RICHMOND TRIANGLE PLAYERS PRESENTS

THIS BITTER EARTH

BY Harrison David Rivers

DIRECTED BY Brandon Rashad Butts

ONSTAGE AND ON DEMAND JANUARY 28 - FEBRUARY 19, 2021

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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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Political apathy has dire consequences for everyone, but especially for marginalized groups who bear the brunt of draconian conservative policies and police shootings. So when a white gay activist confronts his mild-mannered Black boyfriend’s lack of political engagement, love becomes very tricky, indeed.

This is the crux of *This Bitter Earth*, written by Harrison David Rivers, (winner of the McKnight Fellowship for Playwrights, a Jerome Foundation Many Voices Fellowship, an Emerging Artist of Color Fellowship, a Van Lier Fellowship and the New York Stage & Film’s Founders Award), this non-linear love story follows two men who meet at a Black Lives Matter rally and explores the ways their relationship changes over the years, affected by the shifting political tenor of the United States.

Although not autobiographical, playwright Harrison David Rivers (who is a Black queer man in an interracial relationship) calls *This Bitter Earth* “the most personal of my plays.” The play originated thanks to a commission from Ed Decker at the New Conservatory Theatre, seeking work that centered on Blacks in this country.

After several drafts, a seminal moment in the development of the work occurred when Rivers realized that many of the characteristics of his own life were rarely portrayed onstage. This prompted him to begin writing from the heart, realizing that if he felt this way, others must as well.

Most of Rivers’ work is about queer relationships, and *This Bitter Earth* is reflective of his mission to portray the specific dynamics of those
relationships and the way that the world interacts with Black men with nuance. Although both characters in the play hold wildly different views on activism, Rivers deeply identifies with both. The Black character Jesse prefers to stand outside of the political maelstrom, often feeling as if he doesn’t have anything to say, or feeling reluctant to place his body within the action.

As these emotions began to hit close to home, Rivers realized that the action of writing This Bitter Earth was indeed powerful activism. Neil, the white character, inspires passion and engagement, and is informed by Rivers view that true activism is showing up for your community when they need you. One need not always be a leader on the front lines, but one must be there somehow; in the group or behind the scenes.

For many years, Rivers didn’t believe his writing was political. On the surface, his play And She Would Stand Like This is simply a retelling of The Trojan Women by Euripides. Yet through his lens of Black and Brown bodies moving through the world, the work is clearly political and prescient. Staged as members of a diverse family receiving a mysterious unnamed diagnosis, the varied reaction of the hospital staff to each family member comments on the way that marginalized groups interface with large and powerful organizations in healthcare and beyond.

This story, as does much of his work, is an extension of the experiences that the LGBTQ community is having—specifically those surrounding HIV/AIDS. Alarmingly, awareness seems to be dropping in importance, especially in communities of color where the disease is still decimating large numbers and healthcare is sorely lacking.

— Adapted from an online article in the Windy City Times by Sheri Flanders, 2018
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performing at the ROBERT B. MOSS THEATRE
Philip Crosby, Executive Director; Lucian Restivo, Artistic Director;
presents
THIS BITTER EARTH
by Harrison David Rivers

Scenic and Projection Design
Lucian Restivo
Costume Design
Skyler Glaser
Lighting Design
Austin Harber

Sound Design
Spike Bahermez
Properties Design
Breezy Potter
Technical Direction
Sheamus Coleman

Movement Director
Justin J. Bell
Intimacy Director
Raja Benz
Production Stage Manager
Sofia Malin

Director
Brandon Rashad Butts

The Cast
Jesse Howard ............................ Andrew “Rou” Reid
Neil Finley-Darden............................ Evan Nasteff

Understudies never appear unless an announcement is made prior to the
performance. For Jesse – Keaton Hillman; For Neil – Jacob LeBlanc

Setting: New York City, NY, and St. Paul, MN

This Bitter Earth is presented by arrangement with Concord Theatricals on behalf of Samuel
French, Inc. www.concordtheatricals.com

Originally Commissioned and Produced at The New Conservatory Theatre Center
World Premiere in 2017; San Francisco, CA, Ed Decker, Artistic Director

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Special Thanks to: Bill Harrison, Ivan Trittipoe, Diversity Thrift and Diversity Richmond;
Amanda Carter, Rick Lyons, Lunch/Supper; Paul Blacker

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extraordinary support from: The E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, The Roy
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Fund, and the Virginia Commission for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts.
IN CASE OF EMERGENCY...

Leave your seat calmly and proceed through the curtains into the lobby, watching your step so you don’t fall.

There are two exits: the front door, leading to Altamont Avenue; and the back door, leading to the handicapped-accessible parking. Please choose the exit closest to you.

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THE COMPANY

Evan Nasteff (Neil Finley-Darden) just moved back to Richmond after four years out in Los Angeles. He was lucky and grateful to be in many shows during his tenure in the Richmond theatre scene, including Bad Jews (TheatreLAB), Twelfth Night (Quill), The Drowsy Chaperone (Swift Creek Mill), and Cabaret right here at RTP. He’s so, so proud to be a part of this project! LGBTQ+ visibility is very important to him, and he hopes it is to you too. Black Lives Matter.

Andrew “Rou” Reid (Jesse Howard) is truly just happy to be here.

Keaton Hillman (Jesse Understudy) was last seen on the Richmond Triangle Players stage playing Don in the 2018 summer production of A Chorus Line and could not be more excited to be back working with one of his favorite theaters in the city. Recent credits include various roles in The Longest Night and Common Wealth & Common Debt (The Conciliation Project/TheatreLAB), Ensemble in The Great Gatsby (Quill Theatre), Ensemble in The Wiz (Virginia Rep), and Youth in Passing Strange (Firehouse Theatre, RTCC Nominee for Best Actor in a Musical). Follow @keatonohkneel on Twitter and Instagram to keep up with his current and future projects. Thank you for supporting live theatre in a time where we need it most. Much love!

Jacob LeBlanc (Neil Understudy/Vocal Coach) is a graduate student at Virginia Commonwealth University pursuing a Master of Fine Arts in Performance and Pedagogy. Mr. LeBlanc focuses his graduate studies on voice and speech training for performers. He is a native of Louisiana, having earned a Bachelor of Art in Theatre Performance from Louisiana State University before moving to Richmond. This is Mr. LeBlanc's first theatrical engagement since his arrival in Virginia.

THE AUTHOR

Harrison David Rivers is the winner of the 2018 Relentless Award for his play the bandaged place (New York Stage & Film). His produced plays include: When Last We Flew (GLAAD Media Award, NYFringe Excellence in Playwriting Award, NYFringe, Diversionary Theatre, Real Live Theatre), Sweet (AUDELCO nomination for Best Play, National Black Theatre), And She Would Stand Like This (20% Theatre Company, The Movement Theatre Company), Where Storms Are Born (Berkshire Theatre Award nomination for Best New Play, Edgerton Foundation New Play Award, Williamstown Theatre Festival), A Crack in the Sky (History Theatre), Five Points (MN Theatre Award for Exceptional New Work, Lavender Magazine citation
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for Outstanding New Playwriting, BroadwayWorld Minneapolis Award for Best New Work, Inclusion in MinnPost’s year-end “Best” List, Theatre Latte Da) This Bitter Earth (MN Theatre Award for Exceptional New Work, Lavender Magazine citation for Outstanding New Playwriting, Joseph Jefferson Award nomination for Best Production, New Conservatory Theatre Center, Penumbra, About Face), To Let Go and Fall (Theatre Latte Da) and Broadbend, Arkansas (Transport Group/Public Theater). Harrison was named a Runner-up for the 2018 Artist of the Year by the Star Tribune and a 2017 Artist of the Year by City Pages. He has received McKnight and Many Voices Jerome Fellowships, a Van Lier Fellowship, an Emerging Artist of Color Fellowship and residencies with the Bogliasco Foundation, the Siena Art Institute, the Hermitage and Duke University. Harrison was the 2016 Playwright-in-Residence at the Williamstown Theatre Festival. Harrison is an alum of the Public Theater’s Emerging Writers’ Group, Interstate 73, NAMT and The Lincoln Center Directors’ Lab. He is a NYTW Usual Suspect and a member of the Playwright Center’s Board of Directors. BA: Kenyon College. MFA: Columbia School of the Arts.

THE CREATIVE TEAM

Brandon Rashad Butts (Director) is a director and writer based in the DMV area. His directing credits include Bootycandy (Iron Crow Theatre) and Animals Out of Paper (Silver Spring Stage). He’s also participated in a number of play festivals, such as Klecksography (Rorschach Theatre). He’s assisted on several productions including: Pride and Prejudice (World Premiere) Les Liaisons Dangereuses [dir. Hana S. Sharif], Marley (World Premiere), One Night in Miami... (World Premiere)[dir. Kwame Kwei-Armah], Detroit ’67 [dir. Kamilah Forbes], X’s and O’s (Co-production with Berkeley Rep.), 4,000 Miles, After the Revolution, and Amadeus (Baltimore Center Stage). As a writer, his play Spice of Life was recently developed with AdventureMTC. His full-length plays Personal Protection and Reclamation have received readings at Baltimore Center Stage. His short plays Between Us and Profiled have been produced at Manhattan Repertory Theatre, The Secret Theatre, and Blue Pearl Productions. He recently contributed to an editorial piece published with Huffington Post Black Voices, Black Hair Defined. His short story The Red Barn was published in the May ’20 issue of the 3Element Literary Review. Brandon has served as a Producing Fellow at Baltimore Center Stage, SDC Observer, Directing Fellow at Manhattan Theatre Club.
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Spike Bahermez (Sound Designer) is an experimental performance artist, sound designer, and educator from Abu Dhabi. A Fulbright scholar, they hold a Bachelor of Arts in Theatre from New York University and a Masters of Fine Arts in Theatre from Towson University. Their work has been presented at Queens Museum, The Museum of Contemporary Arts in Tucson, The Peale Museum, The Mudlark Public Theatre, The Baltimore Theater Project, and NYU in Abu Dhabi.

Justin J. Bell (Movement Director) is a director and teaching artist who has worked with Synetic, Gala Hispanic Theater’s award winning youth program, Paso Nuevo, and Art 180 (based out of Richmond, VA). Credits: Synetic Theater: *Alice in Wonderland* (March Hare/King of Hearts), *A Tale of Two Cities* (Jerry u/s), *Hamlet…the rest is silence* (Gravedigger), *Much Ado about Nothing* (Balthazar/Friar Francis), *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (Beast), *As You Like It* (Jaques u/s); Constellation Theater Co.: *Journey to the West* (Monkey King u/s); reLease Theater Co.: *straight on til moUrning* (Pan); Heritage Ensemble Theater Co.: *Reflections of a Black Cowboy* (Nat Love), *One Monkey Don’t Stop No Show* (Felix); The Conciliation Project: *uncle tom: deconstructed, Genocide Trail.*

Raja Benz (Intimacy Director) is a transgender actor, director, and educator from Chicago currently living in RVA. Raja is a graduate student pursuing her Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Performance Pedagogy with a post-baccalaureate certificate in Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies from Virginia Commonwealth University. Additionally, Raja holds a BFA from the Professional Actor Training Program from Northern Illinois University, where she was granted the opportunity to study at the Moscow Art Theatre. Raja's work centers on historically excluded narratives of queer of intimacy and pleasure. Raja has worked on a number of community works such as ‘The Consent Project,” which formed a collaboration with comprehensive sexual health educators and artists to offer low or no cost community workshops based on the methodologies popularized by Augusto Boal.

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*).
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Skyler Glaser (Costume Designer) is exploring the world of traditional and digital theatre at Richmond Triangle Players stage. She is a recent graduate of Virginia Commonwealth University and received a BFA in Costume Design. Her previous credits include two all-women-cast shows, *Ada and the Engine* (Shafer Alliance Laboratory Theatre) and *Eclipsed* (TheatreVCU), for which she has received Honorable Mention in Costume Design at the Southeastern Theatre Conference. She would like to thank her friends and partner for their support during this tumultuous time.

Austin Harber (Lighting Designer) is in his final semester of VCU! He will finally obtain a fancy paper, solidifying him as a Bachelor of Fine Arts. So wish him luck as he enters into a new chapter of his life and history. Austin is thankful to be back after almost a year since *Molly House*. He is very thankful to this community for giving him his first professional show, *Times Square Angel*. Austin would also like to thank his family and friends for supporting him. Special thanks to Chase Piazza. Please enjoy the show!

Sofia Malin (Production Stage Manager) is so excited and grateful to be back at RTP! Previous RTP credits include *Times Square Angel* and *Miss Gulch Returns!* She is a recent graduate from VCU with her BFA in Stage Management. Before graduation, Sofia was the Production Stage Manager and 1st Assistant Director for *She Kills Monsters*, which was the university's first virtual production. Other previous credits include *Machinal*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *The Three Musketeers* (VCUarts Theatre), *Red Velvet* (Quill) and *Little Women* (SPARC). Outside of theatre, Sofia was the Production and Logistics Coordinator for the 2020 Menuhin Competition (postponed due to COVID-19) and spent a summer working in production at the Aspen Music Festival and School in Colorado. A big thank you to the amazing artists for their work on this production, as well as Sofia’s friends and family being there supporting her. Enjoy the show!

RTP MANAGEMENT

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 for-
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tune 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. None of this would be possible without the love and support of his husband, David Ballas.

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 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.

Breezy Potter (Company Manager) is a 2017 graduate of TheatreVCU with a BFA in Theatre and a concentration in Stage Management and she
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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.

**RICHMOND TRIANGLE PLAYERS**  
**MANAGEMENT AND STAFF**

Executive Director ................................. Philip Crosby  
Artistic Director ................................. Lucian Restivo  
Community Engagement Manager .......... George M. Smith III  
Accountant ........................................ Terry Sherman, CPA*  
Company Manager ............................... Breezy Lee Potter*  
Graphic Design and Photography ............. John MacLellan*  
Literary Manager ................................... Dexter Ramey*  
Artistic Associates ...... Matthew Akers*, Kikau Alvaro*, Justin Amellio*  
Technical Director ............................... Sheamus Coleman*  
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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.

Continued on page 29
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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

Continued on page 31
Atlantic Union Bank is proud to support the Richmond Triangle Players

We’re a dedicated supporter of the arts in Richmond and committed to enhancing and improving the communities where we all live, work and play. Discover easier banking with us, where convenience, free checking, and customer-centric service is just the beginning of a memorable performance.
bar area, add a staff position, upgrade its lighting and sound equipment, undergird its Annual Fund, and establish both an Operating Reserve Fund and an endowed fund for the development of New Works.

**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 many 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.

Please pledge your support for RTP today. Simply go to [www.rtriangle.org](http://www.rtriangle.org) to make a secure donation with your credit or debit card... you can even set up recurring payments! It couldn’t be faster, easier – or more important.

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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:

I, [insert your name], bequeath the sum of [insert monetary sum or percentage of my residuary estate] to Richmond Triangle Players, 1300 Altamont Ave, Richmond, VA 23230 Tax ID # 62-1513800

Richmond Triangle Players’ Legacy Society honors individuals that have chosen to arrange a planned gift with a value of $5,000 or above. Benefits are life-long and begin as soon as you notify us of your gift and send a copy of the documentation that mentions RTP.

**THANK YOU FOR CONSIDERING A GIFT TO SUPPORT RTP’S FUTURE!**

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**TWO SPECIAL WAYS TO SUPPORT RICHMOND TRIANGLE PLAYERS**

**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

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