

Jessica Bess Lanius

Curriculum Vitae

566 S. Hillcrest Drive, Verona WI 53593
608.381.5510. jblanious@gmail.com

Education

2000	Master of Fine Arts in Acting	Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University
1996	Bachelor of Fine Arts in Acting	University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point
2004	The Viewpoints & Suzuki	Anne Bogart & SITI Company, NYC
2006	Meisner Technique Teacher Training	Maggie Flanigan Studio, NYC

Areas of Expertise & Interest

Actor Training • Meisner Technique • Movement for Actors
Physical Theatre • Devised Theatre • Improvisation

Professional History

Artistic Director of THEATRE LILA, 2004-present. Passionate about inventive, physical theater, Artistic Directors Jessica Lanius and Andy Arden Reese founded Theatre LILA in New York City in 2004. Theatre LILA is dedicated to challenging the audience's experience of theater in all ways, by integrating the 360° actor – using the physical, intellectual, psychological and emotional instrument, and creating an immersive theater experience with a diversity of stories and voices being represented. See portfolio at www.theatrelila.com.

Duties include: directing, selecting a season, casting diverse ensembles, contracting staff, actors, designers, grant writing, strategic planning, overseeing production teams, nurturing growth and development of apprentices, building partnerships with community organizations and implementing artistic residencies, developing workshops, art direction of marketing and advertising, and managing budgets.

Community Engagement and Racial Equity work has been at the forefront of my leadership as Artistic Director of Theatre LILA in Madison. This includes creating and funding our “Racial Equity Initiative” through grant writing and private donations. Developing workshops and residencies that bring the Madison community and area students together using theater to explore race, storytelling, identity and leadership including “[No Story Left Behind](#)” (2014), “[Real Stories About Race](#)” (2015), Whoopensocker Shows, Theatre LILA LAB 360° at MMSD's Capital High School (2017), and our first writers retreat for women of color (2017) culminating in the world premiere of [LINES](#) (2018) at Overture Center for the Arts.

Movement Director & Choreographer, 2015-present, American Players Theatre, Spring Green WI. Working with APT directors, designers, actors and staff to develop original choreography for productions Up the Hill and The Touchstone. Collaborating in detail with directors and design teams, developing movement class for APT apprentices, conducting private movement coaching for actors.

Professional Actor, 2001-present, AEA, SAG-AFTRA. Working actor in New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Madison in film, television, commercials and theatre. Represented by CESD (NYC/LA) and Stewart Talent (Chicago).

Master Class & Guest Artist Teaching, Northwestern University, Rutgers University BFA Acting, UW-Stevens Point, Department of Theatre & Dance, Acting Guest Lecturer, Dance Dept-Guest Lecturer, UW-Madison Master Class for Dance Dept, Li Chiao-Ping and MFA Theatre Dept. with Karen Olivo and guest teacher at The Studio in Ogg Hall. Numerous classes in New York, New Jersey, Cape Cod, Los Angeles and Wisconsin, teaching professional and pre-professional actor workshops, courses and labs

Directing & Original Works

Romeo & Juliet, an adaptation for Theatre LILA Overture Center for the Arts, 2019

Director & Adaptation

Worked with Theatre LILA's diverse cast of actors to explore Shakespeare's poetry with an LGBTQ+ lens, re-imagining the classic story for the 21st Century. Utilizing modern dance, hip-hop and contemporary beats alongside the text to create an unforgettable, immersive theatre experience with Romeo and Juliet presenting as female. [Click for Review](#)

The BED: a Theatre LILA Invention Fredric March Play Circle, 2017

Co-Director with James DeVita

Adapted and directed an exhilarating dreamscape in collaboration with writers from all over the country. With an ensemble of actors, dancers and musicians, *The BED* explored love, intimacy, fear and betrayal in a multi-disciplinary collage.

The Mojo and The Sayso by Aishah Rahman Milwaukee Repertory Theatre & Theatre LILA, 2016

Director

In collaboration with Bronzeville Arts Ensemble, produced and directed this play about an African-American family and the loss of their youngest son at the hands of a white police officer. [Click for Review](#), [Community Engagement](#)

TRASH: a Theatre LILA Invention Overture Center for the Arts, 2015

Director

Working with writers from around the country to premiere a multi-disciplinary series of vignettes about the things call "Trash". A truly ensemble piece, each designer, musician and actor worked in collaboration to create a one-of-a-kind piece of choreographic theatre. [Click for Review](#)

A Midsummer Night's Dream, William Shakespeare Theatre LILA in collaboration with CTM, Overture Center, 2015

Director

In artistic residency with CTM, Theatre LILA created an original adaptation of *Midsummer* utilizing an ensemble-based storytelling approach within the fairy world. A diverse community collaboration that put professional Equity actors working alongside adult and youth members of the community.

The Suitcase Dreams by Karen Olivo, Gwen Rice, Mike Lawler, Tyler Marchant, Jessica Lanius Theatre LILA, Overture Center, 2014

Director & Choreographer

Created and directed this original dreamscape of short scenes, monologues and poems that ranged from realistic to absurd, illuminating the heart of the story with physical gesture, musical punctuation and choreographic moments. [Click for Review](#)

No Child...by Nilaja Sun Theatre LILA, Overture Center, 2014

Director

Directed this one-woman play based on Nilaja Sun's experience as a teaching artist in NYC. Facilitated an outreach project to coincide with the production entitled 'No Story Left Behind' [Click for Review](#)

Big Love by Charles Mee UW-Stevens Point, Jenkins Theatre, 2013 Choreographer

Choreographer in collaboration with director, Tyler Marchant in his re-interpretation of Charles Mee's play utilizing current pop rock music. Developing & collaborating to create original dance and physical theatre vocabulary with a large cast of BFA Acting & Musical Theatre students.

Spring Awakening, the musical
UW-Stevens Point, Studio Theatre, 2012

Director

As a guest artist, directed and choreographed the Tony Award winning musical with BFA Musical Theatre and Acting students in this professional training program. Utilized *The Viewpoints* and an ensemble-based rehearsal process to excavate new ideas and to embolden young actors in a process of staging our own interpretation of this rock musical.

Firecracker
The Becket Theater at Theatre Row, NYC 2008

Director and Adaptation

Directed and adapted the farcically-tragic "Untitled Play" by Anton Chekhov. *NYTheatre's* Martin Denton chose *Firecracker* as a top NYC independent theatre picks of 2008.

The Waltz of Elementary Particles
The American Theatre of Actors, NYC 2005

Director, Writer

Directed & choreographed this devastating exploration of a fragmented world attached to video screens and personal space; where the entire theatre becomes a physical, multi-media collage of the American quest for happiness. [Click for Review](#)

Shakespeare's Women: Under the Corset
The American Theatre of Actors, NYC 2004

Director, Writer

Wrote & directed this full-length play where eight Elizabethan-born women are freed from the confines of their original story to give of themselves as never before seen on stage, from 'Under the Corset'. They converge onto a setting of ultimate possibility, spanning time, language, the afterlife, and borders of reality.

Choreographic-Theatre Works (*sampling*)

Twelfth Night
Director, John Langs
American Players Theater

The Merry Wives of Windsor
Director, Tim Ocel
American Players Theater

Macbeth
Director, James DeVita
American Players Theater

A Small Fire
Director, David Ceasarini
Milwaukee's Next Act Theater

Edward Albee's Seascape
Director, Laura Gordon
American Players Theater

The Lear Project
Director, Andrea Arden Reese
Harwich Theatre Company

Cyrano de Bergerac
Director, James DeVita
American Players Theater

The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane
Director, Roseann Sheridan
Children's Theater of Madison

Wrecked
Director, Andy Arden Reese
Theatre LILA, NYC

Book of Will
Director, Tim Ocel
American Players Theater

Spring Awakening
Director, Jessica Lanius
UW-Stevens Point

Big Love
Director, Tyler Marchant
UW-Stevens Point

Mary's Wedding
Director, Brenda DeVita
American Players Theater

An Ideal Husband
Director, Laura Gordon
American Players Theater

16 Women While You Watched
The Kennedy Center/ACDFA
Washington DC

Teaching Experience

Northwestern University
Dance 110, Movement for the Stage
Winter 2023

Explored aspects of the artist's physical body through both individual exploration and group ensemble improvisations. Exercises synthesizing movement improvisation, the Viewpoints, text/poetry and music, students developed short solo and ensemble works for an audience.

University of Wisconsin-Madison
Theatre 342, Fundamentals of Stage Movement
Spring 2021, Fall 2021/2022

A course seeking the fullest expression of the body, free of excess tension and resistance by opening up the senses through imagery and sensory work. Students learn how to train their physical instrument to be a vessel by which their imagination and impulses are awakened and executed via structured improv and use of The Viewpoints.

University of Wisconsin-Madison
Theatre 619, Advanced Stage Movement
Spring, 2022

Building on TH342, explored psychophysical approaches to acting, physical theatre, mime, clowning and character ideas through structured exercises and improvisations. Including techniques and exercises of Lecoq, Grotowski, Spolin and Lenard Petit.

University of Wisconsin-Madison
Theatre/Music/Dance 469, Interdisciplinary Studies of the Arts
Fall, 2022

An interdisciplinary course focused on building improvisational skills in an experimental style laboratory through the art of collaboration, experimenting with processes, expanding artists options for creating and performing new work by intersecting mediums.

American Players Theatre, Spring Green WI
Movement for the Actor
2015-present

A master class tailored for young professionals in the APT apprentice program working rigorously in repertory theatre. Focus is on grounding the body and awakening the senses to enliven the entire instrument for deeper acting work. In highly structured improvisations students used a sense of whole-body *play* focused on listening and kinesthetic response.

Theatre LILA NYC/Madison
Actor's LAB 360°
2004-present

Developed a professional theatre laboratory for theatre artists and musicians to explore, master, as well as challenge the work of The Viewpoints, Grotowski and Michael Chekhov. Using writing exercises along with highly structured ensemble improvisations to investigate the combination of movement and text to challenge and inspire working actors to continue to expand and explore their craft and instrument. The lab culminates in improvisations by the ensemble in sight specific locations in Madison. [Learn more](#)

Rutgers University
BFA Acting, Master Class
2004-2009

Engaged B.F.A students in an intense Viewpoints based master class, equipping them with new physical acting tools designed to complement their Meisner training. Exercises included kinesthetic response, spatial-relationship, shape, tempo, topography, repetition, duration, gesture and the incorporation of sound and text.

Professional Performing Arts School, New York City
Advanced Scene Study
2007-2008

Developed and instructed an advanced scene study class for 11th grade professional acting majors at PPAS in New York City. Working with classical text from playwrights including Shakespeare, Shaw, Coward, Ibsen, Strindberg, Williams, O'Neill and Chekhov.

Professional Performing Arts School, New York City
Performance Ensemble
2007-2008

Lead PPAS acting majors in a performance ensemble class that engaged their ability to work as a group, embracing their individuality while working cohesively with the entire class. The Viewpoints technique built the foundation of structured improvisation work. Students created and performed an original, collage-like ensemble piece, a culmination of exercises developed throughout the year.

The Piero Dusa Acting Conservatory, Los Angeles
Meisner Technique: 1st Year
2001-Los Angeles CA

Adhering to the technique of Sanford Meisner, trained working actors to work Moment to Moment. First year work included: the use of the repetition exercise, crafting the independent activity, emotional preparation, and crafting shared circumstances. Measuredly introduced students to scene work and the art of marrying the Meisner Exercise with text.

The Piero Dusa acting Conservatory, Los Angeles
Meisner Technique: 2nd Year
2001-Los Angeles CA

Continued leading Meisner scene study work with a focus on character, impediments, the clear execution of actions, justification of text, implanted meanings, and domestic relationships. Graduated students to contemporary scene work by way of The Spoon River Anthology and Nursery Rhymes.

Rutgers University, BFA Acting program
Movement I, Co-Adjunct Faculty
1999-2000

Lead B.F.A actors in the release of physical tension and the opening of the five senses by introduction to The Williamson Technique combined with a series of exercises developed by synthesizing movement improvisation, modern dance, text and music. Directed & created students' final movement pieces for B.F.A. faculty evaluation.

Rutgers University, BFA Acting program
Voice & Speech I, Co-Adjunct Faculty
1999-2000

Worked with B.F.A students to develop and maintain a strong vocal instrument with exercises based in the work of Kristin Linklater, Edith Skinner, as well as innovative voice exercises inspired by Linklater, Cecily Berry and Loyd Williamson. Implemented and tested students on the International Phonetic Alphabet and individually directed their Shakespeare monologues for B.F.A. faculty adjudication.

Rutgers University
Acting Lecturer
1998-2000

Lead beginning actors in the fundamentals of acting, including basic theatre games to free the actor, improvisations to work moment to moment and two-person scene work to introduce character development, actions and objective etc. Course was based in Stanislavski & Meisner techniques.

Acting Coach
2000-present

In a one-on-one setting, coach actors with audition sides, monologues, commercial copy, voice & speech and dialect reduction.

Acting

Production	Role	Company/Director
Charlotte's Web	Charlotte	Children's Theatre of Madison
The Bed	Ensemble	Theatre LILA
In the Next Room or the vibrator play	Catherine Givings	Forward Theater Co.
The Lear Project	Edgar	Harwich Theatre
The Big Funk	Jill	The Drove Theatre Co.
Faust	Helen of Troy	Blue Heron Theatre
Wrecked	Clytemnestra	Theatre LILA
JULIE	Miss Julie	Theatre LILA
Les Liason Dangerous	Mm. De Tourvel	Findlay Rep.Theatre
Noises Off	Brooke Ashton	Findlay Rep.Theatre
Lend Me a Tenor	Maggie	Findlay Rep.Theatre
Carousel	Louise	Findlay Rep.Theatre
Intelligible Lies	Beth	The Construction Co.
Shakespeare's Women	Ophelia	The Wake Up Artists
Alice Shaken & Stirred	Alice	The Dragons Egg
Nina Variations	Nina	Primary Stages
Measure for Measure	Isabella	Rutgers Theater Company
Ah! Wilderness	Belle	Rutgers Theater Company
Lips Together Teeth Apart	Sally	Rutgers University
I Am Not the Ocean	Bill	Rutgers University
Icarus	the Gloria	Rutgers University

FILM/TELEVISION

Chicago PD (Dick Wolf)	Suzanne	Dir. Fred Berner
Mulligan (Midway Films)	Angel	Dir. Will Slocombe
The Late Show	Guest Star	CBS-Jerry Foley
Girlfriends	Guest Star	UPN-Erma Elzy Jones
The Manchurian Candidate	Featured Extra	Dir. Jonathan Demme

COMMERCIALS*

V-8 Juice	Principal	National Network
Special K	Principal	National Network
Oreo	Voice Over	National Network
Stella Artois	Principal	National Network
Claritin	Principal	National Network
Kraft	Principal	National Network
Toyota	Spokesperson	National Network
Tylenol	Principal	National Network
Babybel Cheese	Principal	National Network
Brillo	Principal	National Network
Perkins	Principal	National Network
Johnsonville	Principal	National Network

*Complete list available upon request

Professional Affiliations & Representation

- Screen Actors Guild and American Federation of Television and Radio Artists
- Actors Equity Association
- STEWART TALENT Chicago, 2010-present
- CESD Talent Agency, New York City & Los Angeles, 2000-present
- Kennedy Center Teaching Artist Certification

Awards

- 2018 M List, *Madison Magazine*, Arts & Innovation Awards, Artistic Director Theatre LILA
- *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, Wisconsin Theater, Best Choreography 2017 (*Cyrano*)

- *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, Wisconsin Theater, Best Movement 2016 (*Mary's Wedding*)
- 2015 *Brava Magazine* Woman to Watch
- ACDFa Kennedy Center, Outstanding Student Choreography Award 1996

Professional References

Brenda DeVita

American Players Theatre
Artistic Director
608.588.9219
brenda@americanplayers.org

Malkia Stampley

Goodman Theatre, BOLD Artistic Producer
Co-Founder Milwaukee Black Theater
Festival and Bronzeville Arts Ensemble
414.426.7249
malkiastampley@gmail.com

Tyler Marchant

University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point
Department of Theatre & Dance
Professor - Acting and Directing BFA program
917.568.1415
Tyler.Marchant@uwsp.edu

Andrea Arden Reese

New York University, Tisch School of the Arts
Assistant Arts Professor
201.906.3569
andyardenreese@verizon.net