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## The Big Meal

Department of Theatre and Dance

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Daniel Gurskis, Dean, College of the Arts

Department of Theatre and Dance

Randy Mugleston, Chair

# *The Big Meal*

by Dan LeFranc

April 13 | 14 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23, 2022

Life Hall Studio Theatre

Director **Susan Kerner**

Dramaturg **Maggie-Ann Aube**

Scenic Designer **Becca Sauer**

Costume Designer **Grace Elizabeth Wilson**

Lighting Designer **Olivia M Buonsante**

Sound Designer **Maggie-Ann Aube**

Hair/Makeup Designer **Grace Elizabeth Wilson**

Fight/Intimacy Director **Rick Sordelet**

Voice and Speech Coach **Sarah Koestner**

Stage Manager **Jessica Vaccaro**

## **Cast** (in order of appearance)

Man 3 ..... **Isaiah Robinson**

Woman 3 ..... **Templar Wright**

Man 2 ..... **Joe Baez**

Woman 2 ..... **Kira Merkel**

Boy ..... **Emery Myers**

Girl ..... **Caitlyn Capre**

Man 1 ..... **Jordan Boone**

Woman 1 ..... **Jax Azoff**

Servers ..... **Sydney Coleman, Alex Fontes, Arianna Marmol**

Understudies **Sydney Coleman, Nina DiNorscio, Alex Fontes, Arianna Marmol**

**Time and Place:** The recent present; somewhere in America

Duration: 90 minutes, no intermission.

*The Big Meal* is presented by agreement with Concord Theatricals on behalf of Samuel French, Inc., [www.concordtheatricals.com](http://www.concordtheatricals.com).

*The Big Meal* had its World Premiere on February 7, 2011, at American Theatre Company, Chicago Illinois (PJ Paparelli, Artistic Director). Playwrights Horizons, Inc. produced the New York City premiere of *The Big Meal* Off-Broadway in 2012.

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**Mysti Stay** | Coordinator of Design, Technology,  
and Management

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**Dalton Gorden** | Production Office Assistant

**Erhard Rom** | Scenic Mentor

**Benjamin Merrick** | Technical Director

**Daniel Graham** | Assistant Technical Director

**Daniel Haussler** | Carpenter

**Jeanette Meises** | Scenic Charge Artist

**Alison Merrick** | Props Supervisor

**Robin McGee** | Costume Design Mentor

**Judith Evans** | Costume Shop Supervisor

**Jeanette Aultz** | Assistant Costume Shop Supervisor

**Amanda Phillips Balingit, Katie Pippin,**  
**Robin Ankerich** | Drapers

**Marlene Olson Hamm** | Wardrobe Supervisor

**Nick Kolin** | Lighting Design Mentor

**Osman M. Morales** | Head Electrician

**Zachary Brienza** | Assistant Electrician

**Megan Culley** | Sound Design Mentor

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**Megan C. Austin** | Director, University Galleries

## Staff for *The Big Meal*

**Maggie-Ann Aube** | Assistant Director

**Junyla Silmon** | Assistant Costume Designer

**Rebecca O'Neill** | Assistant Set Designer

**Glorie de la Cruz** | Assistant Lighting Designer

**Rebecca O'Neill** | Assistant Prop Head

**Kate Repp** | Wardrobe Head

**Charlotte Labudde** | Wardrobe Crew

**Liam Driscoll, Jessica Gold** | Crew/Ushers

**Nina DiNorscio,**

**Arianna Edmondson** | Assistant Stage Managers

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### Programs in this season are made possible in part by funds from:

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# Director's Notes

If plays had children, Dan LeFranc's *The Big Meal* would be the child of A.R. Gurney's *The Dining Room*. Gurney's play has resonated with me, with students in my directing classes, and with audiences in productions of *The Dining Room* I've been privileged to direct at MSU, in London, and in Shanghai. While Gurney's play lives in traditional dining rooms, Dan LeFranc chooses restaurants for his intimate snapshots of American family life. Both plays give breath to the moments of joy and pain, loss and healing, and the very particular shared experiences that shape our families over generations.

You are about to meet 20-something Nicole and Sam in their unremarkable chance encounter in a typical American restaurant. They will fall in love, break up, get back together, marry, and create a family. Their lifelong romance will affect the lives of so many others. "We started something, didn't we? We really started something," 90-something Nicole will say when she meets her first great-grandchild, Matthew.

As a director, I'm attracted to stories about human connections and particularly about family. My parents, Louise and Charlie, met in a New York City department store during World War II and married six weeks later. They live on now in the vivid memories and shared legacy of the many people whose lives they touched. Among them are three children, six grandchildren, eight great-grandchildren, even a small boy named Charlie for the great-grandfather he knows only from family photos.

I dedicate *The Big Meal*, my final MSU production, to my parents Louise and Charlie, whose chance encounter at McCreery's Department Store 78 years ago "really started something." I thank my brilliant *Big Meal* cast and artistic team for bringing the beautiful diversity of their family stories to the table. And, of course, a big thank you to my extended MSU family—my wonderful past and present students and colleagues—who have shared an artistic home with me for the past 24 years. I have savored every moment of this very flavorful "big meal"!

—Susan Kerner, Director

# Production Biographies

**Susan Kerner** (Director) has directed in New York, Shanghai, Jaipur (India), London and Cambridge (England), and at theaters and universities throughout the United States, including Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, Indiana Repertory Theatre, Meadow Brook Theatre (MI), George Street Playhouse, Luna Stage, University of Kansas, Rutgers University, and the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. *The Big Meal* is her 27th production for the Department of Theatre and Dance. MSU favorites include *The Wolves*, *Mad Forest*, *Punk Rock*, *Clybourne Park*, *Equus*, *Arcadia*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, and *The Skin of our Teeth*. She commissioned and directed the world premiere of *And Then They Came for Me: Remembering the World of Anne Frank* and is currently co-producing *Eva's Promise: The Heinz Geiringer Story*, a documentary film about the journey of a young artist in hiding from the Nazis 1942–1944. Kerner holds a BA from Connecticut College, an MA from Columbia University, and an MFA from Boston University. She was a Fulbright Scholar in India and is a member of the Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers.

**Maggie-Ann Aube** (Dramaturg/Sound Design) is thrilled to be able to dive into the deep context within this play. She has spent a multitude of nights analyzing each word in the play and is happy to see it be brought to life. This is her first time working on a show in this capacity, and she hopes you all fall in love with it just as she has.

**Becca Sauer** (Scenic Designer) is a senior and excited to be designing her first show at MSU. Previously she has worked in both the scene shop and costume shop for many productions, with a focus in props and painting. She has been head of props for *Top Girls* and *The Names We Gave Him*. Sauer has also been an assistant scenic designer for *The Wolves* and an assistant costume designer for *Reefer Madness*. She is happy to work on this show as her final production in her college career, and looks forward to pursuing theater after she graduates

**Grace Elizabeth Wilson** (Costume Designer, Hair/Makeup Designer) is a senior in the Production/Design program at MSU. Her other costume design credits at Montclair include *Top Girls* (also directed by Susan Kerner) and the dance pieces *They Might Be Giants* (choreographed by Christopher Von Howard) and *The Things That Remain* (choreographed by Janice Rosario). She is currently working on an independent

*Les Misérables* design project called “Designing the Barricades,” to be presented virtually at BarricadesCon on April 22. Wilson is looking forward to taking the next step into her professional career this summer as a stitcher at the Pennsylvania Renaissance Faire.

**Olivia M Buonsante** (Lighting Designer) is a native New Yorker who grew up in musical theater, performing at community theaters on Long Island as well as taking part in workshops with the Broadway Workshop and the Broadway Artists Alliance. After attending AMDA’s Conservatory program in New York City, she chose to pursue a career behind the scenes as a lighting designer with plans to graduate in December 2022. Previous collegiate design credits include *Brooklyn’s Bridge*, *The Bald Soprano*, *The Lesson*, *The Names We Gave Him*, and *The Heidi Chronicles* (assistant lighting designer). [www.oliviambuonsante.com](http://www.oliviambuonsante.com)

**Rick Sordelet** (Fight/Intimacy Coordinator) has served as this country’s most prolific fight director for over 28 years. He and his son, Christian, created Sordelet Inc., an action-based company providing stunt coordination, fight direction, and intimacy consulting for film, television, and theater. He has worked on over 80 shows on Broadway, from *Beauty and the Beast* and *Lion King* all the way to *Tina*. Sordelet just returned from the UK, where he revived the fight direction on Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast*, coming to Broadway next season. The Sordelets are the resident fight directors for the Santa Fe Opera, where they staged the fights for *As You Like It* and *Eugene Onegin*. They are also stunt coordinators for television and film: 12 years with *Guiding Light*, four years with *One Life to Live*, both seasons with *Kevin Can Wait* and *The Crew*, both starring Kevin James. Their most recent film is *Ben Is Back* starring Julia Roberts. They are currently filming *One True Loves* with Simu Liu and Phillipa Soo. Sordelet taught at Yale School of Drama for 22 years as well as at Kean University, Montclair State, and the William Esper Studio. From fight direction and teaching, Sordelet developed into a writer as well, selling several screenplays and a television series. He and his partner, David Blixt, run an E-publishing company called Sordelet INK.

**Sarah Koestner** (Voice and Speech Coach) has previously taught voice and acting at NYU and Rutgers University. She was mentored by Scott Miller in the Graduate Acting program at NYU and is an associated teacher of the Miller Voice Method. She earned her MFA in Acting at Rutgers University, where she trained under William Esper and Lloyd Richards, and received her BFA in Acting from Emerson College. New York



theater credits include *The Libertine*, *Love Song*, *Waiting for Lefty*, *The Truth About Christmas*, and *Betrayal*. Regional credits include *The Understudy*, *The Libertine*, *The Maids*, *Doubt*, *Landscape of the Body*, and *She Stoops to Conquer*. She is a proud member of Actor's Equity.

**Jessica Vaccaro** (Stage Manager) is a junior BA Theatre Studies major who is honored to be given this opportunity to work on her second mainstage show at MSU. Previously she worked on *As You Like It* at MSU as a production assistant. Currently, she has been working with MSU FAST as the technical director/lighting designer for the past three years. She looks forward to future productions at MSU and beyond.

## Cast Biographies

**Jax Azoff** (Woman 1) is a senior BFA actor at MSU. *The Big Meal* is her fourth department show at this school, with her previous MSU credits including *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*, *'TASHA*, and *How to Mourn the Dead*.

**Joe Baez** (Man 2) is very happy to be finishing his college career with this show. He has embraced the “dad energy” and tributes his family for understanding the family dinner dynamic. His previous credits include *The Rover*, *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*, and an experimental piece with Lou Moreno, *The Ultimate Kahoots*. He is not your average Joe.

**Jordan Boone** (Man 1) is from Philadelphia, PA. He has been involved in and has had a passion for theater since the eighth grade. Serving the past few years as a BFA acting student at MSU, he has performed in other productions such as *Anonymous*, *Theatre on the Move*, *Lysistrata*, *'TASHA*, and *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*.

**Caitlyn Capre** (Girl) is a junior BFA Acting major at MSU. She was raised in both East Windsor, NJ, and Atlanta, GA. Her previous theatrical credits at MSU are #14 in *The Wolves* and Chorus: The People in *'TASHA*. This summer, Capre will be interning with Emmy Award–winning casting director Judy Henderson in New York City.

**Sydney Coleman** (Understudy) (She/Her) is a freshman BFA Acting major. *The Big Meal* is the first mainstage production she has participated in at MSU. Understudying has been a wonderful learning process for her, and she is looking forward to applying what she has discovered in future productions as well!

**Nina DiNorscio** (Understudy) is a freshman BFA Acting major who is excited to be in her first mainstage production.

**Alex Fontes** (Server/Understudy) is a freshman BFA Acting major from Andover, NJ. This is the first mainstage play he has had the opportunity to work on at MSU. Being exposed to the kind of work he is going to be doing in future mainstage plays during his journey as an acting major has excited him, and he can't wait to utilize the new skills he gained working on *The Big Meal*.

**Arianna Marmol** (Server/Understudy) is a freshman BFA Acting major. *The Big Meal* is her first mainstage show at MSU, and she is incredibly grateful to be a part of the entire process. She cannot wait to be part of more shows in the future.

**Kira Merkel** (Woman 2) is a junior in the BFA Acting program and is excited to be in their second mainstage production. Their goals in theater are to create and collaborate in theaters and companies all over the world.

**Emery Myers** (Boy) has been at MSU for three years. This is his first production at Montclair State University, and he has now been transferred to the BFA Acting class of 2025. He made his directorial debut during the fall semester of 2021 with FAST's production of *Yellow Moon*. Myers is very humbled and grateful to be able to do this thing we call theater for what he predicts to be the rest of his life, God willing.

**Isaiah Robinson** (Man 3) is elated to return to MSU's studio space with this semester's production of *The Big Meal*. His most recent credits include *Fences* (Lyons) at the Union County Performing Arts Center, and *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* (El Fayoumy), performed in this very room!

**Templar Wright** (Woman 3) is thrilled to be a part of *The Big Meal* during her final semester in MSU's BFA Acting program. Most recently, you may have seen her in *The Wolves* or *The Illusion*. Wright is excited to continue to create, collaborate and explore important stories. [www.templarwright.com](http://www.templarwright.com)