teen for the Miss America Organization. Founder of K.A.R.E - Keeping Arts Relevant for Everyone and Kianna's Klostet. With 15 years of experience, one day, she aspires to make her debut on Broadway, in television, and film. Not only does she want to perform, but she wants to convey to others: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Philippians 4:13

**Joey Miceli (Ensemble)** Joey Miceli is a senior Musical Theatre major at the Manhattan School of Music. He most recently originated the role of Jean-Michel Rabat in the new musical *Le Comte Noir*. Other credits include: *Starblasters* (Ensemble), *Fiddler on the Roof* (Fyedka, BW Award Nomination), and a reading of the new musical *Valentino* (Alberto). He will be seen next spring in a production of Dave Malloy's new musical *Don't Stop Me as Mo*. Joey is also an accomplished singer/songwriter, recently signing with new indie label Dime + Dog Records. His music is available on all streaming platforms.

**Alexia Sanchez (Ensemble)** Alexia Sanchez is a current junior at MSM, and is excited to explore all areas of theatre. She was cast in the ensemble of *Starblasters* during her freshman year, but those preparations were pushed off due to the pandemic. So she is extremely honored to be part of this concert and working in person!

**Dan Berkery (Drums)** Dan Berkery is a freelance drummer/percussionist based in New York City who has performed with numerous acts including Trixie Mattel, Rumer Willis, and Rob McClure. You can hear him on Trixie Mattel's *Two Birds/One Stone* and Brandon James Gwinn's *Not Too Late* and *BULLIT* albums, available on all streaming platforms. In addition to subbing on multiple Broadway shows including *Hamilton*, *Moulin Rouge! The Musical*, *The Book of Mormon*, *Wicked*, and *Dear Evan Hansen*, he also originated the drum book for the New York premier of the off-broadway musical *Ride The Cyclone*.

**Mark Verdino (Bass)** Mark Verdino is a bassist based in New York City. He is fluent on both acoustic bass and fretted and fretless electric bass. Mark recently completed a six-month arena world tour playing bass for actor/singer Hugh Jackman. Mark has been a sub on the Broadway shows *Hamilton*, *Dear Evan Hansen*, *School of Rock*, *Jersey Boys*, *The Book of Mormon*, *Aladdin*, *Mean Girls*, *Jagged Little Pill*, *Waitress*, *Pretty Woman*, *Hello Dolly!*, *Matilda*, *On Your Feet!*, *The Prom*, *A Bronx Tale*, *Finding Neverland*, *Bandstand*, *The Great Comet*, *Fun Home*, *Gigi*, *Mary Poppins*, *Spring Awakening*, *Young Frankenstein*, *The Pirate Queen* and *Movin' Out*. Mark held the bass chair for the *Jersey Boys* first national tour, *Jersey Boys* second national tour, *Aladdin* first National Tour and the *Spring Awakening* first national tour. He also subs in the Radio City Music Hall Orchestra and in the band for the Big Apple Circus. He plays in the corporate party/club date band LUXE. He played for ten years in the acclaimed Dave Matthews Tribute Band Ants Marching, as well as the Billy Joel Tribute Glass Houses. Mark is also the chair of bass instruction at Five Towns College in Dix Hills, NY, and he keeps an active private student studio. Mark is endorsed by D'Addario strings, New York Bass Works basses, Aguilar amplifiers and MONO accessories.

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## WHO'S WHO

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**David Gardos (Music Director, Piano)** Broadway: *Falsettos*, *Finding Neverland*, *Chaplin* (Associate Music Director); *Side Show*, *Big Fish* (Assistant Conductor); *Hamilton* (Sub Conductor). Regional/NY (Music Supervisor/Music Director): *Darling Grenadine* (Roundabout Underground, Goodspeed-at-Chester), *Kiss My Aztec!* (Berkeley Repertory Theatre, La Jolla Playhouse), *Borderline*, *The Family Resemblance* (The O'Neill Theater Center), *The Boy Who Danced On Air* (Abingdon Theatre), *My Paris* (Long Wharf Theater; Goodspeed-at-Chester), *Ever After* (Papermill Playhouse), *Nickel Mines* (NYMF). M.Mus (Orchestral Conducting), University of Cincinnati (CCM); B.Mus (Music Education), University of Sydney.

**Ruthie Fierberg (Co-Producer)** Ruthie Fierberg is an independent arts journalist, producer, and consultant, based in New York City. She is the creator and host of the podcast *Why We Theater*, which digs into the onstage works we love to create the offstage change we need. As the former Executive Editor of Features and Branded Content at *Playbill*, Ruthie spent five years creating innovative and engaging content through in-depth written, multimedia, and video pieces focused on the arts. She also created and hosted *Playbill's Live From the Red Carpet* specials from all of Broadway's opening nights and the annual Tony Awards. In 2020, Ruthie served as the sole executive producer of three digital concert specials which defined virtual concert creation on the pandemic. Two of these concerts (*Pride Spectacular* and ¡Viva Broadway!) were shortlisted for Emmy Awards. A graduate of Barnard College, she has written for such national publications as *Good Housekeeping*, *Parents*, *American Baby*, *Parents Latina*, and *Backstage* magazines. Ruthie has moderated panels for the 92Y, the JCC of Manhattan, Disney Theatrical Productions, BroadwayCon 2016–2020, and the annual American Performing Arts Professionals Conference. She has appeared on NPR, SiriusXM Volume radio, and a number of podcasts as a guest expert. A lover of theatre, tennis, and Bikram yoga, Ruthie is also involved with such causes as Covenant House International and The Actors Fund. Find more at [ruthiefierberg.com](http://ruthiefierberg.com) and follow her IG: @ruthiefierceberg / Twitter: @RuthiesATrain.

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Jana Shea • Joshua Goodman

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### The American Theatre Wing and the Jonathan Larson Grants

In 2017, the American Theatre Wing celebrated 100 years of service committed to championing and honoring American theater. By creating the Tony Awards, developing educational programs and distributing thousands of dollars of grants and awards each year, the American Theatre Wing is dedicated to preserving the past, celebrating the present and fostering the future of American theater nationwide. The Jonathan Larson Grants are a major part of that work, celebrating the standards of tomorrow by supporting the songwriters of today. New musical writers are pushing the envelope of convention and infusing musical theater with contemporary, joyful urban vitality. Endowed with leadership support by Jonathan Larson's family, this program provides financial support, recognition and residency opportunities that invest in the changing landscape of the American musical, one writer at a time.

Since 2015, the Larson Legacy Concert Series at the Adelphi PAC has celebrated the next generation of artists at the college home of the creator of the Pulitzer Prize-winning musical *RENT*, Jonathan Larson '82. Each year, the American Theatre Wing presents emerging creators of musical theater with the Jonathan Larson Grants. Select recipients of these grants are showcased at the Adelphi PAC in this series to help nurture and support the next generation of creative artists to carry on Jonathan Larson's legacy. Past recipients of these grants have gone on to create the Broadway musicals *Dear Evan Hansen*, *Natasha, Pierre and the Great Comet of 1812*, *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder*, *Grey Gardens*, *Next To Normal*, *Elf*, *Hands on a Hardbody*, *Be More Chill* and many more.

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