

DIRECTING CLASS OF 2029

Columbia University
School of the Arts

MARIA-IOANA ANDREI

My name is **Maria-Ioana Andrei**. I was born and raised in Bucharest, Romania, and came to the United States in 2022. I graduated from Wagner College with a BS in Arts Administration and Theatre this past May.



MARIA BURKINA

Maria Burkina is a multidisciplinary artist and emerging director born in Moscow, Russia. In 2013, she moved to New York, where she earned her BFA from the New York School of Interior Design and began her design career before transitioning into directing. In 2025, she wrote, directed, and produced her debut short film, *Demon Amoureux*, a contemporary adaptation of Mikhail Lermontov's *Demon*, which premiered at the LA Shorts International Film Festival. From April to August 2026, she interned at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow, shadowing directors and observing the creation of two new opera productions from rehearsal through opening night. She also gained insight into the theatre's lighting and production departments. She is excited to begin Columbia University's MFA in Theatre Directing this fall, where she looks forward to developing her own approach to theater directing.



ZACH CHRISTENSEN

Zach Christensen is a Minneapolis-based director, performer, and deviser. He is the Founding Artistic Director of Jackdonkey Productions. His directing work is rooted in ensemble practice, physicality, and a wide range of theatrical forms, most passionately those that move through experimentalism, absurdism, and surrealism. Through Jackdonkey Productions, Zach has developed and led a growing body of original, published, and devised work while collaborating with more than one hundred Twin Cities artists. His work has been recognized with support from the Minnesota State Arts Board, including the 2024 and 2025 Creative Individuals Grants, as well as honors including the Minnesota Fringe Audience Choice Award, and the BroadwayWorld Best Supporting Actor Award. Zach has worked as an Assistant Director with Meredith McDonough, Lonny Price, and Justin Lucero, all at Theater Latté Da. As an actor, Zach has performed under the direction of Joseph Haj and Maija Garcia at the Guthrie Theater, as well as Dominique Serrand at The Moving Company. Zach holds a BFA in Theatre Performance from North Dakota State University, and has trained with the Guthrie Theater Actors Lab, and Dell'Arte International. He is delighted to join Columbia's MFA Directing cohort.



GABRIELLE GIACOMO

Gabrielle Giacomo is a stage director based in New York City. As a young artist, she trained at the School of American Ballet, performing in over one hundred NYCB performances of *The Nutcracker*, *Coppélia*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and more. In 2019, she received her BFA in Film & Television Production from NYU Tisch School of the Arts. In 2023, she completed the Professional Apprentice Program for Stage Management at the Juilliard School. In 2025, she was a Resident Artist Assistant Director at the Glimmerglass Festival. This summer (2026), she will be the Stage Director for *CCO in Concert* and Assistant Director for *Master Class* at Central City Opera. As a teaching artist, she has ten years of experience directing, choreographing, and instructing students aged 3–18 at companies including Treasure Trunk Theatre, KJK Productions, Camp Echo Lake, and Sacred Heart Greenwich. Select credits (Director): *Carol: A Triptych*, *Ten Weeks*, *Open Table*, *The Piece* (The Gallery Players), *Macbeth* (SITS NYU). Select credits (Assistant Director): *Silent Serenade* (Mannes Opera, NYT Critic's Pick), *I Due Figaro*, *Le Nozze di Figaro* (The Juilliard School), *Candide* (Curtis Opera Theatre), *The Rake's Progress* (Glimmerglass). gabriellegiacomo.com



LIZZIE NEWCOMB GUMULA

LIZZIE NEWCOMB GUMULA (she/her) Lizzie is a director, producer, educator, and classical pianist originally from Scranton, PA. Her proudest directing/producing credit is *Spring Awakening* at the Scranton Shakespeare Festival, where she has worked since 2016. At Shakes, she is an Associate Producer and the Director of Education, producing the Youth Ensemble educational conservatory program for high school actors, instrumentalists, and creatives. For the past 4 years, Lizzie has lived in Philadelphia, working in creative events at the Walnut Street Theatre and as a freelance artist. Most recently, she produced Relic Theatre Company's inaugural production of *Spring Awakening*, directed by Original Broadway Cast member Robi Hager. Directing credits: *Sweeney Todd*, *Spring Awakening*, *Much Ado*, *Alice by Heart*, *Romeo & Juliet*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Into the Woods*, *The Tempest*, *Twelfth Night*, *Heathers*, *Peter & the Starcatcher* (Scranton Shakes); *tick, tick...BOOM!* (Ridley Performing Arts); *Sunday in the Park...* (UPenn); *Shakespeare's R&J*, *Much Ado* (Lafayette College). Teaching: The Media Theatre and Yes...And!. Concert piano performance venues include Carnegie Hall and Radio City Music Hall. She received her BA in Theatre and English from Lafayette College. Lizzie is a Halloween enthusiast and needlepointer. Her favorite book is *The Secret History* by Donna Tartt, and she has a Siamese cat named Hazel. lizzienewcombgumula.com @lizziegumula



YIKE LU

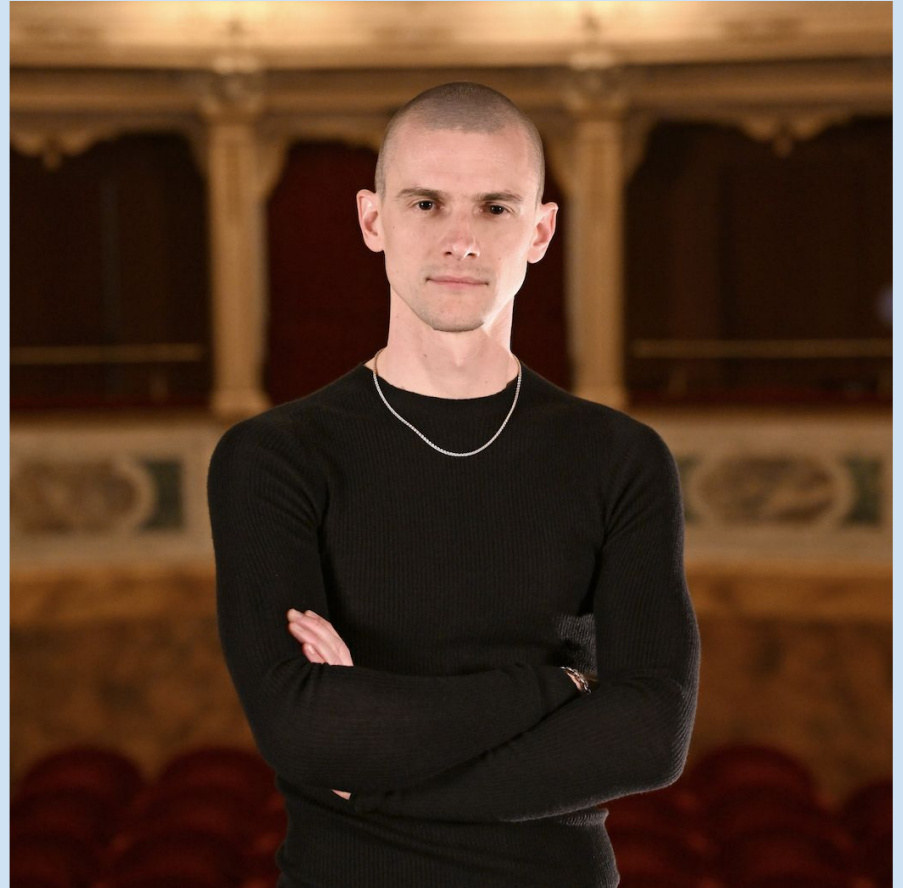
Yike Lu is an incoming MFA candidate in Theater Directing at Columbia University. Originally from Hangzhou, China, she recently graduated from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where she studied painting and performance. Working across theater and visual art, her practice explores cross-cultural translation and visual composition in live performance.



GEORGE R. MILLER

George R. Miller is an American theater director, working primarily in opera. He is dedicated to platforming, interrogating, and reimagining historical repertoire, as well as championing and developing newly created multidisciplinary works. Through sound, text, image, and action, Miller is committed to art about the body, its voice, its environment, the social and political power it has or doesn't have, and its capacity for transformation. His productions have been described as "stunning" (*LA Dance Chronicle*), "superbly directed" (*San Francisco Classical Voice*), "coalescing into one undeniable impact" (*San Francisco Classical Voice*).

George's directorial work has been presented by Opera Philadelphia, REDCAT's NOW Festival, Long Beach Opera, Manhattan School of Music, Opera Saratoga, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, Pioneer Works, The Berggruen Institute, Pageant, and Wild Up, among others. Highlights from the 2025-2026 season include his Carnegie Hall (Zankel Hall) debut with poet and composer J. Mae Barizo and The Knights orchestra; his European debut with writer, musician, and performance-artist Johanna Hedva at Berlin's Hebbel am Ufer (HAU2), followed by an artists' residency at the Mahler & LeWitt Studios in Spoleto, Italy, where they further developed the work; productions as a guest artist with the opera program at UCLA, and a staged recital at The Juilliard School.



ZACHAREE SIMMS

Zacharee Simms (he/they) is a Seattle-based director drawn to bubblegum musicals, bawdy farces, buckets of blood, plays that converse with other plays or media, queer stories, and work exploring mental and physical health, particularly those that center the experiences of caregivers.

Zacharee earned a B.A. in Theatre Arts with concentrations in Acting and Directing from Western Washington University in 2019. He is a 2019 Kennedy Center Directing Fellow and a 2021 graduate of the National Theater Institute. From 2023–2025, he developed curriculum for and coordinated the apprenticeship program at Seattle Rep while directing new work and teaching on the side. He also happens to know many fun facts about Trader Joe's!

