



## NEWS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Hobbits, wizards, goblins, and adventure in “The Hobbit” at Pittsburgh Public Theater**

*All-ages adventure to feature large-scale puppetry from The Public’s Resident Artists*

**Sept. 24, 2024** | The O’Reilly Theater will host dragons, goblins, elves, and more fantastical creatures in Pittsburgh Public Theater’s upcoming puppet-driven all-ages fantasy adventure “The Hobbit,” on stage Oct. 23–Nov. 10 and presented by the M. Patrick Daniels Fund of The Pittsburgh Foundation. The Public today announced the full cast and crew, featuring a renowned puppetry team and a Pittsburgh Public Theater debut from **Russell Saylor** (“Dora’s the Explorer Live!” national tour) as leading adventurer Bilbo Baggins.

“Harnessing the imagination and creativity of young people and bringing them into the theater to share in a live performance is rocket fuel for the art form and ensures that the theater will be embraced and propelled by a new generation of artists and theater lovers,” Saylor said. “‘The Hobbit’ is one of those timeless, universal adventure stories that inspires families of all ages to participate in live theater.”

Pittsburgh Public Theater Artistic Director **Marya Sea Kaminski** directs this adaptation of the fabled tale from **Greg Banks** (Public Unplugged’s “Robin Hood”), [described](#) as “a triumph of storytelling,” and will lead the seven-member cast and renowned design team, including The Public’s Resident Artists **Jamie Agnello** and **Matt Acheson**. The pair will serve as co-creators and co-designers of the production’s elaborate puppet designs, which will bring the story’s incredible characters to vivid life on the O’Reilly Theater stage, while Agnello plays in the cast and Acheson serves as puppet director.

“Live music and extraordinary puppets transform Bilbo’s living room into the forests of Mirkwood and the cliffs of the Lonely Mountain, as Tolkien’s monsters and heroes manifest and disappear right in front of our eyes,” Kaminski said. “This story dares us to believe that a wild imagination and true, tender friendship can make magic possible even in the gravest circumstances.”

*Dungeons & Dragons* meets *Jumanji* in this visionary telling of “The Hobbit” as a tabletop game between friends quickly escalates into a collective fever dream, leading the group to overcome obstacles ranging from monstrous goblins to fearsome dragons and form a bond for the ages.

Saylor’s homebody Bilbo Baggins is joined by a merry band of travelers including: **Shammen McCune** as Gandalf; **Ryan Patrick Kearney** as Thorin Oakenshield; **José Pérez IV** as Bombur and Elven Queen; **Britt Dorazio** as a Fili and Bard; and **Jamie Agnello** as Balin and Gollum. On their journeys they face troubles small and large, including **Maya B. Fullard** as the dragon Smaug (also appearing as Kili).

Scenic Designer **Jennifer Zeyl** joins Costume Designer **Melanie Taylor Burgess**, Lighting Designer **Robert J. Aguilar**, Sound Designer **Zach Moore**, and Composer **Stewart Blackwood** to transform The O’Reilly into Middle Earth. Completing the creative team behind The Public’s staging of “The Hobbit” are Dramaturg **Lindsay L. Barr**, Assistant Directors **Dominique Briggs** and **Oy Adebajo**, Stage Manager **Lisa R. Stafford**, Assistant Stage Manager **Kelly Haywood**, Production Assistant **Gabriella Walko**, and Fight Director **José Pérez IV**.

The Public also offers more ways to join the fun with special events at Pittsburgh Public Theater. Pair your show ticket with a wine tasting through Wine Wednesdays on Wednesday, Oct. 23, or come kick



back with Day Bracey from Barrel & Flow Fest for a beer tasting at 6 p.m. on Sunday, Nov. 3. Parents of kids too young to enjoy "The Hobbit" can add Sitter Sundays to their matinee ticket on Sunday, Nov. 3, for high-quality childcare provided in partnership with Jovie of Pittsburgh, made possible with the generous support of the McKinney Charitable Foundation. For more details about special events at The Public, visit [PPT.org/SpecialEvents](http://PPT.org/SpecialEvents).

Tickets to "The Hobbit" start at just \$35, and discounted student tickets are available for patrons 26 and under using the promo code HOTTIX at checkout at PPT.org or by calling the Box Office at 412.316.1600. The Public also offers a limited number of free tickets to reduce price barriers to seeing live theater, available during a select Theater for All period for each production. For more information about Theater for All, which is generously supported by the Audrey Hillman Fisher Foundation, visit [PPT.org/TFA](http://PPT.org/TFA)

### **Cast.**

#### **Jamie Agnello\***

*Balin/Gollum + co-creator + co-puppet designer*

Jamie Agnello, "a human, not a puppet (*The New York Times*)," is an actor, puppeteer, teaching artist, Sardine, and maker from Oil City, Pennsylvania. Locally, she has appeared at Pittsburgh Public Theater, Quantum Theatre, Bricolage, and New Hazlett Theater. Selected New York credits include Lincoln Center, Park Avenue Armory, St. Ann's Warehouse, and La MaMa ETC. [jamieagnello.com](http://jamieagnello.com), @sardineoftheallegheeny

#### **Britt Dorazio**

*Fili/Bard*

Britt is a Pittsburgh-based artist and educator and is so grateful to make her Pittsburgh Public Theater debut! Favorite credits include #BARS at The Public Theater (NYC) and Amelie in Little Lake Theatre's *Amelie*. She is the founder and lead facilitator of Sovereign Creative Wellness where she works with educators and neurodivergent and disabled artists.

#### **Maya B. Fullard**

*Kili/Smaug*

Maya Fullard is so grateful and excited to be making her Pittsburgh Public Theater debut! Select credits include: Constance in *Ride the Cyclone*, Maleficent in Disney's *Descendants*, Everybody in *Everybody*. Maya is so very excited to bring the story of *The Hobbit* to life and thanks her family and friends as well as Brain and Marya for believing in her! BFA Acting Point Park 2023.

#### **Ryan Patrick Kearney**

*Thorin Oakenshield*

Ryan is very excited to return to Pittsburgh Public Theater (*A Few Good Men*, *Equus*). Ryan has also performed with Pittsburgh CLO, City Theatre Company, PICT, Off the Wall Theater, PMT, Saint Vincent's Summer Theater, Stage 62, South Park Theater, and more. He is very grateful for the opportunity to tell one of his all-time favorite stories.

#### **Shammen McCune\***

*Gandalf/Spider*

Shammen McCune is delighted to return to The Public's stage having last been seen as Caliban in *The Tempest*. Around 'burghland, Shammen has worked with Bricolage, PICT, PSIP. Regionally, Shammen



has worked with Native Voices at the Autry, Phoenix Theater, Ensemble Theatre of Cincinnati, New Harmony Theatre, American Players Theatre, Barter Theatre, and is a co-founding member of the Cincinnati Shakespeare Company.

### **José Pérez IV**

*Bombur/Elven Queen and Fight Director*

José Pérez IV is the Resident Fight & Intimacy Director of Pittsburgh Public Theater. Select credits at The Public: *The Coffin Maker*, *A Christmas Story: The Play*, *Robin Hood*. Regional credits: *POTUS* (City Theatre Company); *A Moon for the Misbegotten* (Quantum Theatre); *Dracula: A feminist revenge fantasy* (Actors Theatre of Louisville), Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (Cleveland Play House). MFA Performance Pedagogy Pitt, BFA Drama NYU.

### **Russell Saylor\***

*Bilbo Baggins*

Pittsburgh Public Theater debut! Tours: *Starlight Express*, *Nuncrackers*, and *Dora the Explorer Live! Dora's Pirate Adventure*. Favorites: "Tracy" in *The Legend of Georgia McBride*, "Max Planck" in Off-Broadway's *Strings Attached*, "Sam" in *Fully Committed*, "Frank" in *Rocky Horror*, and "Mary Sunshine" in *Chicago*. TV/Film: *Law & Order: SVU*, *Mysteries of Laura*, *Fugitive Chronicles*, and *A New Man*. Love to Brandon & Ava! Thanks ATB & Volition!

### **Marya Sea Kaminski**

*Director*

Marya Sea Kaminski is honored to co-lead Pittsburgh Public Theater. She came to Pittsburgh after four years as the Associate Artistic Director at Seattle Repertory Theatre. One of the highlights of her tenure there was spearheading a collaboration with New York's Public Theater and Dallas Theatre Center to create Public Works Seattle. This initiative was based on long-term, authentic partnerships between regional theaters and local non-profits and designed to make theater of, by, and for the people. Earlier in her career, Marya co-founded the Washington Ensemble Theatre and served as Co-Artistic Director there for five years, leading season planning and new play development. She has worked as a director, writer, producer and actor and is a proud member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society, Actors' Equity Association, and the Society of Authors and Dramatic Composers. Marya has taught and lectured on Theater at Hollins University, the University of Washington, and at Cornish College of the Arts, where she was awarded the Drama Department's Award for Teaching Excellence. She has also been honored with the Genius Award in Theater from the Seattle newsweekly, *The Stranger*, and has been recognized as an Artist of the Year by *Seattle Magazine*. Marya holds a BA in English and Theatre Arts from the University of Pennsylvania and an MFA from the University of Washington's School of Drama.

### **Greg Banks**

*Adaptation writer*

Greg has established an international reputation in his work for young audiences of all ages. In 2024 as a nationally acclaimed playwright in the USA he was awarded the Charlotte B Chorpenning Award for his outstanding body of work for young people. His plays take the realities of life and the harshness of our classic stories and render an epic work that speaks directly to, not at, young people. He trusts young audiences to grasp big emotions and ideas. His plays are works of transformation and grand adventure. His scripts have a fluid muscularity, a rhythm that is echoed in the strongly physical nature of his direction. Music is an essential component. A close collaboration with composers and on-stage musicians to create a live and original score ensures that the music is fully integrated into the work, driving the story forward, evoking place and emotion in a very specific way.



It is important that the audience is not just a passive observer, that they are acknowledged by the actors and that the story being told is shared by everyone in the room. Greg is currently a guest director at The Minneapolis Children's Theatre where he has been commissioned to write and direct many adaptations of well-known classics including *Huck Finn*, *Antigone*, *The Hobbit*, *Snow White*, *Pinocchio*, *The Jungle Book*, and *Robin Hood*. He has also directed *Romeo and Juliet*, *Wrinkle In Time*, *Charlotte's Web* and *Sleeping Beauty* for the Children's Theatre. Other productions he has written and directed include *Tir Na N'og* for Travelling Light Theatre \*\*\*\* (Guardian), Nominated TMA Award. 'Why The Whales Came' an adaptation of a Jim Sheridan's film 'Into The west' for The Plymouth Theatre Royal and Theatre Alibi \*\*\*\* (Guardian) Nominated TMA Award.

Greg has written over thirty original scripts many of which are currently being produced at Theatres and other venues throughout The States and Canada. Some are also available through 'Plays for Young Audiences.'

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### ***THE HOBBIT***

Oct. 23 – Nov. 10, 2024

O'Reilly Theater

621 Penn Ave., Pittsburgh, PA 15222

Adapted for the stage by Greg Banks

Based on the novel by J.R.R. Tolkien

Directed by Marya Sea Kaminski

### ***THE FABLED FANTASY BECOMES REALITY***

In this all-ages adventure, J.R.R. Tolkien's magical Middle Earth transitions from page to stage in spellbinding fashion. An unexpected journey awaits homebody Bilbo Baggins, his BFF Gandalf, a new guy named Thorin, and anyone brave enough to join them. What starts as a Dungeons and Dragons tabletop game between friends quickly escalates into a collective fever dream as the group overcomes obstacles ranging from monstrous goblins to the fearsome dragon Smaug and form a bond for the ages. This epic trek, reimagined through the whimsical lens of playwright Greg Banks (Public's Unplugged *Robin Hood*) and featuring puppets designed by Resident Artists Matt Acheson (Broadway's *War Horse* Puppetry Director) and Jamie Agnello, is a treasure hunt sure to make families want to go there and back again.

*Presented by the M. Patrick Daniels Fund of The Pittsburgh Foundation*

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### **ABOUT PITTSBURGH PUBLIC THEATER**

*Pittsburgh Public Theater strives to be a true public theater to the Pittsburgh region and welcomes more than 70,000 guests through the doors of the O'Reilly Theater every year. The Public is renowned for its exceptional mix of programming, featuring American classics, world premieres, new adaptations, and favorite musicals. Its commitment to education and engagement initiatives is a cornerstone of its mission and includes the signature Shakespeare Monologue & Scene Contest and innovative community partnerships. The O'Reilly Theater is a project of the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust.*

*Pittsburgh Public Theater is under the leadership of Artistic Director Marya Sea Kaminski and Managing Director Shaunda McDill and celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> season in 2024.*

