



DEPARTMENT OF **THEATRE ARTS**
MAINSTAGE PRODUCTION SERIES ***PRESENTS***

Catch

A World Premiere Workshop



Written & Directed by
Lester Mayers '19 (Theatre Arts)

Sept. 25-26 & Oct. 1*-3 @ 8 p.m.
Sept. 27 & Oct. 4 @ p.m.**

Parker Theatre

*Pre-show talk on Thursday, Oct. 1

**Talkback following performance on Sunday, Sept. 27



ABOUT **CATCH**

Catch is a bold, docu-poetic theatrical experience that amplifies the lived realities of people impacted by HIV. Blending verbatim testimony, poetry, movement, music, and ensemble storytelling, the work confronts stigma with radical honesty while celebrating resilience, survival, love, and community. CATCH invites audiences not only to witness these stories, but to recognize our shared humanity and the power of collective care.

1 act | 1 hour & 15 minutes | No intermission

***Catch* deals with sensitive topics surrounding HIV.**

CAST

Listed in alphabetical order by last name

Frankie Alfieri	Mama
Devon Allen	Ancestor Two
Savannah Campbell	Chorus Understudy for Nurse
Kiera O'Grady-Chabran	Ancestor Three Chorus Understudy for Robert's Mother & Ancestor Two
Riss DeJesus	Nurse
Alina Estep	Person
Grace Fang	Future
Paige Mansfield	Present
Mikelle Wright Matos	Robert
Janeva Mazil	Robert's Mother
Leni Negrin	Past Chorus Understudy for Present & Person
Katherine Sohn	Chorus Understudy for Mama

DRAMATURG NOTE



“If there’s one thing I want to do in my life and in my career, it is to help people to live with less shame, because I’ve seen how powerful that can be.”

-Lester Mayers

Catch explores the reality of receiving a positive HIV diagnosis, but with the assurance that life continues past that moment. This is not a play where fear and grief are ultimately defeated by love and joy; in *Catch*, they are allowed to mingle rather than compete. The SUNY New Paltz Department of Theatre Arts aims to create a space where this story can be told honestly and without judgement. Above all, this production’s focus is on the people: their lives according to their own voices, beyond what was recorded in medical charts and history books.

The above quote is proudly attributed to our playwright and director, the ever-steadfast Lester Mayers. The heart of *Catch* echoes his sentiment of living with truth and freedom from shame. Mayers, a New Paltz alumni with a BA in Theatre Arts (Performance) and MFA from Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics, is a multidisciplinary artist. In his book *Tomorrow – 12:01: Celebrating the Stories of Those Affected by HIV*, Mayers’ research into primary sources and personal testimony is presented as a documentary in the form of poetry. As a precursor to *Catch*, the book informs how the play approaches the construction of each character. Many of the principal characters—Past, Present, Future, and so on—are named for intangible concepts. Thus, they have the potential to contain the overlapping memories of multiple people who have shared the same experience. A live theatrical setting gives them the opportunity to inhabit a body and interact with one another across different points in time. All but one of the characters functions this way.

The hidden figure, Robert Lee Rayford, is the only named role in *Catch*. The few records that were preserved contained medical data and tissue samples, but almost nothing was recorded about Robert’s personal life or upbringing. We remember Robert not just as the first known case of HIV in North America, but as a 15-year-old boy from Missouri, who lived at home with his mom and loved basketball. At the time of his death in 1969, medical science knew very little about the virus that they were dealing with and insufficient effort was made to address the severity of Robert’s condition. Even in the 1980s, when HIV and AIDS became an epidemic, the Reagan administration neglected to take the disease seriously and much of the public knowledge of the virus stemmed from rumor and hearsay. As a result, people with HIV and AIDS undeservedly garnered reactions of fear and hostility.

DRAMATURG **NOTE** (CONT'D)



The relevance of *Catch* is tied to the panic and stigma of the AIDS crisis and how it continues to affect people with HIV and AIDS today. As recently as February 2025, changes to the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief by the Trump administration have significantly limited access to HIV prevention medications. This change signified a renewed hostility towards groups most at risk of contracting the disease, especially the queer community. The political climate in the United States has only continued to worsen for queer people. Alongside the misinformation and speculation in mainstream news media, lawmakers have been enabled to target queer and trans people's rights at every opportunity. Queer individuals find it difficult enough to trust, confide in, or ask for help from family and friends when it's uncertain if they will be accepted. Adding to this, the disclosure of a positive HIV diagnosis only amplifies the fear of judgement, shame, and violence. For many, it may feel safer to keep their status and lifestyle hidden.

Socially, it remains dangerous to exist openly queer and trans in today's world especially in the United States. The characters in *Catch*, embody not only the spirit of those who have been lost due to AIDS, but also the spirit of queer lives that the federal government has tried to erase from our history. Through *Catch*, we remember their truth and celebrate their lives as people not diminished by their circumstances.

Lee Fletcher

Dramaturg

Paige Mansfield

Assistant Dramaturg

PLAYWRIGHT & DIRECTOR'S NOTE



Catch began with listening.

It grows from the world of my book, *Tomorrow—12:01: A Collection of Docu-Poems Celebrating the Stories of Those Affected by HIV*, and from a desire to hold testimony, memory, grief, humor, desire, and survival in the same room without flattening any of them.

As both playwright and director, I have been most interested in one thing: **the people before the diagnosis**. The lovers. The mothers. The chosen family. The jokes. The sex. The fear. The music. The arguments. The ordinary tenderness. HIV is part of these lives, but it is not the whole of them.

The dramaturgy of *Catch* lives in that tension. The piece moves between memory and presence, the intimate and the ancestral, the documentary and the poetic. Its theatrical language uses testimony, movement, music, and ensemble storytelling to create an archive that is not interested in turning people into monuments. The ancestors are not here simply because they died. They are here because they lived.

That distinction has shaped the direction of this production as well. The staging resists pity and spectacle. It asks the actors to remain specific, complicated, funny, sexual, angry, loving, and alive. It asks the audience not just to witness history, but to recognize the humanity inside it.

Bringing *Catch* to SUNY New Paltz for its world premiere is deeply personal. This institution helped shape me as an artist, and I am profoundly grateful to the SUNY New Paltz Department of Theatre Arts for recognizing the importance of this work, believing in the writing, and giving it the space, resources, and care necessary to become fully alive onstage.

I am equally grateful to the brilliant students who have stepped into this process as actors and designers with courage, intelligence, imagination, discipline, and generosity. You have not simply executed a production; you have questioned it, challenged it, deepened it, and helped reveal things in the work I could not have discovered alone.

PLAYWRIGHT & DIRECTOR'S **NOTE** (CONT'D)

To my stage management team: Thank you for holding the architecture of this process together with patience, precision, humor, and extraordinary care. To my dramaturg team and assistant director: Thank you for your artistic partnership, your eyes in the room, your questions, and your willingness to help carry the responsibility of telling these stories with honesty. Theatre is often credited to one name at the top of a page, but the truth is that a production only becomes possible because many people agree to hold the same fragile thing together.

I do not take that trust lightly.

Ultimately, *Catch* asks a simple question:

What do we owe the people whose survival made ours possible?

My hope is that the answer begins with remembering them fully, and with gratitude for every person who helps keep those memories alive.



— **Lester Mayers '19 (Theatre Arts)**
Playwright & Director

ABOUT THE **PLAYWRIGHT/DIRECTOR**



Lester Mayers '19 (Theatre Arts)

Lester Eugene Mayers is an award-winning Brooklyn-born Black queer playwright, director, performance artist, dramaturg, choreographer, author, and professor whose work centers memory, survival, Blackness, queerness, family, and the lives history too often pushes to the margins. His honors include two New York State Assembly citations recognizing artistic excellence and innovation, the SUNY New Paltz Forty Under 40 Award, the National Advancement of Creative Writing Visionary Award, the SUNY Chancellor's Award, and the Many Voices Fellowship from the Playwrights' Center. He is also a recipient of a Minnesota Creative Support Grant.

Mayers held a more than five-year artistic residency with SoMad.NYC, a sustained creative partnership that resulted in multiple films, publications, poetic concerts, and interdisciplinary performance works. His practice blends poetry, movement, testimony, music, film, and theatrical storytelling to create work that is culturally specific, formally adventurous, and unapologetically human. His book, *Tomorrow—12:01: A Collection of Docu-Poems Celebrating the Stories of Those Affected by HIV*, was submitted for consideration for the 2026 Pulitzer Prize. A SUNY New Paltz alumnus, Mayers returns with *Catch* for its world premiere, continuing his commitment to creating theatre that bears witness to the people and stories we cannot afford to lose.

CREATIVE TEAM



Lester Mayers	Director
Grace Hoey	Assistant Director
Diane Feller	Production Manager
Liam Gorelin	Assistant Production Manager
Meg Hobson	Production Stage Manager
Liam Gorelin Nova Bulin	Assistant Stage Managers
Dani Pressman Lila Bruni Milly Fletcher	Production Assistants
Paige Mansfield	Dramaturg
Gianna Rojas	Assistant Dramaturg
Eli Reid	Scenic Designer
Bridget Donnelly	Technical Supervisor
Dan Daly	Technical Director
Julie McCabe	Properties Manager
Moriah Pilet	Properties Manager
Katelyn Haubrick	Costume Designer
Ainsley Claggett	Assistant Costume Designer
Pheonix Entrades	Hair & Makeup Supervisor
Nick Nystoriak	Assistant Hair & Makeup Supervisor
Michael Grundy Jay Forbes	Lighting Designer
	Sound Designers

PRODUCTION TEAM



Costumes

Costume Designer	Moriah Pilet
Asst. Costume Designer	Katelyn Haubrick
Hair & Makeup Supervisor	Ainsley Clagett
Asst. Hair & Makeup Supervisor	Phoenix Entrades
Wardrobe Supervisor	Libby Young
Wardrobe Crew	Mya Espinosa, AJ Importuna
Costume Shop Staff	Libby Young, Ainsley Clagett, Mia Rinaldi, Moriah Pilet, Janeva Mazil, Magnolia Allen, Ismene Roque, Athena Holman, Natalie Stockmeyer, Katelyn Haubrick, Chloe Kass, Cookie Richards
Costume TAP	Elizabeth Howe, Cayden Reilly, Audrey Spiegel

Scenic

Technical Director	Bridget Donnelly
Lead Carpenters	Julie Deltuvia, Michael Colantuoni
Carpenter	Margaux Gilbert, Kenny Annusiata, Raeanna Hoskinson
Scenic Charge	Alex Strock
Scenic Artist	Katelyn Haubrick
Scene Shop TAP	Alexis Accomando, Ava Deryabina, Lauryn Donahue, Quinn Donnavan, Lee Fletcher, Kori Miltz, Dani Pressman, Claudia Romero, Alex Vickers, Markus Zois

PRODUCTION TEAM (CONT'D)



Props

Props manager **Julia McCabe**
Props TAP **Riss DeJesus, Red Delgado,
Julie Deltuvia, Leo Jones,
Arianna Knolla, Reece Rene**

Lighting

Lighting Designer **Nick Nystoriak**
Lighting Programmer **Bradley Stanton**
Light Board Operator **Miles North**
Electricians **Phoebe Albro, Nova Bulin,
Declan Caulfield, Meg
Hobson, Paige Mansfield,
Miles North, Dani Pressman,
Jupiter Rizzitiello, Bradley
Stanton, Luis Torres**

Sound

Co-Sound Designers **Michael Grundy and Jay Forbes**
Production Audio **Miles North**
Board Operator **Bree Forte**
Load In Crew **Grace Fang, Nick Nystoriak,
Bree Forte**
Shop Assistants **Paige Mansfield, Miles North,
Phoebe Albro**

Box Office

House Managers **Lee Fletcher & Sofia Levine**
Box Office Assistants **Anna Troetel, Tessa Chiaino,
Gianna Baez, Kyra Perles, Colin
Holst, Julia Kotliar, Kaidey
Constanza**
Front of House TAP **Madelyn Marer, Bee Messin &
James Young**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



Parker Theatre is situated on the ancestral land of the Esopus, Lenape, and Munsee people.

Special thanks to the band **Funktional Loonacy** for the use of their song "Getting Dark"

DEPARTMENT OF **THEATRE ARTS**



Associate Professor, Chair	Patricia A. Fitzpatrick
Production Manager	Diane Feller
Technical Director	Eli Reid
Assistant Professor, Scenic & Props	
Supervisor, Head of Design	Dan Daly
Costume Director	Kaitlyn Kociela Taylor
Lecturer, Lighting Supervisor	Travis McHale
Lecturer, Sound Supervisor	Dean Mahoney
Lecturer, Dramaturgy Supervisor	Caitlyn Halvorsen-Kratky
Faculty	Matthieu Chapman Catherine Doherty Brittany Proia Ryan Quinn Tony Speciale Andrea Varga
Adjunct Faculty	Brendan Burke Jamie Gruber Jason Martin Charlotte Palmer-Lane Sandie Poels-Luna Connie Rotunda Jack Wade

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Department of Theatre Arts

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