



Pioneer Theatre Company's Student Matinee Program is made possible through the support of Salt Lake County's Zoo, Arts and Parks Program, The Simmons Family Foundation, and The Meldrum Foundation Endowment Fund.

elf

The Musical

Book by **Thomas Meehan & Bob Martin**

Music by **Matthew Sklar**

Lyrics by **Chad Beguelin**

Based upon the New Line Cinema film written by **David Berenbaum**

Directed by **Alan Muraoka**

Choreographed by **Rommy Sandhu**

December 3 - 18, 2021

Runtime: 2:10 which includes a 15-minute intermission

SPOTLIGHT

STUDY GUIDE

For Teachers and Students

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Alan Muraoka

Happy holidays and welcome back to Pioneer Theatre Company!

I'm Alan Muraoka, the director of this production of Elf! First off, let me say that we are so happy that you are here. Live theatre is unique because every performance is slightly different, and that is what makes it so special. For many of our cast this is their first show back after a year and a half and

know that they are ready and rarin' to go. We hope that you are as excited as we are to share Buddy the Elf's journey from the North Pole to New York City!

The holiday season is a time to celebrate the importance of family and friendship, and to spread love through acts of generosity and kindness. These themes run throughout the world of our show. Buddy the Elf brings brightness and lightness into any room he visits, and we hope that you will exit the theatre with a smile and humming one of our joyful tunes.

This is my first show with Pioneer Theatre

Company, and I am so grateful to Karen Azenberg and everyone here for making me feel so welcome. I am always attracted to shows that have a wonderful center of heart and humor, and Elf fits that bill perfectly. It is also important for me to present a world of diversity and inclusion, and I hope you will notice as you see our beautiful cast that this is a reflection of what America represents to me.

I sincerely hope you have a wonderful time, and welcome back to live theatre!

*Alan Muraoka
Director Elf The Musical*

"IF BUDDY THE ELF WAS A MUPPET, I THINK HE WOULD BE CLOSEST TO EITHER ERNIE OR GROVER."

Interview with Director Alan Muraoka

Alan Muraoka, director of PTC's upcoming show *Elf The Musical*, is a well-established actor and director and may look familiar to many of you. That's because he is also the proprietor of Hooper's Store on the much-loved "Sesame Street," where he has been a cast member for 23 years!

PTC sat down with Alan to ask him about *Elf The Musical*, being an actor and a director, and of course, "Sesame Street."

How did you transition from acting to directing? Is it difficult juggling a TV role and directing?

When I was a theatre arts major at UCLA, I was interested in both acting and directing, but focused on the acting. That got me to New York City in 1987 and my first Broadway show. My first professional directing debut was in 1998 with an Asian American Theatre Company called NAATCO (National Asian American Theatre Company), where I directed the Wil-



Alan Muraoka with Elmo, Abby and Cookie Monster on Sesame Street. Photo credit: Paul McGinnis



Alan Muraoka directing a show.

liam Finn musical *Falsettoland* with an all-Asian American cast. We got amazing reviews and a love letter from *The New York Times*, so the show ran for that entire summer. It gave me a wonderful start to my directing career.

I have been a cast member of “Sesame Street” for the past 23 years (I play Alan, the proprietor of Hooper’s Store) and have had the pleasure of directing projects for them for the past 10 years. We shoot an entire season of “Sesame Street” in four months, so that leaves the rest of the year for me to do other directing and acting projects, like *Elf*. It actually works out pretty well since our shooting season for “Sesame Street” is so short. The only time it becomes a small challenge is when I am both directing and acting in the same episode. It’s a lot of hats to wear at the same time, but I have figured out how to make that work and I am luckily surrounded by great people who help support me.

Being a full time cast member on a kid’s show is a different path for a Broadway actor and director. Have your skills working on “Sesame Street” helped with working on a family friendly show like *Elf*?

Absolutely. At “Sesame Street,” we strive for finding both humor and heart in our material as we try to find that balance of education and entertainment. And when Karen Azenberg (Artistic Director for PTC) approached me and sent me the script for *Elf*, I immediately saw that the show is filled with the same humor and heart that I love. Buddy the Elf’s life perspective is so pure, and his joy brightens every room he enters that I found immediate parallels to it and “Sesame Street.” If Buddy the Elf was a Muppet, I think he would be closest to either Ernie or Grover.

What was the first professional show you saw as a child? How did that affect your decision to become an actor? Is *Elf The Musical* a good “first show” to introduce children to theatre?

My parents weren’t really theatregoers, but when they saw that I had an interest, they did start buying tickets to the touring shows that came to Los Angeles. The show that I remember being the most impactful to me was *A Chorus Line*. I think I was 14 at the time, and I was blown away by the dancing and the story. I think it was my “a-ha” moment. I had already been doing theatre at my elementary and junior high school, but this set me on a course to where I am today. My parents were, of course, concerned but supportive of my passions, and when it came time to talk about college, I told

them I wanted to be a Theatre Arts major. We decided as a family that UCLA would be the best fit, because they had a wonderful theatre program, but if I somehow changed my mind, it was a great school with lots of alternative choices. Luckily, we never had to have that discussion. Carol Burnett offered an annual Musical Theatre Scholarship at UCLA that was open for any student to audition, and eight finalists were chosen to perform for an audience of industry folks. There was a panel of four celebrity judges who decided the outcome. I was a finalist three times, and finally won my junior year. And throughout those three years I was judged by Broadway veterans Paula Kelly, Ken Berry, Rock Hudson, and Carol Burnett herself. I think the moment that my parents and grandparents met Carol Burnett backstage they knew there was no turning back.

I think *Elf* is the perfect show for children to be introduced to theatre. It’s a holiday show with so much physical humor, great songs, a huge heart, and the central character of Buddy, who has the innocence of an eight-year-old child. It’s a win-win scenario.

What draws you to this show and what do you plan to bring to the production that others have not done before?

As I have said, the humor and the heart of any show is what excites me and drives me. An emotional connection is vital and important in any good storytelling, and I do think that *Elf* has that. The challenges that arise are, of course, the realities of budget. We cannot realize everything that was in the original Broadway production, so we have to work smarter, which is always a fun



As The Engineer, singing 'If You Want To Die In Bed' in Miss Saigon

and challenging journey. We are using lighting for many of our magical effects, and fingers crossed it all works out. That's all I'm going to give. You'll have to come and see it for yourself!

Anything you would like to add about the cast you're working with? Have you worked with any of them before?

I feel so lucky to have this wonderful mix of local and New York talent. Whenever I cast, I try to find both the most talented actors and people I want to be in a room with. I try to create a relaxed atmosphere in the rehearsal room, where actors feel brave enough to experiment and sometimes fail. I cannot tell you how many great ideas come out of failed attempts. I know as an actor when I feel safe, and I try to recreate that in my rehearsal space. Max Chernin as Buddy is a revelation. I have been a fan of his for a few years, and so am

very excited that he is setting the tone for both comedy and heart. Our Musical Director Tom Griffin hired me as an actor back in 1983 or 1984 for *Holiday Cabaret* he was doing in Los Angeles, and this is our first time back together since that time. Our Choreographer, Rommy Sandhu, and I have been friends for many years and yet this is our first time collaborating on a project together. Our Greenway is played by Howard Kaye, who is a longtime favorite at PTC, and he and I did the original Broadway production of *Miss Saigon* back in 1995. And this is the theatrical return of my friend Danielle Decrette, who stopped performing to raise three beautiful girls, and will be a valued member of our Ensemble.

What is your next project?

On Thanksgiving Day "Sesame Street" will debut a special called *See Us Coming Together*, which will celebrate Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and introduce a new Muppet cast member named Ji-Young, a spunky Korean American girl. I had the great honor of co-directing this special as well as being an actor in it, along with guest stars like Simu Liu, Naomi Osaka, Padma Lakshmi, Melissa King, and Jim Lee.

I also will be directing segments for "Sesame Street's" upcoming Season 53, as well as developing a new musical based on the life of Franz Kafka and *The Metamorphosis*.

YOUR STUDY BUDDY - THE ELF!

Buddy wants you to succeed in all sorts of subjects! Here are some questions, activities and think-it-overs for kids from one to 92 from the best Study Buddy ever.

Anatomy of an Elf

1. It took Buddy a while, but one day he pieced together that he's just not like the other elves in Santa's Workshop. What are some differences (between himself and any other elf) that Buddy *should* have picked up on?

Holiday Anthropology

2. How many different holidays can you think of to be included in the phrase "Happy Holidays?"

Long-itude

3a. Buddy's journey to find his dad takes him from the North Pole to New York City. Using an atlas or Google Maps, find out how far Buddy's trip was. How long do you think it took him? What kinds of terrain, animals, and other obstacles did he encounter along the way?

3b. There are actually different "types" of North Pole, including the Geographic (where Santa lives) and the Magnetic. What are the differences between them? Are there any other types of poles?

Elfish

4. On the next page is a description of a storytelling tool called "The Hero's Journey." How does Buddy's story in the show fit this literary pattern?

THE HERO'S JOURNEY

Buddy's story follows a pattern of storytelling identified by the early 20th century writer Joseph Campbell (a friend and contemporary to John Steinbeck) as "The Hero's Journey."

"The Hero's Journey" appears in stories we have heard and have told many times—and across many cultures—for thousands of years. The circumstances change to make a familiar story new and exciting, and so we return to the story again and again, still able to enjoy it.

Some examples include *Alice in Wonderland*, *King Arthur*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Narnia*, *The Lion King*, *Spiderman*, *Superman*, and *Harry Potter*.

The story of Buddy the Elf is very much the story of a hero on a journey.

Here's a synopsis of Campbell's literary theory:

Ordinary World – the circumstances in which the main character (the protagonist, or hero) has lived up to the start of the story are established. The hero is uncomfortable, uneasy, or suspects that something isn't quite right or complete in this world.

Call to Adventure – Something in the hero's world changes, and they must make a decision about that change.

Refusal of the Call – The hero is afraid of the change, or skeptical of it, and resists the call to do something about the new situation.



Max Chernin as Buddy the Elf

Meeting with the Mentor – The hero meets with, or is introduced to, a seasoned traveler of the world who helps in some way – either with equipment, training, advice, or all three.

Crossing the Threshold – The hero takes up the call, and leaves their ordinary world for a new one with unfamiliar rules.

Tests, Allies, and Enemies – The hero is tested in the new world, and with each new character they meet must decide which people to trust, fear, or help.

Approach – The hero and their new allies prepare for the most difficult part of the journey.

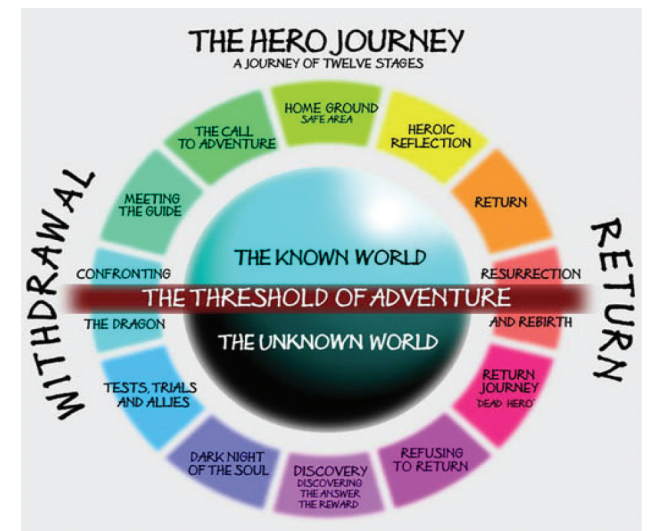
Ordeal – The hero confronts their greatest fear.

Reward – The hero is rewarded for going through the ordeal.

The Road Back – The hero is compelled to return home with the reward.

Resurrection – At the climax of the story, the hero completes their final test. They resolve the conflicting circumstances that have plagued them since the beginning.

Return with the "Elixir" – The hero returns to their old, familiar world with something from the journey that has the power to change that world in the same way it changed the hero.



OUR EQUITY CAST



DAVID BAIDA*
(Store Manager / Ensemble
/ Santa U/S)

DAVID BAIDA* (Store Manager / Ensemble / Santa U/S) Original Broadway and 1st National Tour cast: *On Your Feet!* Originated Piragua Guy on the 1st National Tour: *In The Heights*, performing with Lin-Manuel Miranda in Hollywood and Puerto Rico. Regional: In The Heights at Kennedy Center (with Anthony Ramos & Vanessa Hudgens).

KYLE CARESS* (Ensemble) This is Kyle's PTC debut! Select credits include *Cinderella* (National Tour); Ensemble, *Seesaw* (Off-Broadway/J2 Spotlight) as well as various shows at The Rev Theatre Co., Studio Tenn, and Highlands Playhouse.



KYLE CARESS*
(Ensemble)

MAX CHERNIN* (Buddy) Broadway: *Bright Star*, *Sunday in the Park with George*. New York: Bernstein's Mass (Lincoln Center), *The Golden Apple* (City Center Encores!), *Brooklynite* (Vineyard), *Skittles Commercial: The Musical* (Town Hall). Regional: *Daddy Long Legs* (Theatre Raleigh), *Bright Star* (Pioneer Theatre Company, Old Globe, Kennedy Center, Center Theatre Group).

ANTOINETTE COMER* (Jovie) makes her PTC debut! Previous credits: Broadway: *Mamma Mia!* National/International Tours: *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical*, *Mamma Mia!*, *Dreamgirls*. She can also be seen and heard on several current national commercials.



ANTOINETTE COMER*
(Jovie)



DANIELLE DECRETTE*
(Ensemble/ Mrs. Claus/ Emily
U/S)

DANIELLE DECRETTE* (Ensemble/ Mrs. Claus/ Emily U/S) National Tours: *Anything Goes* with Leslie Uggams, *A Funny Thing Happened...* with Mickey Rooney, David Merrick's *42nd Street* (Peggy U/S). Upcoming Independent films include *Elle* with Joshua Henry and *Framed* (working title).



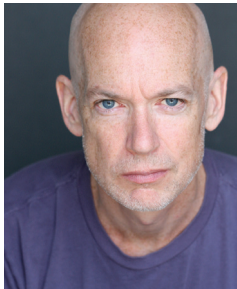
MAX CHERNIN*
(Buddy)

MARY FANNING DRIGGS* (Emily) is in her 23rd PTC production, having appeared in such favorites as *Mamma Mia!* (Rosie), *The Last Ship* (Regional Premiere), *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, *Once*, and both productions of *Les Misérables* (ensemble/Madame Thénardier).



MARY FANNING DRIGGS*
(Emily)

EQUITY CAST CONT.



CHRISTOPHER GURR*
(Walter)

HOWARD KAYE* (Greenway/ Ensemble/ Walter U/S) returns to PTC having performed in productions of *Peter and the Starcatcher*, *The Music Man*, *It Happened One Christmas*, and *Oliver*. He has appeared on Broadway in *Miss Saigon* and in the original North American Company of *Mamma Mia!*.

ELYSE NIEDEREE* (Ensemble/Deb U/S) Past PTC credits: *Mamma Mia!* (Lisa), *It Happened One Christmas*. Broadway: *King Kong*. National Tour: *Elf The Musical*. TV: “The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel.”

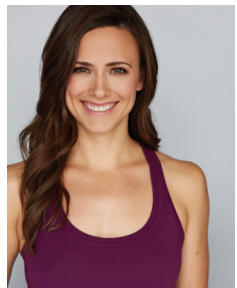
DENNIS O’BANNION* (Associate Choreographer/Ensemble) makes his PTC debut. Broadway: *Irving Berlin’s White Christmas*. Most recently he was in *The Little Mermaid* at Tuacahn Amphitheater.

CHRISTOPHER GURR* (Walter) Broadway: *Cats* (revival), *Tuck Everlasting*, *Kinky Boots*, *Amazing Grace*, and *All The Way* with Bryan Cranston. National Tours: *Memphis*, *Monty Python’s Spamalot*. Television: “Madame Secretary” on CBS, “At That Age” pilot, “Soul Santa” starting Nov. 11 on BET+, “Gilded Age” on HBO this Feb., and five episodes of “The Blacklist” on NBC.

JASON SIMON* (Santa/ Buddy U/S) PBS: Live from Lincoln Center NY Philharmonic’s concert of *Show Boat*, Dick Dead-Eye in *HMS Pinafore*, Cleopas in *Easter Mysteries*, and *The Merry Widow* at the Metropolitan Opera. Other TV/Film: “Bull,” “An Angry Boy,” “Little Voice,” “Spongebob Squarepants: Sponge Out of Water,” “White Collar,” “Exploitation,” and “I’d Kill For You.” National Tours: *Sister Act*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *The Producers*, *CATS!*, *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, and *Funny Girl*.

JESSE SWIMM* (Ensemble, Buddy U/S) Broadway: *School of Rock the Musical* (Original Cast), *Mary Poppins* (Ensemble, U/S Bert). Tours: *My Fair Lady* (Swing/Dance Captain), *West Side Story* (Action). TV: “Dancing with the Stars,” “The Tonight Show.”

CARLITA VICTORIA* (Deb/ Ensemble) Founding Executive Director of Darkness RISING Nonprofit for Black mental health (@DarknessRISINGProject). Selected credits: *Hairspray*, *In The Heights*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Kinky Boots*, *Glee Project Promo*, *The Color Purple*, *Dreamgirls*, *Little Shop Of Horrors*, *Rock Of Ages*. Film/TV: “Dr. OZ,” Apple Inc., AARP.



ELYSE NIEDEREE*
(Ensemble/ Deb U/S)



DENNIS O’BANNION*
(Associate Choreographer/ Ensemble)



JASON SIMON*
(Santa)



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