



the
THANKSGIVING
PLAY

by Larissa FastHorse

Wed. Oct. 20 @ 7:30pm
Thur. Oct. 21 @ 7:30pm
Fri. Oct. 22 @ 7:30pm
Sat. Oct. 23 @ 2:00pm & 7:30pm
Sun. Oct. 24 @ 2:00pm



Directed by Jakob G. Hofmann
Scenic Design & Projections by Jessie Lizotte '18
Costume Design by Julie Leavitt-Learson
Lighting Design by Lynne Chase



www.theatre-fairfield.org



LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

We acknowledge that indigenous peoples and nations, including Mohegan, Mashantucket Pequot, Eastern Pequot, Schaghticoke, Golden Hill Paugussett, Niantic, and the Quinnipiac and other Algonquian speaking peoples, have stewarded through generations the lands and waterways of what is now the state of Connecticut. We honor and respect the enduring relationship that exists between these peoples and nations and this land.*

WE ARE:

the resident theatre company of Fairfield University; made up of students, faculty and guest artists. We are a community of learners. Our artistic home is the Wien Black Box at the Quick Center for the Arts.

OUR MISSION is:

to **educate** students and audiences in all aspects of the art form, as we **produce** high quality productions relevant to our times, **utilizing** professional standards and compelling plays from all eras.

Our aim is to **harness** the profound empathy-building power of theatre to **celebrate** human dignity and explore our common humanity.

OUR VISION is:

performances that make the world a more thoughtful, more compassionate, more just place.

WE VALUE:

respect for our artists and community; antiracism, inclusion, and diversity; and accessibility in all forms.

OUR ALUMNI:

are versatile and engaged theatre artists, working in all aspects of the industry. Alumni also include business managers, lawyers, medical professionals, and educators.

Our alumni are agents of positive change in their communities.

* Theatre Fairfield has adapted its Land Acknowledgement from Yale University, available online at: <https://secretary.yale.edu/services-resources/land-acknowledgment-statements>

The Thanksgiving Play

by Larissa FastHorse

Cast

Logan Emily Sheridan
Jaxton Jay Martins
Caden Carlin Fournier
Alicia Tracy Ferguson

TurkToks

Teacher Kai Halm
TurkTok #1 Angelo Corsini, Carlin Fournier
Jay Martins
TurkTok #2 Tracy Ferguson, Nora Jacobi
Emily Sheridan
TurkTok #3 Nora Jacobi
TurkTok #4 Angelo Corsini, Nora Jacobi
Jay Martins

Time:
Present Day

Place:
A highschool theatre classroom.

*There will be no intermission.
Please turn off all electronic devices.
All photography and audio/video recording is prohibited.*

Staff & Crew

Director	Jackob G. Hofmann
Scenic Designer	Jessie Lizotte '18
Costume Designer	Julie Leavitt-Learson
Lighting Designer.	Lynne Chase
Projection Desginer	Jessie Lizotte '18
Technical Director	Anne Kendall
Producers	Dr. Martha Schmoyer LoMonaco, Lynne Porter
Stage Manager	Lillie Kortrey '23
Assistant Stage Manager	Angelo Corsini '25
Master Carpenter	Carlin Fournier '22
Construction Crew	Tracy Ferguson '22, Grace Kavulich '22 Emma King '24, THTR 1150 Students THTR 1011 Students
Paint Charge	Amanda Bull '24
Paint Crew	Chase O'Brien '22, Taylor Soyland '24 Emily Sheridan '24
Master Electrician/Light Board Op	Abby Ligas '24
Electricians.	Jay Martins '22, Brady Hanney '22
Sound Board Operator.	Nora Jacobi '25
Prop Manager.	Chloe Cofini '24
Prop Crew	Nora Jacobi '25, Mikeala Pratt '24
Front of House Manager	Grace Kavulich '22, Chase O'Brien '22
Box Office	Maya Kapur '22, Marie Balemian '23

“The Thanksgiving Play” is presented by arrangement with Concord Theatricals on behalf of Samuel French, Inc.

www.concordtheatricals.com

“THE THANKSGIVING PLAY” was commissioned and originally produced by Artists Repertory Theatre, Portland, Oregon, Damso Rodriguez, Artistic Director, Sarah Horton, Managing Director

Director's Note

“Performative Wokeness”

During my early stages of research for *The Thanksgiving Play* by Larissa FastHorse, I came across the following quote from the playwright: “Laughter gives us energy. Laughter gives us more time. It actually adds time to your life. So, I’m giving you information and I’m giving you more time to change the world. You’re welcome, American Theatre.”

I was immediately struck by Ms. FastHorse’s words upon reading them as I felt that they provided me with the proper guidance needed in order to direct such a powerful and important work. “This is more than just satire,” I’d humbly keep reminding myself as the cast and crew worked on the delicate task of trying to balance the complex world of white privilege with the playwright’s hilariously crafted on stage theatrical moments.

Easier said than done.

Ms. FastHorse’s groundbreaking play contains within its pages awkward moments for both its characters and audiences alike. The play fearlessly confronts audiences with polarizing dialogue while also asking a company of actors to engage in outrageous situations that are frequently uncomfortable (if not cringeworthy) for all those involved.

But this is Ms. Fasthorse’s entire point, isn’t it?

Like many of us currently living in present-day America, the four main characters presented in *The Thanksgiving Play* consider themselves to be “enlightened” folks with only the best of intentions at heart. And, like so many of us living in America today, these characters have blindspots. It is my opinion that these blindspots are exactly what make this particular play so powerful and memorable. These blindspots expose to us what the problems of the world actually are and, frankly, have always been. The real question is now that these problems have been exposed, what are we as a society going to do about them?

To quote our playwright once again: “Real change is messy and difficult, and has all kinds of mistakes and all kinds of problems and hurt feelings and then we find our way through it.” Speaking as a white man, I’d like to personally acknowledge the privilege granted to me by being offered the opportunity to direct Theatre Fairfield’s production of *The Thanksgiving Play* and, moving forward, I intend on making the goal of striving for real change a real priority in my own life. As director, it is my deepest hope that our audiences will join me in this meaningful endeavor.

Oh, and one last thing, please remember it’s OK to laugh. It’s a comedy. And Ms. FastHorse will be delighted if you do!

--Jacob G. Hofmann, Director

Producer's Note

WELCOME BACK TO THE THEATRE!

We are thrilled to have you back with us, live and in-person! We are especially proud to invite you to join us here for the very first time since the Wien Black Box Theatre became Theatre Fairfield's permanent artistic home. Although we have performed in the Black Box since 1990, it didn't officially become our space until last year, just as the pandemic was forcing us to bar our stage door. How delightful to lift the bar and welcome you in!

Since COVID is still with us, we request that you kindly follow our new audience policies to keep everyone---you, the actors, the stage personnel, our entire company---safe and secure. The actors are performing without masks but are keeping their distance from you (at least 12 feet), are all fully vaccinated, and are being tested twice a week for COVID. We trust that you, too, are fully vaccinated, properly wearing your mask (fully covering your nose and mouth) throughout the performance, and maintaining your socially-distanced seating. Please do not move your chairs during the show. Also, as always, keep your phones tucked away and fully turned off and do not use cameras or any other recording device.

THANK YOU for being HERE---it means so very, very much to us all.

--Dr. Marti LoMonaco, Producer

Next Up for Theatre Fairfield



Thur. Dec. 2 @ 7:30pm

Sat. Dec. 4 @ 7:30pm

Sun. Dec. 5 @ 2:00pm

More info at www.theatre-fairfield.org

About the Playwright



Playwright Larissa FastHorse

Born of the Sicangu Lakota Nation, Larissa FastHorse is a famed playwright and MacArthur “Genius Award” Fellow. She started as a ballet dancer before moving to stage and television writing. FastHorse also founded Indigenous Direction, a consulting firm that advises on media projects that deal with Native American issues and representation, as well as how non-Native people can build healthy relationships with indigenous communities.

The Thanksgiving Play, one of the top ten most-produced plays in the United States for the past four years, is her first play which features exclusively white characters. In an interview with *American Theatre* magazine, FastHorse explained her frustration with predominantly white theatre companies not putting on her plays because they claim they can’t find Native American actors to fill the roles; hence, her choice to write a play exclusively for white actors.

A frequent topic in the interview concerns her difficulties with white audiences and how they engage with her work. Part of her frustration that motivated her to write *The Thanksgiving Play* was how being Native, and a playwright who writes about Native people, often has white liberal audiences look to her and her work for educational purposes: “Oh, wow. I can learn something about Indigenous folks.” Another annoyance she highlighted was the white guilt from her audiences who ask, “I laughed—is that okay? With this particular play, people understand laughing at the white parts. They get very uncomfortable when they get closer to the Native things, or showing some of the ways that white people appropriate everything, including our tragedy and pain. When we get to those parts, that’s when it’s interesting: the white people get really nervous and scared about laughing, and the Native people laugh the hardest, because it’s so true, and you have to laugh or you would cry, you know?”

FastHorse exploits her own privilege as she defends her advocacy of indigenous playwrights and actors. She grew up outside the reservation in a “white family” and is “half-white” herself: “I’m someone who can ‘pass’ in many ways. So all of those things that were painful in my childhood—growing up feeling outside my Lakota people and being called a half-breed—those things have turned into my superpower, right? I can code-switch like nobody, and I understand the white world of theatre and how those things work in a way that, unfortunately, most Native folks haven’t been given access to. I do think colorism plays a part in it too—that I’m a “safer” Native: I’m an attractive, female, not-too-dark Native. All those things probably play a part in why I’m in the room.”

“As an Indigenous human,” FastHorse argues, “once I’m in that theatre, then my job is to advocate for the play, advocate for myself as an artist, but then also advocate for my community. Because I can’t be the last Native person in that door. So I will fight tooth and nail for the community; I will do whatever I have to do to defend them, and make sure that the access stays open.”

To read the full article, (<https://www.americantheatre.org/2019/02/12/larissa-fasthorses-the-thanksgiving-play-its-okay-to-laugh/>), please visit the Digiturgy page on the Theatre Fairfield website: www.theatre-fairfield.org.

And for more information on FastHorse and her work, go to these websites:

<https://www.hoganhorsestudio.com/bioandphotos>

<https://www.macfound.org/fellows/class-of-2020/larissa-fasthorse> <https://www.indigenousdirection.com/services>

--Mikaela Pratt '24, Dramaturgy Assistant

Acknowledging the Land and Local Native American History

The following is an abbreviated excerpt from Charles Brilvitch's book, *A History of Connecticut's Golden Hill Paugussett Tribe* (Charleston: History Press, 2007). Brilvitch is a Bridgeport, Connecticut historian, and an expert on the architectural history of the City. *A History of Connecticut's Golden Hill Paugussett Tribe*, details information about the Paugussett tribe, one of the Indigenous tribes that occupied land all around Fairfield County. It is important to acknowledge the people who came before us and understand their culture and history. Theatre Fairfield acknowledges that we reside on land originally belonging to The Golden Hill Paugussett tribe, among several other Indigenous tribes. *The Thanksgiving Play* heavily emphasizes the importance of lifting up and empowering Native voices that have been silenced and neglected throughout history. Understanding the history of the Paugussett tribe, prior to and post European settlement is a way for non-Native spectators to show respect and honor to the Native point of view.

“The Golden Hill Paugussett tribe has been a part of Greater Bridgeport's history from time immemorial. The original indigenous people of this region, who greeted the European explorers and settlers and who were responsible for the pottery fragments, arrowheads, and shell middens excavated by archaeologists over the years, still manage to hold onto a tiny scrap of their ancestral territory, the Golden Hill Reservation in Trumbull.

Scholars and historians generally agree that Paugussett territory extended along the Connecticut coast west from New Haven Harbor to the Saugatuck River in Westport, and to the upper reaches of the Housatonic and Naugatuck Rivers. This is a unique geological province of Connecticut: It is the only portion of the state with a wide and fertile coastal plain, much like lands well to the south (to the east of New Haven and from Norwalk west the boulder-strewn granite hills extend down to the edge of the Sound). The Paugussett lands had long sandy beaches adjoined by extensive tidal flats and salt marshes, quite the opposite of the “rock-bound coast” usually associated with New England.

This gentle land was a paradise for shellfish, and wildlife as well as Native people. It is estimated that then, as now, fully 25 percent of Connecticut's oyster population could be found at the mouth of the Housatonic River—and the area immediately off the coast of Bridgeport comprises the largest natural-growth oyster bed to the north of Chesapeake Bay.



Golden Hill Paugussett Indian Symbol

The Paugussett tribesmen nurtured the terrestrial component of this coastline as well. They used fire as a tool to clear underbrush, add fertility to the soil, and provide optimal conditions for game animal habitat. They also cleared substantial areas to create major planting—indeed, the contact-era name for what is now Bridgeport, “Pequonnock,” means “cleared land.”

Europeans began to explore the coast in the 16th century, transmitting deadly diseases that spread from tribe to tribe for which the Natives had no resistance. In 1614 Dutch traders set up shop on the Hudson River, a mere 50 miles from Paugussett territory. Within a short time, they managed to coerce the tribe into intensive manufacture of wampum, a product of the quahog shells found in profusion in the waters off the beaches of Fairfield, Milford, and Bridgeport. Used by Natives for millennia for religious and diplomatic purposes, the wampum belts became perverted into a form of currency that was used in the fur trade centered at Albany. The peaceful Paugussett, whose few primitive weapons were useless against the firearms possessed by the Dutch, were in no position to refuse.

It would not be long before the choice lands that were home to the Golden Hill Paugussett caught the eye of the land-hungry Englishmen. Led by their clergymen, Puritan flocks helped themselves to the rich farmland of the Connecticut River Valley—the product of countless generations of toil on the part of the River Indians—beginning in 1633. The docile River tribes folded before the English, but another more warlike tribe—the Pequots—stood their ground and contested the Puritan incursion into Indian territory. Their resistance led to the Pequot War of 1637, in which the majority of the tribe regardless of age, gender, or history of taking up arms against the English, were murdered in their sleep, and much of the remainder found themselves enslaved, some thousands of miles from home.

A tattered remnant of the Pequot tribe fled overland, hoping to hook up with kinsmen in the Hudson Valley. They covered 80 grueling miles on foot before they were cornered by the English in a swamp in what is today known as Southport (between Center Street and Oxford Road, just to the north of the I-95 entrance ramp). Here most of the remaining warriors were slaughtered. With the Pequot tribe vanquished, the Englishmen took a good calculating look at the land in the vicinity of their battlefield and liked what they saw—lots of level, fertile land already cleared and ready to farm, plenty of salt hay for their cattle in the marshes, and all those fish and oysters. Accordingly, two years later three new settlements were planted—Milford, Stratford, and Fairfield right in the middle of the Paugussett heartland. As had been the practice elsewhere, the Indian inhabitants would simply have to be elbowed aside from their own country.



Golden Hill Paugussett Indian Reservation

The Paugussett people, far from being hapless and perpetual victims, adapted themselves with courage and panache to their new circumstances and took for themselves a page out of the white man’s playbook. They not only survived; they prospered, and in many ways laid the groundwork for the modern community that we all know. The Native population had basically been forced in its entirety off the reservations and had adapted Christianity and Anglo-Saxon surnames and outward lifestyles. They spoke English fluently in their public and private life. They remained eminently conscious, however, of who and what they were, their cultural heritage amazingly intact beneath a veneer that was acceptable to their white neighbors. They generally supported themselves as farmhands, millhands, woodcutters, and general laborers in the country towns throughout the region.”

All information from: Brilvitch “The Golden Hill Paugussett Tribe.” Bridgeport History Center. Accessed October 8, 2021. <https://bportlibrary.org/hc/grassroots-historians/>.

--Lillie Kortrey '23, Dramaturgy Production Intern

***To get the latest news, go to theatre-fairfield.org.
Also, like us on Facebook and follow us on Instagram:
[@theatrefairfield](https://www.instagram.com/theatrefairfield)***

Notes on the First Thanksgiving

Claude Scales, a good friend of Theatre Fairfield and author of the popular blog, *Self-Absorbed Boomer*, shared his Thanksgiving Day post 2010, “Thanksgiving is a Contested Holiday. Enjoy it Anyway” in anticipation of our production of *The Thanksgiving Play*. With Claude’s kind permission, his assiduous research and witty musings on the real first Thanksgiving is provided in full in the Digiturgy section of *The Thanksgiving Play* on our website: www.theatre-fairfield.org. We offer these edited excerpts to whet your appetite for the play’s struggle with how to tell this story to elementary schoolers. Too bad our four characters didn’t read Claude’s blog before they began devising their play—they may have learned something!

-Dr. Martha S. LoMonaco, Producer

There is dispute over the timing and nature of the first Thanksgiving feast. There are two extant accounts of the earliest years of the Plymouth settlement written by original settlers. One of these, *Good Neues from New England*, by Edward Winslow (one of the settlers on the *Mayflower*), was published in 1624, just four years after the *Mayflower* arrived; the other, *Of Plimoth Plantation*, by William Bradford, governor of the colony, was written and published a quarter of a century later. Both Winslow and Bradford, the latter perhaps relying on Winslow’s earlier account, describe an event in the summer of 1623, which can be summarized thus: A drought causes the crop planted by the settlers—corn and beans—to fail. They respond by humbling themselves before the Lord in prayer and fasting. “Oh, the mercy of our God”, Winslow writes, “the clouds gathered together on all sides, and the next morning distilled such soft, sweet and moderate showers of rain” that the corn and the beans revived. The settlers thank their God for His mercy.



The First Thanksgiving 1621 J.L.G. Ferris

The other account, as found in Bradford’s narrative, agrees more closely in its details to what has become the traditional Thanksgiving story, in that it takes place late in 1621 and involves Native American guests. Bradford’s account [is] of a feast in 1621—a sort of frontier diplomatic dinner—between the people Bradford later called “Pilgrims” and the local “Indian” tribe and their “king”, Massasoit. Bradford describes how the colonists sent four men out to hunt, who returned with a large quantity of “fowl” (not necessarily turkeys); and how the Indians contributed the carcasses of five deer. A later historian, however, notes that the Native Americans were party crashers, not invited guests. When about 100 Wampanoag warriors showed up uninvited at the Pilgrims’ festival with freshly killed deer as a gesture of goodwill, they were angling for a treaty with the Anglo-Saxon tribe. The same historian also contends that the feast was not one of “thanksgiving” to God, but rather “a harvest-home celebration, of the kind familiar from centuries of observance in rural England, interrupted by a force of Indians . . .”

In the first place, the Separatists (they weren’t called Pilgrims) showed their gratitude to God not by feasting, but by fasting. Being radical Protestants, they didn’t celebrate holy days (i.e. holidays) such as Christmas and Easter, because they considered them superstitious relics of Catholicism. Being English, however, they did celebrate the secular Medieval harvest festival, which involved eating, drinking beer and wine, and playing games. One thing’s for sure: If the Pilgrims did encounter a turkey, they would know what it was because the Spanish had introduced the American species to Europe by way of the Ottoman Empire (thus the name “Turkey”) in the time of the conquistadors. By the 1620s, it was a familiar dish on the English table.

***For more information about the world of the play,
go to theatre-fairfield.org***

Special Thanks

Vice Provost Mark Ligas
Provost Christine M. Siegel
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Zack Gaiero, Samuele Dionysus Deluise, and Grace Curley
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Theatre Faculty

Lynne Porter, Dr. Martha S. LoMonaco, Julie Leavitt-Learson
Anne Kendall, Jakob G. Hofmann, Lynne Chase, Tom Schwans
Jan Mason, Casey Grambo, Godfrey L. Simmons Jr.

Theatre Fairfield Production Interns

Carlin Fournier '22 - Marketing Intern
Tracy Ferguson '22 - Audience Relations Intern
Lillie Kortrey '23 - Dramaturgy Intern

Theatre Fairfield Season
2021-2022

Larissa FastHorse's
The Thanksgiving Play

Directed by Jakob G. Hofmann

October 20-24, 2021

Quick Center Blackbox & Livestreamed

Project X
by Judy Tate

Created from Interviews of Fairfield University Alumni,
Students, Faculty, and Staff

December 2, 4, 5, 2021

Quick Center Blackbox & Livestreamed

Nia Vardalos'
Tiny Beautiful Things

based on the book by Cheryl Strayed

Produced, Directed, & Designed by Advanced Theatre Students

Sponsored by the Jamie Hulley Arts Foundation

January 21-23, 2022

Quick Center Blackbox

Kate Hamill's
Pride & Prejudice

Adapted from the novel by Jane Austen

Directed by Dr. Martha S. LoMonaco

April 6-10, 2022

Quick Center Blackbox