RICHMOND TRIANGLE PLAYERS PRESENTS

THE SANTA CLOSET

BY

JEFFREY SOLOMON

DIRECTED BY

NORA OGINLEYE

ONSTAGE AND STREAMING

NOV 18 - DEC 19, 2020

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We are proud to be the longest-operating professional theatre in the entire mid-Atlantic community that has continuously produced works relevant to the LGBTQ experience—in fact, we are now in our 28th season, despite the temporary closure caused by an unparalleled pandemic!

We are proud that the works we have produced have made a positive impact on our community, and have helped shape Richmond’s conversations about diversity, equity and inclusion. And we are especially proud that in this time of need, RTP’s patrons made it clear through their extraordinary support how much they love the theatre we create.

We are now regarded as one of the major cultural entities in Central Virginia, and have received international recognition for our work, in addition to commendations from the Virginia Legislature, recognition as a 2019 Richmond History Maker by the Valentine Museum and Capital Region Collaborative, and as an OUTstanding Virginian at the 2018 statewide Equality Virginia dinner.

Whether it’s your first or fiftieth time at Richmond Triangle Players, thank you for joining us! We hope you will be with us for many years to come.

CONTACT US

BY EMAIL:

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PLAYWRIGHT JEFFREY SOLOMON TALKS ABOUT THE SANTA CLOSET

The play premiered just over ten years ago as a solo play entitled Santa Claus is Coming Out. The title change was prompted by The New York Times. Neil Genzlinger called the play “Delightful” in his round-up of holiday fare a decade ago, but he seemed to agree with some audience members who thought the title was misleading, adding: “Santa Claus Is Coming Out, is an accurate description of where his story goes, but is oh so misleading as to its content. This isn’t a clumsy parody, but a sensitive, imaginative tale that really is about a boy’s realization that he is different.”

For the record, I love the title Santa Claus is Coming Out, because it’s an homage to Santa Claus is Coming to Town and the other classic Rankin and Bass “Claymation” Christmas Specials (like Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer, Year Without a Santa Claus, etc.), which are in part an inspiration for this play. But I get their point. The premise, on its surface, can seem just silly and vapid.

The Santa Closet implies the play is about much more than Santa Claus, and it is. The Santa Closet is all the times adults didn’t speak to us honestly and openly about LGBTQ issues when we were small. It’s all the family members, and teachers, and celebrities they never told us about and stuffed into the closet, because they thought it was inappropriate, or we were too young, or they were afraid, or they just didn’t know how to have the conversation.

In terms of updating the play, my dear friend and colleague Emily Weiner, the Artistic Director of the company I co-founded with her, Houses on the Moon, said, “I want to do this play next year!” And I said, “Thank god!” I had been doing this play every single year since 2001 in one form or another but took a break to be papa. But Em also said, “Not so fast, Solomon, a lot has happened since this play had its Off-Broadway run in 2009: like marriage equality, and Arthur the Rat came out.” (No, wait. That was just his teacher).

Anyways, Emily made me sit down and write, and so did Joe Brancato, my original director, and has always been a loving collaborator and has helped to guide and shape this piece. I whined and complained but I am so glad I did it.
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The play deals with adults’ fear and discomfort in talking to kids honestly and openly about LGBT issues. Back when I started the play, it was a huge deal for an elementary school teacher to come out as gay, or someone to take a same-sex date to the prom. Now, depending on where you live in the country, not so much. The country has been consumed more recently by gender identity panic. Restroom hysteria. And the Trump administration has, of course, been working to erase trans people and take away all civil rights gains made during the Obama administration.

The visibility of trans folks in the media and in the popular conversation has created an interesting dilemma for parents. It used to be if your gender atypical child said he wanted to play with a Barbie, or get an easy bake oven, parents thought, “Oh....maybe my child is gay.” But now, with increased visibility and the evolving definition of what it means to be queer, a parent must ask a lot more. Could my child be transgender? Non binary?

The play has acknowledged the gender evolving world we live in, where Harry Styles wears an earring and gets ogled by both men and women, Sam Smith comes out as non-binary, Janelle Monet as bisexual, the number one rapper and country western star is a Black, young gay guy. I don’t think that has made all parents more accepting. For some, it just gives them more things to worry about - more biases they will have to unpack when their kid pushes the gender and sexuality envelope. I think accounting for way in which queer identity has evolved has added something very dynamic and urgent to the play.

I suppose this current version is more complex and nuanced. I think it more fully honors the parents' struggle and their journey towards acceptance of their not-so-straight child.

But creating this new version has allowed me to go deeper and explore “Gary’s" yearning for the dolls he asks Santa for, and what it means to be rejected and bullied at school and not fully supported or understood by his parents.

– Adapted from an online interview on Call Me Adam web site
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The Santa Closet

by Jeffrey Solomon

The Cast

The Reporter (and Everyone Else) ......................... Eddie Webster

Standby for Mr. Webster – Levi Meerovich

This is a form of theatrical journalism. All text is edited from over a decade of interviews conducted by Jeffrey Solomon on the North Pole and beyond, news footage and other documentary sources.

The Santa Closet is presented by arrangement with its author.

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Special Thanks to: Bill Harrison, Ivan Trittipoe, Diversity Thrift and Diversity Richmond; Amanda Carter, Rick Lyons, Lunch/Supper; Don Warren; Houses on the Moon Theatre Company.

Richmond Triangle Players’ 2020-21 Season is made possible in part through extraordinary support from: The E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, The Roy Cockrum Foundation, CultureWorks Grant Program, the Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation Resilience Fund, and the Virginia Commission for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts.
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THE COMPANY

Eddie Webster (The Reporter and Others) is excited to be performing again with Richmond Triangle Players! He has previously appeared at RTP as Chick in *Times Square Angel*, Gould in *Grey Gardens*, and James in *Corpus Christi*. He was most recently seen as Chester in *The Great Gatsby* (Quill Theatre). Other credits include *Red Velvet* (Quill Theatre), *Annie* (JFT), *West Side Story* and *1776* (VA Rep), *Heathers* (Firehouse/TheatreLab), and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (Quill Theatre). Thank you to Nora and Lucian for this opportunity. Love to Breanoh, Samm, BJ, Casey, and Deb, with special thanks to Lauren, Levi, and Erica for the support and encouragement. Happy Holidays everybody! Wear your mask!

Levi Meerovich (Standby) is thrilled to be back at RTP after music directing their summer smash hit, *Girlfriend*, and shaking the rafters as Riff Raff in their sold out run of *The Rocky Horror Show*. Other recent credits include *The 39 Steps*, *Atlantis, Shakespeare in Love* (VA Rep), *Urinetown, LEVEL 4* (TheatreLAB), *Preludes* (RTCC Award for Supporting Actor in a Musical) *Wrong Chopped* (Firehouse Theatre), and Miss Trunchbull in *Matilda: The Musical* (Dogwood Dell). Levi is a founding member of DOG STUFF, proudly producing absurd works of theatre up and down the east coast. Thanks to the incredible team at RTP -- Lucian, Breezy, Lauren, Phil, and everyone who works so hard to make this house a home. Special thanks to Eddie and Nora for their love and vision. Special Special thanks to Payton, for always having his back. Enjoy the show, Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays!

THE AUTHOR

Jeffrey Solomon is the co-founder of Houses on the Moon Theater Company, a New York City not-for-profit with a mission to amplify unheard voices. Jeff wrote and directed two original Houses productions, *Building Houses on the Moon* (Lucille Lortel Theatre, City Theatre, Pittsburgh, Winner: Best Play for an Ensemble, Columbus National Gay and Lesbian Theatre Festival) and *De Novo* (59E59 St. Theaters, Next Door at New York Theatre Workshop, Palacio Tecleno in El Salvador). He is also the playwright of *Tara’s Crossing*, which appeared at the Queens Theatre’s Immigrant Voice’s Project and had its world premiere run at the Tenement Theatre in New York. *De Novo* and *Tara’s Crossing* are presented widely in Law Schools as a training tool on asylum and refugee issues. As a solo performer and playwright Mr. Solomon’s *MotherSON* premiered at HERE Art Center in New York and he received a Joseph Jefferson Nomination for Best Actor for the same per-

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formance in Chicago at the Bailiwick Rep. The play has had acclaimed runs on London’s Off West End (New End Theatre, Oval House) and in Melbourne, Australia (Theatre Works) and toured widely with engagements in U.S., U.K. India, Sri Lanka, Israel and the Philippines. The play has been embraced a diversity training tool at colleges, universities, houses of worship and corporations. His performance won the Best Actor Award in Dublin’s Absolut Gay Theatre Festival as well as the Awards for Audience Favorite, Best Playwriting and Best Male Solo Performer at the Columbus National Gay and Lesbian Theatre Festival. Jeff's other solo play *The Santa Closet* ran Off-Broadway on Theatre Row at the Kirk Playhouse and won the Best of the Festival at the Columbus National Gay and Lesbian Theatre Festival. The play has toured nationally and run at the Diversionary Theatre in San Diego. Jeff is a Moth Grand Slam champion and his story has been heard on NPR's *Moth Radio Hour*. Jeffrey Solomon’s original teleplay for *CityKids* (ABC/Jim Henson Productions) received an Emmy Nomination for Best Children’s Special as well as winning an Ollie Award for excellence in Children’s Programming.

**THE CREATIVE TEAM**

Nora Ogunleye (Director) is ecstatic to make her directorial debut here at Richmond Triangle Players! She had the amazing opportunity to perform the role of Peona in last year’s production *Times Square Angel* and hopes to bring that same joy and laughter to this holiday season, especially in the midst of this pandemic. Nora would like to thank her friends and family, especially Chelsea Burke and Lucian Restivo, for always offering her a seat at the table. She would also like to thank the amazing designers and production team whose hard work and dedication have shone throughout this process. Enjoy the show!

Sheamus Coleman (Technical Director) has been working behind the scenes as a Carpenter for Richmond Triangle Players (*Falsettos*, *The Rocky Horror Show*, and *Times Square Angel*), as Sound Designer for RTP’s *The Cake*, and as the Technical Director for Dogwood Dell’s summer season (*Thoroughly Modern Millie*, *25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, and *Matilda*).

Deryn Gabor (Lighting Designer) is a senior lighting design student at Virginia Commonwealth University. She has had the pleasure of working as Assistant Lighting Designer on *The Cake* at Richmond Triangle Players,
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Assistant Lighting Designer on *Cinderella* at Virginia Repertory Theater, and Associate Lighting Designer on *The Revolutionists* at TheatreLAB. Her other design credits include *Ada and the Engine, God of Carnage, Persephone,* and *Venus in Fur* at Shafer Alliance Laboratory Theatre.

**Erica Hughes (Dialect Coach)** is an instructor of Voice & Speech at VCU, as well as a private voice/dialect/text coach and a performer. In Richmond, she has also worked with Virginia Rep, Firehouse Theatre, TheatreLAB, University of Richmond, CAT, and Quill Theatre. She has also coached for the Pittsburgh Irish and Classical Theatre, Chicago Pride Films & Plays, Round House Theatre, and the National Speech & Debate Association, among other institutions. Erica has an M.F.A. in Theatre Pedagogy/Stage Voice & Speech from VCU.

**Lauren Langston (Production Stage Manager)** is delighted to be back at RTP after stage managing *The Cake* and *The Rocky Horror Show* last season. She believes in vintage aesthetics not vintage values -- love is love, gender is a construct, black lives matter, and continues to pursue BIPOC allyship. She would like to thank RTP, Nora, and our amazing Production Team for a supportive and wonderful process. Thank you to Deven and dogs Millie and Roddy for making quarantine so full of love.

**Joey Luck (Sound Design)** is excited to be a part of this production of *The Santa Closet!* His last production at RTP was *Grey Gardens.* Joey received the Richmond Theatre Critics Circle award for Outstanding Achievement in Sound Design in 2013 for his work on *A Bright New Boise* at Firehouse Theatre, in 2014 for *Cabaret* at RTP, in 2015 for *Psycho Beach Party* at RTP, in 2017 for *The Toxic Avenger* with 5th Wall Theatre, and in 2019 for *Sweeney Todd* at TheatreLAB. Joey would like to thank his friends and family for all of their love and support!

**Breezy Potter (Company Manager)** is a 2017 graduate of TheatreVCU with a BFA in Theatre and a concentration in Stage Management and she is now the Company Manager at Richmond Triangle Players. She spends a lot of her theatre time stage managing, with recent credits including *Molly House* (Richmond Triangle Players), *The Revolutionists, Urinetown, Dance Nation, Sweeney Todd, Significant Other, A Doll’s House, I’m Gonna Pray for You So Hard, Moth,* and *The Last Five Years* (TheatreLAB), and *Heathers: The Musical* (TheatreLAB and Firehouse Theatre). You also may have seen her play a cute lil glitch of a human in the world premiere of *Level 4* at TheatreLAB. She is very small, please do not step on her.
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Since 1999 Diversity Richmond has, through your support, donated over $1 million to causes that nourish our community. Please join us in making an inclusive Richmond where inequality does not exist.
Philip Crosby (Executive Director) is entering his second decade leading Richmond Triangle Players. He has over thirty-five years of experience leading nonprofit arts and cultural organizations, including as a professional marketer, publicist, fundraiser and strategist for Cleveland’s Great Lakes Theater Festival, Boston Shakespeare Festival, TheatreVirginia, and Richmond Ballet. During his career, he has had the great good fortune to work with some of the most celebrated names in theatre, film and dance, including Tom Hanks, Olympia Dukakis, Hal Holbrook, Alfred Drake, George Abbott, Ruby Dee, Graciela Daniele, Gerald Freedman, Bart Cook and Maria Calegari. He joined the Board of RTP in 2001, and became the company’s first full-time Managing Director in 2009. In concert with RTP’s Board, artists, staff, patrons and volunteers, he has helped transform this company from a small fringe theater into one of Richmond’s most vital arts institutions and the cultural anchor of the revitalized Scott’s Addition neighborhood. He holds a BS in Speech from Northwestern University. He was appointed by former Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe to serve on the Commonwealth’s first LGBT Tourism Task Force, has served on several advisory panels for the Virginia Commission for the Arts, and has been a member of Richmond Region Tourism’s OutRVA Campaign since its inception. He is the current president of the RVA Theatre Alliance and serves on the board of the Scott’s Addition Business Association.

Lucian Restivo (Artistic Director) is a theatre professional in the Richmond area. Most recent directing credits include Seven Homeless Mammoths… (2019 RTCC nomination for Best Play), The Laramie Project (2019 RTCC winner for Best Director – Play and Best Play), and The View UpStairs with RTP; Murder Ballad with 5th Wall Theatre. He has also assisted Justin Amellio in directing bare: a pop opera (2013 RTCC winner for Best Musical), and The Boy from Oz with RTP. Favorite sound design credits include Act of God, Buyer and Cellar, and Corpus Christi with RTP; Dry Land (2017 RTCC nomination for Achievement in Sound Design) and Grand Concourse (2017 RTCC winner for Best Play) with TheatreLAB. Favorite acting credits include Almost, Maine and The Little Lion (Joel) with Swift Creek Mill Theatre; The Lyons (Curtis) with 5th Wall Theatre; Dog Sees God (Beethoven) at the Firehouse Theatre Project; bare: a pop opera (Lucas), Psycho Beach Party (Yo-Yo), Corpus Christi (2017 RTCC nomination for Best Play and Best Ensemble Acting), The Normal Heart (2017 RTCC nomination for Best Play) with RTP. He was a part of the Top 40 Under 40 Class of 2017. He has toured
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internationally with Missoula Children’s Theatre and nationally with VA Rep. He has also worked with Ford’s Theatre and The Studio Theatre in Washington, DC. He is a proud dog dad to Leo and drag husband to Wette Midler. VCU ’11.

**RICHMOND TRIANGLE PLAYERS**

**MANAGEMENT AND STAFF**

Executive Director .......................................... Philip Crosby
Artistic Director ............................................. Lucian Restivo
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WHO WE ARE

For almost 30 years, Richmond Triangle Players has been transforming our community's conversations about diversity, equity and inclusion through the production of LGBTQ-themed works.

A nonprofit, professional theatre company organized in 1993, RTP is the only professional theatre company in the Richmond area – and the longest continually operating one in the entire Mid-Atlantic region – which expressly and regularly serves the LGBTQ community. While other local theatres occasionally produce plays with LGBTQ content, only Triangle Players has made an ongoing commitment to LGBTQ artists, issues, audiences and community support.

WHAT WE HAVE DONE

In 2009, RTP vacated the crumbling building in which its theater had been housed and transformed an old radiator shop in a then-unknown neighborhood, into the warm, welcoming and exciting performance venue you are sitting in today.

Since then, RTP has won acclaim from its growing and diverse audiences, as well as from the Richmond Theatre Critics Circle, with over 100 “Best” nominations, and awards for Best Play and Best Musical multiple times each. The readers of STYLE Weekly have twice voted Richmond Triangle Players as Richmond's Best Local Theatre Company, in addition to naming RTP in its "Top Three" every year.

In 2018, Richmond Triangle Players was honored at the statewide Equality Virginia dinner as one of that year’s “OUTstanding Virginians,” and in 2019 was privileged to be named a “Richmond History Maker,” by the Valentine Museum and Capital Region Collaborative.

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Additional plaudits have come from the national publication Playbill.com, which named RTP as one of the 15 most important theaters of its kind in the nation, as well as in an editorial from the Richmond Times-Dispatch which said, in part: “RTP has been consistently willing to explore tough issues involving people who are gay in America and the challenges — and triumphs — they experience ... Their dramatic success here has opened doors and opened minds the old-fashioned way — through laughter, tears, and telling truth.”

RTP is also the cultural anchor of Scott’s Addition, one of the most vibrant new neighborhoods in Richmond to live, play or work, hosting over 160 events to the delight of over 10,000 enthusiastic patrons annually.

Most important, in June 2018, Triangle Players was proud to announce the completion of its 25th Anniversary Campaign, which enabled the company to purchase its building free and clear, complete exterior renovations including a signature marquee canopy, refresh its lobby and 

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OUR COMMITMENT TO YOU

The world is certainly a different place since the days of our humble beginnings – performing for small audiences on a makeshift stage in the attic of a now-defunct afterhours club. Yet while RTP – and our community – has made so may strides in today's America, there still are many challenges ahead.

Our equality teeters on the vital intersection of the LGBTQ+ community and the RVA community in a time in our nation's history where much progress has been made – yet so many obstacles remain. In our community – now coping with the effects of a global pandemic, and with no further patience to idly accept systemic racism built into its very fabric – RTP’s singular voice in the community is needed now more than ever.

GET CLOSER TO US

Your gift to our Annual Fund not only guarantees we can keep our unique voice strong, but will enable you to get closer to the artists and pull back the curtain on our process through a series of exclusive events, so that you feel a closer part of the RTP family.

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SUPPORT THE CREATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF NEW WORK

As a part of our landmark 25th Anniversary Campaign, RTP founder John Knapp and his husband Tim Gillham graciously endowed a new fund to support the creation and development of original LGBTQ work, especially musical theater work. RTP audiences will start seeing the fruits of that investment this season, as we kick off the inaugural So.Queer Playwrights Festival (see our web site for more information).

Additional gifts to support The John Knapp and Tim Gillham Fund are welcomed and encouraged. For more information, contact RTP Executive Director Philip Crosby at crosby@rtriangle.org

LEAVE A LEGACY FOR RTP

Did you know it is possible to support Richmond Triangle Players through your will or IRA?

Please help us sustain the work that we do by including Richmond Triangle Players in your estate planning. Your generosity will enable theatergoers to enjoy shows at RTP well into the future and will help us continue to offer in-depth education programs that directly benefit area youth. If you choose to include RTP in your estate plans, please let us know so we can thank you personally for making such a vital and important commitment.

Making RTP a beneficiary of your retirement plan is both tax efficient and as easy as changing the beneficiary form with your IRA administrator and designating RTP as a primary, contingent or partial beneficiary. Alternatively you can make a bequest through your will, codicil or trust. Here is an example:

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Continued on page 37
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