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# Life & Culture

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## Thrilling, smart, messy

This is what the changes in theater wrought by COVID and protests can look like, with Local Lab II



Local Theater Company founder and artistic director Pesha Rudnick talks to an audience during the Local Lab in 2019. Michael Ensminger, provided by Local Theater Company



Nick Chase, left, and Betty Hart, co-artistic directors with Pesha Rudnick of Local Theater Company, at The Savoy Denver in Denver on April 12. Hyoung Chang, The Denver Post

By Lisa Kennedy Special to The Denver Post

**When Local Theater Company launches the 11th installment of its Spring Lab this weekend at Boulder's Dairy Arts Center, the three-day festival of staged readings of new works, conversations and parties will signal a return to business as usual. The company's signature event will be in-person, finally!**

It also will serve as an exciting reminder that there is no such thing as "business as usual" in innovative theater-making. Change is welcome — and since the start of the pandemic and the social justice protests of 2020, it has been essential.

Among the changes at Local Theater has been the smooth but telling

ascent of Nick Chase and Betty Hart over the past year, to their roles as co-directors of Local Lab, which now has year-round programming. The associate artistic director and marketing manager of the company, Chase is also a playwright and director. Hart, in addition to being a Local Theater associate artist, is an in-demand direc-

tor and president of the Colorado Theatre Guild. When Local Lab 11 unfurls this weekend with its four main-stage readings, it will have been guided as much by them as by the company's founder and artistic director, Pesha Rudnick.

In 2020, Local was among the handful of area theaters that leaned into the abyss created by the coro-

**If you go**

Local Lab 11. Local Theater Company's three-day festival of plays, conversations and parties, April 22-24 at the Dairy Arts Center, 2590 Walnut St., Boulder. Passes, single tickets and information at [localtheaterco.org](http://localtheaterco.org) or [thedairy.org](http://thedairy.org).

navirus pandemic and offered something to communities in need of the engagement and succor of theater. Others included the Cata-

**THEATER » 3C**

## Yoga on the Rocks is back to full capacity this summer

By John Meyer The Denver Post

Yoga on the Rocks at Red Rocks Amphitheatre will return for its 10th annual summer series beginning in June, with tickets going on sale Friday, April 22, at 10 a.m.

Because of COVID-19, classes were limited to 175 people in 2020 and to 500 last summer. This summer, according to Red Rocks spokesman Brian Kitts, classes will be back to full capacity, which is 2,000.

New this year, two of the classes will be bilingual for Spanish-speakers.

Classes will be held all four Saturdays in June, three Saturdays in July (excluding Fourth of July weekend), and the first two Saturdays in August. Season passes will cost \$150 and five-packs will cost \$80. Single sessions are priced at \$17. Classes will be held from 7 to 8 a.m.

SnowShape classes designed to help folks prepare for skiing and snowboarding season will be held the last two Saturdays in September and first two Saturdays in October.

## It's only April, but Glo is vying for 2022's best new restaurant



Lemon chicken shio made with chicken broth, crispy lemon glazed chicken, onsen egg, menma, bean sprouts, green onion, chili jam and crispy shallot. Daniel Brenner, Special to The Denver Post

By Josie Sexton The Denver Post

Shortly after Glo Noodle House opened last month in Highland — and before visiting it myself — I began noticing chefs and neighbors and seemingly everyone who'd visited proudly rooting for it.

I've since learned that the feeling is contagious.

You see, it has to start with the people behind a business and carry over to their staff and service; it moves through the food and drinks, out into the dining room, and spills onto the patio before extending across town, over the car ride home after dinner.

Before you know it, everyone is talking. While some will recommend a spot based on food, factoring in value, ambiance and service, I'm here to tell you that, in 2022 and beyond, restaurants are first and foremost about people and their livelihoods, and how both connect with diners. In Glo's case, the people to know are



# A duchess brought low by “A Very British Scandal”

By Matthew Anderson  
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**LONDON**» Everybody loves a sex scandal, and a posh one is even better. The great and the good brought down in disgrace: That's a story people want to hear.

In “A Very British Scandal,” a three-part series streaming on Prime Video beginning April 22, Claire Foy plays the Duchess of Argyll, a real-life aristocrat whose sex life was pored over in a 1960s court case that created a media frenzy and riveted the nation. When the BBC aired “A Very British Scandal” this past December, nearly 7 million people tuned in.

The show is a companion to “A Very English Scandal,” another hugely popular Amazon-BBC coproduction in which Hugh Grant played an upper-crust politician who suffered a similar fate.

These stories, Foy said in an interview, appealed to elements of Britain's national character. “We're perverts, aren't we?” Foy said. “Deep down, all British people love it: We love gossip and love the titillating things other people are getting up to,” she added. “Anything that happens behind closed doors, we're all completely obsessed with.”

In the show's final episode, one of the duchess's aristocratic friends bemoans the British public's desire to know what the upper classes are up to. “The little people in their grubby pits look up to us, because we are not them,” says the friend, played by



Following her divorce from her second husband, for decades the Duchess of Argyll (played here by Claire Foy) was the subject of gossip anecdotes and crude jokes. Alan Peables, Amazon Prime Video

Julia Davis. But stories about the duchess's sex life, she says, “are dragging us down so we look just like them.”

Foy's character was never one of “the little people,” but she wasn't always an aristocrat, either.

She was born Margaret Whigham, in Scotland, in 1912. Her father, a self-made textiles millionaire, moved the family to New York when she was a child, and she lived there until she was 14. Back in Britain, she became a much-photographed debutante with a fancy trans-Atlantic sheen, and a fixture of newspaper society pages. After a string of high-profile relationships and a first marriage that ended in divorce, she became the Duchess of Argyll in 1951 when she married the duke, Ian Campbell

(played by Paul Bettany in the show), whose family had been part of the Scottish aristocracy since the 1400s.

A glamorous A-lister who counted society columnists as her friends, the duchess cultivated a chic media image. And she realized early on she could make money from what we would now call her personal brand, taking cash from tabloid newspapers to appear in fawning articles. (“Beautiful! Rich! Distinguished!” read a teaser for a 1961 Daily Mirror splash. “This is the Duchess of Argyll the world knows.”)

But when her marriage to the duke broke down, she lost control of the story. The couple's nasty divorce case — in which the duchess's intimate photos were presented in court — made

her the subject of salacious newspaper articles and gossip anecdotes, and later, “A Very British Scandal” and even an opera.

During the trial, the duke submitted a list of 88 men he said the duchess had slept with during their marriage, as well as Polaroids he had stolen from her that showed the duchess performing oral sex on an unknown man whose head was not in the frame.

Over the rest of her life, she frittered away the fortune she had inherited from her father on a series of unsuccessful lawsuits and dubious investments. Her personal relations didn't fare much better: She fell out with many of her friends and a daughter from her first marriage. The duchess died in penury, at 80, in a London retirement home. The first hymn at her funeral, in 1993, began, “Dear Lord and father of mankind, forgive our foolish ways.”

Sarah Phelps, who wrote the script for “A Very British Scandal,” said that the duchess's case and the media furor around it represented “the end of an era.” It was “the birth of a different kind of journalism, and a way of writing about sex and scandal in a very, very prurient way,” she said. And it paved the way for later media depictions of Britney Spears, Amy Winehouse and Meghan Markle — “that viciousness and anger that is directed at women in the public eye,” she said.

When the initial outrage faded, the duchess remained the sub-

ject of snickering innuendos for decades. Grinning men would pose for photos beside the boarding sign for a Scottish boat that shared her name: “Queue here for the Duchess of Argyll.”

Today's TV audiences will have more sympathy for the duchess, who now looks like a victim of “slut-shaming,” and the nonconsensual sharing of her photos like “revenge porn.” Many viewers won't judge her harshly for a sex act that some women's magazines now offer tips on performing. Yet they might still find it hard to warm to the duchess, who Foy plays as an arrogant, scheming snob.

“She lied and she cheated, and she did all sorts of really awful things,” Foy said. “In her defense, they were also done to her.”

As a person in the public eye, she sympathized with the duchess and her treatment by the press. “She was one thing, and then they decided she was something else,” Foy said. “Journalists dictate the public perception of you in my industry,” she added. “You are completely in the hands of the people who write the story.”

Despite a persistent whiff of scandal, the duchess continued to lead an active life in London high society for most of the rest of her life, said Lady Colin Campbell, a relative by marriage. “She was certainly a notoriety, but she was never a pariah,” said Campbell, 72. “

“She rose above it, as simple as that,” she added.

## THEATER

◀FROM 1C

mounts; the dance performance company Control Group; and Buntport, the little troupe of brainiacs that thinks it can and does and does and does. Under Rudnick's stewardship, Local Theater, its associate artists and board also grappled with the meaning of the social justice protests for the work they did and how they did it, and of who exactly “they” were.

“Pesha didn't have to choose us. But she intentionally did choose Nick and me. And I think what's great is that we both represent the cool factor. Because we're just really cool theater peeps with interesting aesthetics,” Hart said with a knowing smile during a tag-team interview with Chase. “But also, that you get both the BIPOC and the LGBTQ community between the two of us. We both have an East Coast thing. We both have a West Coast thing. It's just really interesting.”

### “We come together ...”

It's been nearly two years since an anonymous group of theater-makers served notice to America's theater community — Broadway and independent — that theater must do better.

“Dear White American Theater: We come together as Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) theater-makers, in the legacy of August Wilson's ‘The Ground on Which I Stand,’ to let you know exactly which ground we stand on in wake of our nation's civic unrest. We see you. We have always seen you. We have seen you pretend not to see us.”

So began the watershed document “We See You, White American Theatre,” which was made public in June 2020. The authors were anonymous, but the initial 300-plus who co-signed the letter are among the nation's best and brightest theater-makers, such as Lin-Manuel Miranda, Lynn Nottage, Viola Davis, Quiara Alegria Hudes, Suzan-Lori Park and Dominique Morrisseau.

The document currently has more than 104,000 signatures.

One didn't have to embrace every demand to recognize in its principles for building anti-racist theater real opportunities for transformation. Which, in the arts, means new stories, more storytellers, new forms and reimagined leadership.

“I think what the document provided for all of us in the theater community — especially those of us who had equity, diversity, inclusion as core tenets already at play in our strategic plans, in the way that we run our companies — was some new



“Pesha (Rudnick) didn't have to choose us,” says Betty Hart. “But she intentionally did choose Nick (Chase) and me.” Hyoung Chang, The Denver Post



Nick Chase, the associate artistic director and marketing manager of the Local Theater Company, is also a playwright and director. Hyoung Chang, The Denver Post



From left, Simone St. John, Sam Gilstrap and Brian Landis Folkens during a rehearsal for Local Lab in 2019. Graeme Schulz, provided by Local Theater Company

language that was in the voice of our BIPOC leaders in theater,” said Rudnick. “It wasn't within sort of this vague community. It was very specific. The principles gave us some language to serve as a barometer for our work.”

Institutions, even independent ones, have a way of returning to form, out of habit even more than mendacity. For many years, Rudnick already had been honing a guiding principle. “If I just boiled it down to one theme, it has usually been ‘avoid the default,’” she said. “And that was across the board: the board of directors, directors, casting, staff, associate artists. Default is what creates and perpetuates racism and the same storytelling in American theater. So, default in casting, always just casting light when they don't specify. Default in attracting new board members by defaulting to people who might be retired and live in Boulder. Like, just default in general, our principle had been to actively disrupt default.”

Local Lab II's creative triumvi-



Jada Suzanne Dixon is the first Black person to direct a show at the Arvada Center. Andy Cross, Denver Post file

rate of Chase-Hart-Rudnick isn't the only sign that things are shifting in area theater. Jada Suzanne Dixon is the first Black person to direct a show at the Arvada Center. Her finely comedic production of “Stick Fly” — Lydia R. Diamond's family dra-

ma (with a capital “D”) — is in repertory until May 19.

Hart is pulling off a similar first for Littleton's Town Hall Arts Center, directing the musical “Once On This Island,” which runs through May 8.

“Over the last two years, we've

developed 18 plays, and because we're expanding what Local Lab is or expanding the program itself, we're able to house a diversity of plays or musicals underneath that,” Chase said.

### What's playing

This weekend's Local Lab II does indeed look expansive and meaningful, as well as downright fun.

- Topher Payne's really big fish — er, Phish — tale, the wonderfully titled “You Enjoy Myself,” gets a reading, directed by Hart. Two people passionate about the beloved jam band — and at one time, each other — are brought together in a Vermont farmhouse 30 years later. (Friday, 7 p.m.)

- As part of its new partnership with the University of Colorado, Local linked student playwright Esther Omega with seasoned director Lisa Marie Rollins for “The Lotus.” In Omega's dystopian play, two sisters team up with a charming boy to thwart a computer super-virus, but there will be hurdles, maybe even insurmountable ones. (Saturday, 2 p.m.)

- A beloved children's book meets a spaghetti Western. What could go right? Plenty, it turns out, in “Goodnight Cowboy,” a solo, multilayered dance-theater exploration of self, toxic masculinity and more by Jody Kuehner, aka Cherdonna Shinatra. (Saturday, 6 p.m.)

- And you're invited to attend a Quaker meeting of sorts for Nick Malakhov's “Affinity Lunch Minutes” (directed by Sabin Epstein), about two Black teachers at a prestigious Quaker school and the disciplinary decision that puts them at odds and divides the school. (Sunday, 2 p.m.)

The changes for Local Theater since 2020 have been bold and at times even “messy,” as Rudnick put it, as the company injects the notion of experimentation back into its Local Lab. “There are things that have emerged from the Lab in the last two years that people have loved and have been transformative,” she said. Rudnick has also received “some of the most frustrated, finger-waggy emails I've ever gotten from audience members who've been disappointed in what Lab looked like.” As it should be.

“For the first time, I know that I'm doing my job right. We as a collective — Betty, Nick and I — are curating messy, special projects with possibilities,” said Rudnick. “And that finally feels like we're in the right lane for Local.”

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