
THE SHED **Press Release**

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The Shed Presents ***The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe***
By **Jane Wagner**
Starring **Cecily Strong**
Directed by **Leigh Silverman**
Choreographed by **James Alsop**
December 21, 2021 – February 6, 2022
The Griffin Theater

“An idiosyncratic, genuinely subversive, comedy. Original, absorbing theater.”
– *New York Times*

New York, NY – November 1, 2021 – The Shed (Alex Poots, Artistic Director and CEO and Madani Younis, Chief Executive Producer) is thrilled to present a newly commissioned production of ***The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe***, freshly revisited by playwright **Jane Wagner**. Tony nominated director **Leigh Silverman** (*Lifespan of a Fact*, *Violet*) will stage the iconic play starring **Cecily Strong** (*Saturday Night Live*, *Schmigadoon!*) in her theatrical debut. **James Alsop** (“Girls 5 Eva”) will choreograph.

Performances begin on December 21, 2021 and opening night is January 11, 2022 at the Shed’s intimate 500-seat Griffin Theater (545 West 30th Street).

This award winning, timely one-woman play ***The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe*** explores American society, art, power, and the feminist movement through a comedic and quick-witted investigation.

The creative team includes **Christine Jones** and **Mary Hamrick** (Co-Set Design), **Anita Yavich** (Costume Design), **Stacey Derosier** (Lighting Design), **Elisheba Ittoop** (Sound Designer/Composer), **Justin Scribner** (Production Stage Manager). **Lily Tomlin**, who originated the role, serves as executive producer with Wagner.

The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe won the 1986 New York Drama Critics Circle Award and the Drama Desk Award for Unique Theatrical Experience. The play moved to Broadway in 1985, where Ms. Tomlin won the Tony Award for Best Actress in a Play.

“I am so excited that my play *The Search* is being brought back to life at the Shed this winter. I feel so fortunate to have the stellar duo of Cecily Strong of SNL and Leigh Silverman at the forefront of this journey. I am over the moon to have the brilliantly talented team at the Shed helping me to reimagine the Search that I began with Lily Tomlin at another fragile time in our world.” – **Jane Wagner, Playwright**

“*The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe* has been an indelible presence for me since I was 14 when I discovered a well-loved copy in the theater section of my local library,” said **Cecily Strong**. “The timing of this run could not be more perfect as we invite audiences to reconnect with each other after such difficult separation and experience the humanity in Jane Wagner’s extraordinary words. I’m buzzing in equal measure with nerves and excitement and am truly honored to be taking this journey with the team at the Shed and the force of nature that is Leigh Silverman – buoyed by the incredible support of Jane and my comedy hero, Lily Tomlin. It all feels like kismet and a lifelong dream come true!”

“This production originated with the celebrated New York Theater director Leigh Silverman, who brought the idea of revisiting the work of the iconic Jane Wagner. In presenting *The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe*, we’re watching as the baton is passed from Lily Tomlin to Cecily Strong in her New York stage debut and we are thrilled that audiences can experience this at The Shed,” said **Madani Younis, The Shed’s Chief Executive Producer**. “This play is one of those rare works that makes a plea for connection, for love and friendship, insisting that the only way we will be saved is to save one another. It affirms the possibility of hope and describes the true labor of change that takes place in both the personal and political. It is a welcomed reminder of how far we have come and of the work that remains ahead of us.”

“I was 11 years old when I first had my mind blown by Lily Tomlin’s iconic performance in the brilliant masterpiece, *The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe*. It is not overstatement or hyperbolic to say I am a director because of the transformational magic I experienced that night and which can only happen in the theater. And in the painful depths of the pandemic, when there was no theater, and in the abyss of my own search for the “why” I picked up my well-worn copy. And suddenly knew it was the play I wanted to direct, that we would all desperately need to see when (*or if*) we would ever be shoulder to shoulder laughing again. We would be so thirsty for Jane Wagner’s brilliant musings on humanity, the goosebumps and the “awe-robics.” And then I met Cecily Strong. Cecily, making her New York debut, is both the obvious comedic descendent of Lily Tomlin and also a totally unique voice and an accomplished, fearless actress.”
– **Leigh Silverman, Director**

Tickets for *The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe* go on sale on November 5, 2021 at theshed.org

BIOS:

Cecily Strong is best known for her work as a cast member on Saturday Night Live, where she returns for her tenth season. Strong received back-to-back Emmy nominations in 2020 and 2021 for Outstanding Supporting Actress in a Comedy Series for her work on *SNL*. She has entertained viewers with her standout “Weekend Update” character, Cathy Anne, Michael Che’s wacky chain-smoking neighbor who offers her opinions on current events. Her recurring character Gemma, a British “singer” with various boyfriends, also quickly became a fan

favorite. She has earned rave reviews for her notable Judge Jeanine Pirro, Sen. Dianne Feinstein, and Melania Trump impressions. Strong has co-hosted “Weekend Update” alongside both Seth Meyers and Colin Hanks. Most recently, Strong starred on Apple TV+’s 2021 hit musical series, *Schmigadoon!*, on which she also serves as a producer. Her memoir, *This Will All Be Over Soon*, was released in summer 2021. In Chicago, Strong improvised regularly at iO and served as an understudy for the Second City Main Stage and E.T.C. shows. She performed as a member of the Second City national touring company and has also appeared at the Chicago SketchFest, Chicago Just for Laughs, the New York Sketch Fest, and the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Strong has appeared in the films *The Female Brain* and Paul Feig’s reboot of *Ghostbusters*, as well as Melissa McCarthy’s *The Boss*, *The Bronze*, and *The Meddler*. Additionally, Strong headlined the 2015 White House Correspondents’ Dinner. Strong was raised in Oak Park, Illinois, and has a BFA in theater from the California Institute of the Arts.

Jane Wagner (Playwright). Jane Wagner, a distinguished American playwright, has won numerous awards, including two Peabody’s, four Emmy’s, a Writer’s Guild Award for her work in television and the seldom-given NY Drama Critics’ Circle Special Award for her Broadway success, *The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe*. Wagner made her writing debut with the acclaimed CBS teleplay entitled *J.T.* and her book of the same title. In 1970, Wagner began working with Lily Tomlin on an Edith Ann album, *Edith Ann: And That’s the Truth* (1971), which began an award-winning, creative alliance that has lasted for nearly fifty years. They went on to co-write and produce two more Grammy-nominated albums, *Modern Scream* (1975) and *On Stage* (1977). Together, Wagner and Tomlin also produced six television specials as well as three animated specials that starred the precocious Edith Ann. In 1977, Wagner wrote and directed *Appearing Nitely*, a one-woman show in which Tomlin made her Broadway debut. Wagner subsequently wrote the screenplay for the movie, *The Incredible Shrinking Woman*. In 1985, Wagner brought *The Search* to Broadway, where it became one of the most acclaimed plays of the 1985-86 Broadway season. The hardcover edition of *The Search* became the first play in twenty years to appear on The NY Times bestseller list. In 2013, Harper Collins issued a new release of the book to celebrate twenty-five years in print. Wagner has also written and executive-produced the narration for the Emmy winning HBO documentary, *An Apology to Elephants*. In 2019, Lincoln Center honored Wagner and Tomlin with a retrospective of their careers, *Two Free Women*. Together they founded the Los Angeles LGBT Center’s Lily Tomlin/Jane Wagner Cultural Arts Center. In 2020, Wagner was honored with the prestigious Lambda Literary Visionary Award, for her “innovative and barrier-breaking work.” Wagner’s continuing career in writing, drawing, art, text, photos and videos can be found at www.lilytomlin.com. On New Year’s Eve 2013, she married her long-time partner, Lily Tomlin.

Leigh Silverman (Director). Broadway: *Grand Horizons* (2ST; Williamstown Theater Festival); *The Lifespan of a Fact* (Studio 54); *Violet* (Roundabout; Tony nomination); *Chinglish* (Goodman Theatre; Longacre); *Well* (Public Theater; ACT; Longacre). Recent Off-Broadway: *Soft Power* (Public Theater; Ahmanson Theater/

Curran Theater; Drama Desk nom); *Tumacho* (Clubbed Thumb); *Hurricane Diane* (New York Theatre Workshop; Two River Theater); *Harry Clarke* (Vineyard Theatre/Audible, Minetta Lane; Lortel nom); *Wild Goose Dreams* (Public Theater; La Jolla Playhouse); *Sweet Charity* (New Group); *On The Exhale* (Roundabout); *The Outer Space* (Public Theater). Encores: *Bring Me to Light*; *Violet*; *The Wild Party*; *Really Rosie*. 2011 Obie Award and 2019 Obie for Sustained Excellence. Upcoming: *Suffs* (Public Theater)

James Alsop (Choreography). James Alsop most recently choreographed the Peacock musical TV series *GIRLS5EVA*, executive produced by Tina Fey. Her choreography has also been featured on the FX series *POSE* and the Netflix musical series *SOUNDTRACK*, and up next, her choreography will be featured on the upcoming HBO Max reboot of *GOSSIP GIRL*. In addition, she is currently co-choreographing the upcoming Broadway musical *THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA*. She began her career as co-choreographer of Beyoncé's videos, tour, and promotional materials for the multi-platinum selling records "Who Run the World (Girls)" "Dance For You" and "Love on Top." She also assisted in choreographing the mega hit music video "Booty" by Jennifer Lopez, and worked with Oscar nominated director Paul Thomas Anderson for the HAIM music video "Just A Little of Your Love." After choreographing the entire season of Maya Rudolph & Martin Short's variety series *Maya & Marty*, she was asked by Tina Fey and Jeff Richmond to choreograph season 3 of the Emmy nominated series *The Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*, and has since worked for shows on NBC, Showtime, Netflix, and others. When not working with top stars, she teaches around the country and world, educating young artists and dancers to be who they are in their art form and love it.

Lily Tomlin rose to national prominence in 1969 on the television series, *Laugh-In*, with her characterizations of Ernestine, the irascible telephone operator, and Edith Ann, the devilish six year old. Tomlin went on to star in six comedy television specials, which she co-wrote with Jane Wagner. In 1977, Tomlin made her Broadway debut in *Appearing Nitely*, written and directed by Wagner. Tomlin next appeared on Broadway in 1985 in Wagner's critically-acclaimed play, *The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe*. On film, Tomlin's 1975 debut in Robert Altman's *Nashville* was nominated for an Oscar, and the NY Film Critics voted Tomlin Best Supporting Actress. Over the next forty years, she has starred in over 25 movies, including Jane Wagner's *The Incredible Shrinking Woman*, *9 to 5*, *All of Me*, *The Late Show*, *Big Business*, *The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life In the Universe*, *Tea With Mussolini*, *Disney's The Kid*, *I Heart Huckabee's*, ***A Prairie Home Companion***, ***Admission*** and most recently, the **critically-acclaimed *Grandma***. On television, Tomlin has been seen in many series, including *The West Wing*, *Desperate Housewives*, the FX series, *Damages*, *NCIS*, and *Web Therapy*. **In 2014, Tomlin started filming the hit NetFlix comedy, *Grace and Frankie*, with Jane Fonda, which has become the longest-running NetFlix original series. The seventh season is filming in 2021, and will be aired in 2022.** Tomlin is well-known for supporting philanthropic organizations, particularly those focused on animal welfare, civil rights, health care, protection of elephants, women's issues, environmental concerns, overcoming homelessness

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and supporting the LGBTQ community in all aspects of life. She has given countless fund-raising performances for organizations across the country, including The Ann Richards School for Young Women Leaders, Rosie's Place in Boston, Project Home in Philadelphia, Fenway Health Center, One Fair Wage, and many community action groups. Tomlin has contributed in other ways to improve conditions for all living things, such as founding the Los Angeles LGBT Center's Lily Tomlin/Jane Wagner Cultural Arts Center. Tomlin and Wagner together also founded the Goosebump Garden at the internationally known LGBT Fenway Health Center in Boston and have been involved in its growth for over 25 years. As part of her concern for animals, Tomlin earned an Emmy for her narration of the documentary *An Apology to Elephants*. She works with elephant activists all over the country to take elephants out of zoos, is on the boards of Actors and Others for Animals and the Shambala Sanctuary. Tomlin's humanitarian efforts earned her the Honickman Foundation's Golden Heart Award for her impact in breaking the cycle of homelessness and poverty. Throughout her career, Tomlin has received eight Emmys, two Tony Awards, a Grammy, two Peabody Awards, the prestigious Mark Twain Prize, Kennedy Center Honors and numerous other notable honors. She continues to appear around the country in concert performances. On New Year's Eve 2013, she married her long-time partner, Jane Wagner.

The Shed is a new cultural institution of and for the 21st century. We produce and welcome innovative art and ideas, across all forms of creativity, to build a shared understanding of our rapidly changing world and a more equitable society. In our highly adaptable building on Manhattan's west side, The Shed brings together established and emerging artists to create new work in fields ranging from pop to classical music, painting to digital media, theater to literature, and sculpture to dance. We seek opportunities to collaborate with cultural peers and community organizations, work with like-minded partners, and provide unique spaces for private events. As an independent nonprofit that values invention, equity, and generosity, we are committed to advancing art forms, addressing the urgent issues of our time, and making our work impactful, sustainable, and relevant to the local community, the cultural sector, New York City, and beyond.

www.theshed.org

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