

Set sail for an inclusive adventure with A.B.L.E. & Chicago Shakespeare Theater

24 performers with Down syndrome and other intellectual and developmental disabilities re-imagine an epic classic for our modern times



Chicago—March 26, 2024—[A.B.L.E.](#)—Artists Breaking Limits & Expectations—a Chicago-based nonprofit that creates theatre and film for, with, and by individuals with Down syndrome and other intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and [Chicago Shakespeare Theater](#) (CST) announce today a re-imagining of the epic classic *The Odyssey*.

A.B.L.E.'s production weaves music, movement, shadow puppetry, and scenes devised by the group into a powerful and joyful celebration of the choices we make, and the challenges we face along our journey. The vibrant adaptation features a **neurodiverse cast of 44 performers, including 24 actors with intellectual and developmental disabilities**. The performance in the Courtyard Theater on **May 11, 2024 at 2:00pm** will mark the two companies' 7th collaboration, most recently having co-

produced *A Midsummer Night's Dream* last spring.

The theme of fate vs. agency is prevalent in Homer's tale, and it's one that co-directors Braden Cleary and Katie Yohe particularly wanted to highlight with the Ensembles. Currently, 24 actors with varying disabilities including Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, and autism take part in A.B.L.E.'s performance ensembles. "Folks with intellectual and developmental disabilities often have a lot of choices made for them, or it's presumed that they are not capable of making their own choices," says Yohe, also A.B.L.E.'s Executive Artistic Director. "Braden and I drafted a loose skeleton of the story but the script and production is really actor-led." Each actor self-identified where their strengths lie as a performer, and were assigned to a chapter of the story based on their interests.

Over the course of a 10-week rehearsal process, actors collaborated with a team of volunteer facilitators to build the story. Facilitator Kara Davidson, a company member at Manual Cinema, helped actors design and build shadow puppets to bring to life monsters like the Cyclops and Scylla. Music Educator Polly Yukevich loaned the ensembles 15 ukuleles to bring musical magic to The Lotus Eaters and the seductive Sirens.

A.B.L.E. is committed to ensuring everyone feels they have a space in the theatre. The sensory-friendly performance will include numerous accessibility supports for audience members of all ages and ability levels. This includes dual ASL interpretation and open captioning. A.B.L.E. also reserves a designated movement zone for audience members who need to move around to help them focus. Audience members will receive a social story and sensory guide before the show to help audience members know what to expect from their trip to the theatre. "We hope we can set an example for our community of what true inclusion looks like both onstage and off."

Event Details:

Saturday May 11, 2024 at 2:00pm
Chicago Shakespeare Theater's Courtyard Theater
800 East Grand Avenue
Chicago IL 60611

Tickets: All tickets are Pay-what-you-can starting at \$15, general admission

Online: ableensemble.com/events

Phone: 312.595.5600

In person: at the Chicago Shakespeare Theater box office

Access: Performances will be open captioned and dual ASL interpreted.

COVID Policies: To ensure A.B.L.E.'s immunocompromised performers and community members feel safe and welcome, all audience members should remain masked for the duration of their time in the theater complex.

This production of *The Odyssey* is sponsored by Gail and Dennis Rossow. A.B.L.E.'s 2023-2024 Season is partially supported by grants from The Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, FunFund, The Illinois Arts Council, Innovation 80, The Paul M. Angell Family Foundation, and The National Endowment for the Arts.

ABOUT A.B.L.E.

A.B.L.E. - Artists Breaking Limits & Expectations - is celebrating their 8th anniversary of creating theatre and film for, with, and by individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. A.B.L.E. engages actors ages 13 and up through ensembles and outreach programming. Whether in person or online, all A.B.L.E. programs strive to foster agency, and nurture lifelong skills like communication, collaboration, and creativity. A.B.L.E.'s ensembles have produced more than 25 projects for the stage and screen, ranging from adaptations of theatrical classics by Shakespeare, Dickens, and Gilbert & Sullivan, to original work, to innovative Zoom projects including *Romeo & Juliet Remix*. A.B.L.E.'s feature films have been recognized by several local and international festivals. By placing people with disabilities in the spotlight, A.B.L.E.'s work strives to shift societal preconceptions, and build more inclusive, empathetic communities. For more information about A.B.L.E., please visit www.ableensemble.com and find them on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#).

ABOUT CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE THEATER

Regional Tony Award-recipient Chicago Shakespeare Theater produces a bold and innovative year-round season—plays, musicals, world premieres, family productions, and theatrical presentations from around the globe—alongside nationally recognized education programming serving tens of thousands of students, teachers, and lifelong learners each year. Founded in 1986, the Theater's onstage work has expanded to as many as twenty productions and 650 performances annually. Chicago Shakespeare is dedicated to welcoming the next generation of theatergoers; one in four of its audience members is under the age of eighteen. As a nonprofit organization, the Theater works to embrace diversity, prioritize inclusion, provide equitable opportunities, and offer an accessible experience for all. On the Theater's three stages at its home on Navy Pier, in classrooms and neighborhoods across the city, and in venues around the world, Chicago Shakespeare is a multifaceted cultural hub—inviting audiences, artists, and community members to share powerful stories that connect and inspire. www.chicagoshakes.com

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