

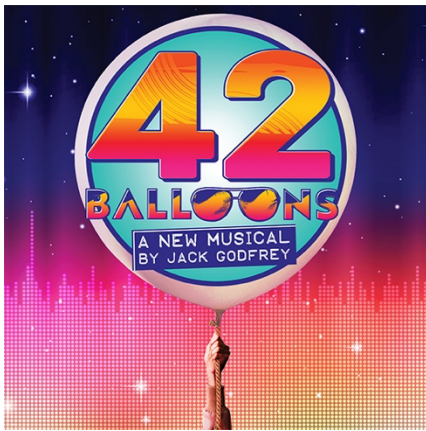
Chicago Shakespeare Theater announces casting
for the NORTH AMERICAN PREMIERE
of a new musical from the producers of *SIX*

42 Balloons

A soaringly original musical by Jack Godfrey

Starring Charlie McCullagh and Evelyn Hoskins, reprising their roles from the acclaimed UK run

May 24–June 29 in The Yard



Chicago—April 14, 2025—[Chicago Shakespeare Theater \(CST\)](#) announces today the cast of the North American premiere of the new musical [42 Balloons](#). From the multi-award-winning producers **Kevin McCollum** (*Oh, Mary!*, *Rent*), **Andy Barnes** and **Wendy Barnes** (*SIX*), and **Sonia Friedman Productions** (*Merrily We Roll Along*), *42 Balloons* is an '80s-inspired musical based on the unbelievable true story of Larry Walters' daring lawn chair flight. The show is produced by Chicago Shakespeare Theater after an acclaimed UK run at The Lowry where it garnered audience and critical acclaim, including a five-star review from *The Times* which proclaimed the show as "whip-smart, funny, and unexpectedly but exceptionally touching." The musical is written by **Jack Godfrey**, directed by **Ellie Coote**, and will run **May 24–June 29, 2025**, in The Yard at Chicago Shakespeare Theater.

Charlie McCullagh and **Evelyn Hoskins** star as Larry Walters and Carol Van Deusen, reprising their roles from the acclaimed UK run last year. They lead an ensemble cast that also includes **Daniel Assetta**, **Kailin Brown**, **Devin Cortez**, **Cameron Anika Hill**, **Lisa Howard**, **Josh Hoon Lee**, **Minju Michelle Lee**, **Austin Nelson Jr.**, **Morgan Schoenecker**, and **Akron Watson**.

Understudies include **Julia Bain**, **Lacey Jack**, **Joshua Messmore**, and **Luke Nowakowski**.

Inspired by an unbelievable true story, *42 Balloons* is a soaringly original musical from the award-winning producers of *SIX*. On July 2, 1982, truck driver Larry Walters defied the odds (and FAA airspace regulations) to achieve his lifelong dream of flying. In a lawn chair attached to 42 weather balloons, Larry—supported by his girlfriend and a community of unlikely heroes—ascended 16,000 feet into the blue sky above LA, and from the moment he landed, their lives would never be the same. Featuring an irresistible '80s pop-inspired score, *42 Balloons* is a funny, moving, and thrillingly staged new musical that asks: How far would you go for your dream... and how far would you be willing to fly?

Charlie McCullagh stars as Larry Walters, a role he originated last year at The Lowry. His credits also include the original West End cast of *Bonnie & Clyde* and the 50th anniversary tour of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, and he recently appeared in Apple TV's *Prime Target*. **Evelyn Hoskins** plays Larry's partner, Carol Van Deusen. Her West End credits include *Dawn in Waitress*, *Something Rotten!* and *Spring Awakening*. She has also appeared in *Gypsy* (Mill at Sonning), *Assassins* (Nottingham Playhouse/Watermill Theatre), and the US tour of *Peter Pan*, among many other credits.

The ensemble cast also features **Daniel Assetta** (*Juliet* on Broadway, New York City Center Encores! production of *The Light in the Piazza*), **Kailin Brown** (Velma Kelly, *Chicago* National Tour), **Devin Cortez** (*Empire* and *Americano!* at New World Stages, *Hair* at Two River Theater), **Cameron Anika Hill** (*Elf* and *Dear Evan Hansen* on Broadway, First National Tours of *Oklahoma!* and *Summer: The Donna Summer Musical*), **Lisa Howard** (*Titanique*, *Escape to Margaritaville*, *It Shoulda Been You*, *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* on Broadway), **Josh Hoon Lee** (*RENT* at The MUNY, *Pippin* at Center of Creative Arts St. Louis), **Minju Michelle Lee** (*Newsies* at The REV Theatre Company), **Austin Nelson Jr.** (*The Little Mermaid* at Drury Lane Theatre, *1776* at Marriott Theatre), **Morgan Schoenecker** (*Mary Poppins* at Metropolis Performing Arts Centre, *Legally Blonde* at Music Theatre Works), and **Akron Watson** (*The Color Purple* on Broadway, *The Fortress of Solitude* at The Public Theater). Understudies include **Julia Bain**, **Lacey May Jack**, **Joshua Messmore**, and **Luke Nowakowski**.

"It's such a pleasure to be producing this truly life-affirming and original piece of musical theater at CST," shared Chicago Shakespeare's artistic director **Edward Hall**. "A story full of hope, an uplifting and infectious score, and a world shot through with '80s color. We're thrilled to be partnering with Kevin, Andy, Wendy, and Sonia to celebrate Larry Walters—one of America's greatest dreamers."

Creator **Jack Godfrey** said, “I’m unbelievably excited that *42 Balloons* will be coming to Chicago Shakespeare Theater this year, particularly with its brilliant recent history of supporting, developing, and producing new musicals! I’m thrilled that we will have this amazing opportunity to take our show about big balloons and big dreams to the land where Larry Walters actually flew 42 years ago. I cannot wait to share this musical and this story with American audiences very soon.”

“I instantly connected with Larry and his desire to fly beyond his own limitations,” shared producer **Kevin McCollum**. “One of my favorite aspects of being a producer is being able to help shepherd work by new voices, and I was inspired by Jack Godfrey’s ability to capture the specificity of this real-life story and transform it into a universal journey that soars to the heavens.”

Creator **Jack Godfrey** is a musical theater composer, lyricist, and writer. His other projects include *This Is A Love Story* (music and lyrics, commissioned by Vicky Graham Productions, selected for BEAM2021, workshop at Birmingham Hippodrome in January 2024) and *Babies* (music and lyrics, winner of the BYMT New Music Theatre Award 2021, run at The Other Palace in 2024), which is currently nominated for the *WhatsOnStage* Award for Best New Musical.

Director and dramaturg **Ellie Coote** is the co-founder of Chalk Musical Theatre Dramaturgy. Additional credits include *The Way Way Deep* (Underbelly, The Edinburgh Festival Fringe) and *Mario: A Super Musical* (The Cockpit, Union Theatre). Workshop credits include *Train On Fire* (MT Fest), *Bluff* (Pint Of Wine), and *Busk* (Dare Festival). Coote is currently writing *This Is A Love Story* with Jack Godfrey (Vicky Graham Productions), and adapting a translation of Korean musical *Red Book* (IM Culture).

The production features orchestrations, arrangements, and musical supervision by **Joe Beighton** (*SIX*), choreography by **Alexzandra Sarmiento** (*How to Succeed In Business Without Really Trying*), scenic design by **Milla Clarke** (*Mates in Chelsea*), costume design by **Natalie Pryce** (*VANYA*), video design by Tony and Olivier Award winner **Andrzej Goulding** (*Life of Pi*), lighting design by Tony and Olivier Award nominee **Bruno Poet** (*Tina – The Tina Turner Musical*), and sound design by Grammy and Tony Award nominee **Paul Gatehouse** (*SIX*). The team also includes **Patrick B. Phillips** (Music Director), **Chels Morgan** (Intimacy Director), **Kate DeVore** (Dialect Coach), **Patrick Goodwin CSA**, **The Telsey Office** (New York Casting), **Bob Mason** (Chicago Casting), **Billie Aken-Tyers** (Associate Director), **Camden Gonzales** (Associate Choreographer), **Tony DiBernardo** (Associate Scenic Designer), **Joseph Haggerty** (Associate Sound Designer), **Brendan Marble** (Assistant Lighting Designer), **Kailey Rockwell** (Assistant Music Director), **Jinni Pike** (Production Stage Manager), **Emma Franklin** (Assistant Stage Manager), and **Tuesday Thacker** (Production Assistant).

42 Balloons is produced by special arrangement with **Kevin McCollum**, **Andy Barnes** and **Wendy Barnes**, and **Sonia Friedman Productions** in association with **Debbie Hicks**, **Sam Levy**, **KLIVE Entertainment Co.**, **Kenny Wax**, and **The Lowry**.

More information at chicagoshakes.com/42balloons or on social media at [@chicagoshakes](https://twitter.com/chicagoshakes).

42 Balloons

Book, music, and lyrics by Jack Godfrey
Directed by Ellie Coote
May 24 – June 29, 2025
The Yard at Chicago Shakespeare Theater

PERFORMANCE LISTING

- Tuesdays at 7:00 p.m. (except May 27 and June 3)
- Wednesdays at 1:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m.
- Thursdays at 7:00 p.m.
- Fridays at 7:00 p.m. (except June 6)
- Saturdays at 2:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m.
- Sundays at 2:00 p.m.

Chicago Shakespeare strives to make its facility and performances accessible to all patrons. Accessible seating, assistive listening devices, large-print and Braille programs, and sensory tools are available at every performance. Enhanced performances include:

- **ASL interpreted performance – Friday, June 20 at 7:00 p.m.**
All dialogue and lyrics are translated into American Sign Language by two certified interpreters.
- **Audio-described performance – Sunday, June 22 at 2:00 p.m.**
A program that provides spoken narration of a play’s key visual elements for patrons who are blind or have low vision. Touch Tours provide patrons the opportunity to experience, firsthand, a production’s design elements.
- **Open captioned performance – Wednesday, June 25 at 1:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m.**
A text display of the words and sounds heard during a play, synced live with the action onstage.

Creative Team

Jack Godfrey - Writer
Ellie Coote - Director & Dramaturg
Joe Beighton - Orchestrator & Musical Supervisor
Alexzandra Sarmiento - Choreographer
Milla Clarke - Scenic Designer
Natalie Pryce - Costume Designer
Andrzej Goulding - Video Designer & Animator
Bruno Poet - Lighting Designer
Paul Gatehouse - Sound Designer
Patrick B. Phillips - Music Director
Chels Morgan - Intimacy Director
Kate DeVore - Dialect Coach
Patrick Goodwin CSA | The Telsey Office – New York Casting
Bob Mason - Chicago Casting
Billie Aken-Tyers - Associate Director
Camden Gonzales - Associate Choreographer
Tony DiBernardo - Associate Scenic Designer
Joseph Haggerty - Associate Sound Designer
Brendan Marble - Assistant Lighting Designer
Kailey Rockwell - Assistant Music Director
Jinni Pike - Production Stage Manager
Emma Franklin - Assistant Stage Manager
Tuesday Thacker - Production Assistant

CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE THEATER (CST)

A Regional Tony Award recipient, Chicago Shakespeare Theater produces a bold and innovative year-round season that includes Shakespeare, original plays, musicals, family programming, and international theatrical events. CST is committed to serving as a cultural center across its three stages—the 700+ seat Yard, 500 seat Jentes Family Courtyard Theater, and the 200 seat Carl and Marilyn Thoma Theater Upstairs as well as in classrooms, neighborhoods, and venues around the world. CST has a deep commitment to education and lifelong learning with robust programming for students, teachers, and lifelong learners, and engagement with communities across the city. Onstage, in classrooms and neighborhoods across the city, and in venues around the world, Chicago Shakespeare is a multifaceted theater—inviting audiences, artists, and community members to share powerful stories that illuminate the complexities, ambiguities, and wonders of our world. www.chicagoshakes.com

Cast

Daniel Assetta - Air Traffic Controller / Ensemble
Kailin Brown - Ensemble
Devin Cortez - Ensemble
Cameron Anika Hill - Ensemble
Evelyn Hoskins - Carol Van Deusen
Lisa Howard - Margaret Van Deusen
Josh Hoon Lee - Ensemble
Minju Michelle Lee - The Kid / Ensemble
Charlie McCullagh - Larry Walters
Austin Nelson Jr. - David Letterman / Ensemble
Morgan Schoenecker - Ensemble
Akron Watson - Ron Richland / Ensemble
Julia Bain - Understudy
Lacey Jack - Understudy
Joshua Messmore - Understudy
Luke Nowakowski - Understudy

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