

# The Contemporary Theatre of Ohio

The Contemporary Theatre of Ohio Produces Play About Children's Mental Health: *The Worries of Wesley (Or: How I Learned to Stop Having Anxiety, or Not Really, But I am Trying)*

New Play Premiering in Columbus Sparks Key Conversations Between Kids and Adults

COLUMBUS, Ohio, Dec. 12, 2023 -- The Contemporary Theatre of Ohio (formerly CATCO) is presenting *The Worries of Wesley (Or: How I Learned to Stop Having Anxiety, or Not Really, But I am Trying)*, Jan. 26-Feb. 4 in Studio Two in the Vern Riffe Center.

The play, written by Jessica Moss and directed by Alan Tyson, is made possible by a PNC Foundation grant through the PNC Arts Alive initiative that challenges visual and performing arts organizations to put forth their best, most original thinking to expand audience participation and engagement.

*The Worries of Wesley (Or: How I Learned to Stop Having Anxiety, or Not Really, But I am Trying)*, was selected from hundreds of plays to have a staged reading at The Contemporary's 2022 New Works Festival for Young Audiences. Based on audience feedback, The Contemporary chose to do a full production of this play in 2024.

"One of the things we do best is listen to the residents of Columbus and curate plays and experiences based on feedback," said Leda Hoffmann, Artistic Director of The Contemporary. "The response to the reading of this play was so overwhelmingly positive about its relevance to the current moment and impact for young audiences, that we decided to produce it as soon as possible. Columbus parents and kids at the reading provided their feedback, and Jessica made several changes based on their valuable input so when this play takes off nationally, which we believe it will, we can be all be proud that it got its start here in Columbus."

The play features Wesley, an elementary school student who goes to school, has great friends and loving parents, but sometimes gets overwhelmed and experiences anxiety. Wesley embarks on a whimsical journey of self-discovery, engaging in enlightening conversations with puppet representations of their brain, heart, and lungs. Through Wesley's heartwarming and uplifting story, young people and their families discover ways to understand their own emotions and rely on the people around them when they need help.

"What we saw firsthand at the reading was that this play is a conversation starter and helps people talk about mental health and anxiety, especially in young children," said Christy Farnbauch, Executive

Director of The Contemporary. “We live in an anxiety-provoking world. Helping children to understand their feelings is important so they know they’re not alone and that there are coping skills they can use. I love that this play leaves everyone in the audience – children and parents alike - feeling empowered and ready to tackle life’s challenges with confidence.”

“There's opportunity to be so creative, to be physical and theatrical in this work and to really play. You have to really go for it if you're going to compete with the imagination of a 6-year-old, because they can out-create me any day of the week,” said Jessica Moss, author of *The Worries of Wesley*. “I am so inspired by young people, by their resilience and intelligence and kindness, and I think they deserve work of exceptionally high-quality onstage. I know that The Contemporary Theatre of Ohio is committed to that kind of work, and I am so honored to be part of their season.”

Performing in the play are: Simone Dean, playing Wesley; Zeke Moses, playing Cameron; Anisah Aziz, playing Parker; Brian C. Gray, playing Parent 1 and others; and Justin King, playing Parent 2 and others.

Tickets for *The Worries of Wesley* are \$25 for adults and \$15 for children under 16, and can be purchased online at <https://www.thecontemporaryohio.org/2023-24/wesley>.

The preview performance is scheduled for Jan. 26 at 7 p.m. with opening night on Jan. 27 at 7 p.m. Performances run through Feb. 4 with performances on Fridays and Saturdays at 7 p.m., and Saturdays and Sundays at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. The play runs for 45 minutes with no intermission and is recommended for patrons 7 years of age and older.

The theatre also offers a Pay-What-You-Want (PWYW) ticket option for every preview this season. PWYW tickets may be purchased in advance by telephone (614-469-0939), in-person at the CBUSArts ticket office, 55 E. State St., or at the venue starting two hours before showtime. The Contemporary also offers \$20 student rush tickets to every performance. Tickets (one per student with a valid ID) are sold at the box office, 77 S. High St., Fourth Floor, up to two hours before curtain and are subject to availability.

Patrons can enter the building from the High Street entrance, or through the parking garage entered from Front Street.

Nationwide is the season sponsor for The Contemporary’s 39th season. Funding for *The Worries of Wesley* is provided by PNC Arts Alive. Resources for children and families to extend the conversations sparked by the play are provided by The On Our Sleeves Movement for Children’s Mental Health. Season support comes from The Greater Columbus Arts Council, the city of Columbus, and Franklin County, as well as The Shubert Foundation, Inc., and the Ohio Arts Council, a state agency that funds and supports quality arts experiences to strengthen Ohio communities culturally, educationally, and economically with state tax dollars from the Ohio Legislature. The Contemporary also appreciates the support of Leona and Rowena Kesler Memorial Fund, Helen W. Wildermuth Fund for Drama and Music with the assistance of the Ingram-White Castle Foundation of The Columbus Foundation who assists donors and others in strengthening our community for the benefit of all its citizens.

### **About PNC Arts Alive**

PNC Arts Alive is a multi-year initiative of PNC and the PNC Foundation dedicated to supporting visual and performing arts groups with the goal of increasing arts access and engagement in new and innovative ways. The PNC Foundation, which receives its principal funding from The

PNC Financial Services Group, actively supports organizations that provide services for the benefit of communities in which it has a significant presence. The foundation focuses its philanthropic mission on early childhood education and community and economic development, which includes the arts and culture. For more information, visit [www.pncartsalive.com](http://www.pncartsalive.com).

### **About The Contemporary Theatre of Ohio**

The Contemporary Theatre of Ohio is central Ohio's leading professional Equity theatre company, providing exceptional productions and educational programs for adults and young people, in response to our community's needs. We believe theatrical storytelling transforms people of all ages by immersing them into immediate, communal experiences. The Contemporary exists to harness the transformational power of theatre that engages with our current moment to inspire a community of empathy. For more information, visit [TheContemporaryOhio.org](http://TheContemporaryOhio.org).

### **The Contemporary Ohio's Vision**

We strive to become an anti-racist, nationally recognized contemporary theatre company that anchors a thriving Columbus theatre ecosystem in an empathetic, equitable world.

### **The Contemporary's Purpose/Mission**

To harness the transformational power of theatre that engages with our current moment to inspire a community of empathy.

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