



KOSTROMA

CAST YOUR VOTE AT THE
HELEN GARDINER
PHELAN PLAYHOUSE
79 ST. GEORGE STREET

WRITTEN

BY POLLY PHOKEEV

DIRECTED BY BEATRIZ PIZANO

MARCH 5TH 7:30 PM
MARCH 6TH 7:30 PM
MARCH 7TH 2:00 PM
MARCH 7TH 7:30 PM
MARCH 8TH 2:00 PM



Centre for Drama, Theatre & Performance Studies
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Centre for Drama, Theatre & Performance Studies wishes to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Kostroma is one of those plays that comes along and you immediately know that this is something you want to direct. I first heard a reading of the play at the Banff Centre for the Arts. At the time, the play in development was almost three hours long. I was glued to my seat for the entire time of the first reading. So, when the opportunity to direct this year's Mainstage Performance came along, this play was at the top of my list.

Kostroma is full of fresh theatrical ideas. It is extremely relevant to these times. It invites us to imagine a country together. It asks us to think about what kind of a world we want to create, about what is important to us individually and collectively. It reminds us to keep searching and to live with passion and commitment. Polly's beautiful writing is deep, political, intellectual, funny and absurd. It has all the magical ingredients that allow an ensemble of artists to dig deeply into their characters, to live in the moment, to challenge themselves to risk and make bold choices. But most of all, this is truly an ensemble work where every character is an essential part of the whole. Just like every individual is vital to society itself. Including the ghosts.

I am extremely grateful to Polly for allowing us to "play" with this version of Kostroma; and we hope that our work gets her closer to the production draft of this incredible theatrical piece.

SYNOPSIS

A post-communist fever dream about a woman trying to wrangle together a fair election in an autocratic regime run by clown bureaucrats, about a family trying to reconcile at the end of the world, about a community trying to find its footing in the aftermath of a failed revolution. There are ghosts, chickens, executioners, ballrooms filled with shards of glass. Absurd, playful, queer in every sense, Kostroma, like politics, like family, is an Escher staircase, winding through a shifting landscape like dictators and children reinventing the rules of a game in play.

COMPANY

CREW

Assistant Costume Designers:

Sabrina Kousaian

Annie Tang

Sophist Yang

Sherly Xie

Assistant Set Designers:

Mahi Chowdhury

Isla Munnik

Adele Thomson

Assistant Prop Designers:

Chloe Kim

Jessica Lee

Vivian Nguyen

Assistant Lighting Designer:

Yiefi Fan

Assistant Sound Designer:

Jia Yun

Assistant Projection Designers:

Alice Zhao

Angelina Zhou

CAST

ANDREA PEREZ

MASHA



Andrea (she/her) is a performer, director, and artsworker, in her final year of a drama, classics, & creative writing degree at U of T. Her favourite media includes Fleabag, Yellowjackets, and Normal People (and she's really enjoying the new Lorde album right now). She's incredibly excited to be a part of the world premiere of this delightfully strange play alongside her wonderful classmates! Instagram: @aandrea.perezzz

Selected Acting Credits: A Girl in School Uniform (A Front Company), Spring Awakening (Hart House Theatre / EDS), Crab Mentality (CDTPS Alumni Project), A Streetcar Named Desire (TCDS), Twelfth Night (Thaumatrope Theatre), The Rocky Horror Picture Show (UC Follies), Company (VCDS).

Selected Directing Credits: Lord of the Flies (Hart House Theatre / SMC Troubadours), Palisade: A Musical Workshop (Thaumatrope Theatre), Equinox (Dandelion Theatre), Never Swim Alone (VCDS).

MALCOLM CRYSLER-HOWARD

STEPAN



Malcolm Crysler-Howard is an actor and fourth-year student at U of T, double majoring in drama and physics. He has previously performed on stage and screen. Malcolm is excited and grateful to play Stepan in the world premiere of Kostroma, and to perform alongside his awesome castmates and the incredible creative team and crew. He thanks his family and loved ones for their support, as well as all the help he has received from past and present teachers.

CAST

ELLA ANNIS

KAJA/ CHICKEN



Ella Annis is a multidisciplinary artist in her third year at U of T studying for a specialist in drama and a minor in linguistics. Her recent credits include director of What's Killing the Poets? (U of T Dramafest), stage manager of Footloose (SMC), costume designer of Tickless Time (VCDS), apprentice stage manager of Five Minutes Between Lion and Man (Hart House), music composer of Shawshank Redemption (SMC), Miss Julie in Miss Julie (VCDS), assistant director and co-stage manager of Three Plays and a Conversation (U of T Dramafest), and more. Working on Kostroma has been one of the most formative experiences of her life and she is eternally grateful to have had her life changed by such an incredible cast and crew. The biggest thank you to Bea Pizano for opening our horizons to all that theatre is and can be.

LEV TOKOL

ARTUR



Lev Tokol (he/him) is an actor, director and composer from Windsor, Ontario. At the University of Toronto, Lev has pursued the performance, directing, and playwriting streams at the CDTPS. Select credits with campus groups include performing in Spring Awakening (2022), Cabaret (2023), and Anyone Can Whistle (2025), directing All In The Timing (2023), Twelve Angry Men (2023), and Company (2025), and composing and directing a score for A Streetcar Named Desire (2024). Most recently, Lev directed Savage/Love for the 2025 CDTPS Directors' Showcase and was a winner of the 2025 Hart House Drama Festival Monologue Competition. Lev can be found sporadically on Instagram as @levgidtok, or in the wild very likely noodling on a puzzle.

CAST

GRACE ELIZABETH HUESTIS

MUZZLE



Grace Elizabeth Huestis (she/her) is a non-union actress, playwright and vocalist based in Toronto, Ontario. Graduating as a drama specialist from the CDTPS, Grace is excited to let her artistry guide her into this new chapter. She had her first professional performance at Hart House Theatre this past November, playing Agave in 5 Minutes Between Lion & Man, for which she won the Donald Sutherland Best Performance Award at the 2025 U of T DramaFest. With her career, Grace aspires to be a major figure in representing her Guyanese heritage on the stage and screen in comedic, dramatic, gothic, and horror roles. She is extremely thankful to the cast and crew of Kostroma, and is excited to bring Muzzle to life.

Selected Acting Credits: Muzzle (Kostroma), Agave (5 Minutes Between Lion & Man), Klytemnesta (Helen/Klyemnestra, or Maneater), Spirit of Betrayal (I Am My Beloved(s)).

GRACE KEEPING

BUCKLE



Grace Keeping (she/her) is an actress and creator from Newfoundland! She is a fourth-year student at the University of Toronto majoring in conservation biology and drama. She invites you to BUCKLE in for the ride that is Kostroma (sorry for the pun). She is extremely grateful to be a part of this process and work on a play that has deeper messages you can explore with each viewing. Question everything, challenge your systems and make a change for what you believe in. Thank you for coming to see the show.

Instagram: @grace_keeping

Selected Credits: Elizabeth Proctor, The Crucible (TCDS, 2025)

Partner, The Worker (CDTPS Helen Phelan Gardiner Playhouse, 2024)

Irish step dancer, your nightmares (Tonight)

CAST

ARTEMIS RIEDMUELLER

GRIM



Artemis is a human being. She is allegedly an actor, stage manager, and writer.

HANNAH JAMAL

WHIP



Hannah Jamal is a third-year drama and psychology student at the University of Toronto. She is thrilled to be playing Whip in the quirky, kaleidoscopic world of Kostroma alongside her incredibly talented cast and crew.

CAST

ANYA IVANTCHENKO

INA



Anya Ivantchenko is an actor, director, producer, composer, and occasionally a drama and political science student at the University of Toronto, and she is so fired up to be part of the world premiere of Kostroma. She wants to thank her family, friends, cat, and various medications that all support her through making art. Selected credits: director, *The Crucible* (TCDS, 2025), producer, *Next to Normal*, *Miss Julie*, *Low Level Panic*, *71*, *Company*, *Da Kink In My Hair* (VCDS, 2024-25), *Chicken Builder*, *Into the Woods* (Tomken Road Middle School, 2017), *Dancer to David Guetta's Titanium* (Burnhamthorpe Public School, 2015). Her parents will only allow her to pursue theatre if she becomes Instagram famous, so help her achieve her goals: @anya.ivant

SAMUEL BARNES

OLD MAN



Samuel Barnes is a fourth-year student at Victoria College.

CAST

JAPNEET KAUR

SIMON / PACIFIST



Japneet Kaur is a fourth (and final) year drama and sexual diversity studies student at U of T, who is very grateful to have been able to grow and learn in the world of Kostroma. A storyteller who enjoys sharing art through a range of mediums including acting, dancing, & playwriting, among others. Kaur is excited to bring Simon & the Pacifist to the audience! Selected credits include The Rocky Horror Picture Show (UC Follies), Kareeb Kareeb Us (Short Film), Elephant Song (Cinema Club, Toronto Fringe Festival), 71 (VCDS), and most recently, co-stage managing Harlow's Rhesus Monkey at the Hart House U of T Drama Festival.

KENNEDY MCCARTHY

MAYOR / OPPORTUNIST



Kennedy McCarthy is an actor from south western Ontario. He can be found on stage, screen, or in a series of shawarma ads. Recent credits include: Dogfight (Thaumatrope Theatre), Twelfth Night (Thaumatrope Theatre), Grease (TCDS), The Bookie (Short Film), The Birth Of Shawarma (Playhouse). He is incredibly excited to get to bring this incredible and topical story to life with these incredible actors and some of his best friends. Huge thanks to his parents, friends, sister, and to you for watching. Enjoy the show and remember not to look so grim – there is always a turning. @kennedy.m

CAST

ADELAINE ANIAG

LEPIDOPTERIST



Adelaine Aniag (she/her) is a transforming artist, but as an actress, she finds the wings to fly. As she finishes her final year at the University of Toronto with a degree in archaeology and drama, she aspires to grow past the chrysalis and change into becoming a professional actress. Having done her film training in Vancouver and her theatre training in Toronto – she has experienced a variety of storytelling and performances. Kostroma is like no other.

Adelaine is excited to invite you into the world of Kostroma. She hopes that you take off your rose-tinted glasses and look through the Lepidopterist's microscope. Question the very existence of our being while being open to our potential to change. Because maybe. It isn't just a metaphor.

Recent Selected credits:

Jo March, Little Women, SMC Hart House Theatre, 2025

"Actor," Savage/Love, CDTPS Helen Phelan Gardiner Playhouse, 2025

Instagram: @adelaineaniag

DALILA BEJAR-ALI

THE LOCAL



Dalila Bejar-Ali is an actress and playwright in her third year as a drama specialist at U of T. She is very excited to be playing The Local in this production of Kostroma and can't wait to see where this piece goes next. Recent credits include: 5 Minutes Between Lion and Man (Hart House Theatre), Company (VCDS), Romeo and Juliet (TCDS), and Young Frankenstein (VCDS). Special thanks to her fellow castmates for an amazing year.

CREATIVE TEAM

POLLY PHOKEEV

PLAYWRIGHT



Polly Phokeev is a playwright and prose writer based in Toronto. She holds a BA in drama with the University of Toronto, and MFA in creative writing with the University of British Columbia. Playwriting credits include *How We Are* (created with Mikaela Lily Davies; winner of 2016 Safe Words New Canadian Play Award and MyEntertainment World Award for Outstanding New Work), *Seams* (SummerWorks 2015; NOW Magazine pick for Outstanding New Play) and *The Mess* (with Davies; nominated for 2017 MyEntertainment Critics' Choice Award). Polly was honoured with the inaugural Award for a Young Canadian Playwright through the Jon Kaplan Legacy Fund in 2019. As a fiction writer, Polly was awarded second place in the Toronto Star Short Story Contest for her short story *Stalwart Island*. Her story *Long Haul to Napoli* was featured as a finalist in *Accenti Magazine's* Writing Contest. She was longlisted for both the 2023 CBC Short Story Prize and the 2023 Commonwealth Short Story Prize for *Death of a Sparrow*. She translated and adapted Mikhail Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita* with Mikaela Lily Davies and Hailey Gillis (in collaboration with Crow's Theatre) and prepared a literal translation for Crow's Theatre's *Uncle Vanya*. She is currently writing her debut short story collection. pollyphokeev.com

CREATIVE TEAM

BEATRIZ PIZANO

DIRECTOR



Beatriz Pizano (she\her) is a director, actor, playwright, dramaturge and the artistic director of Aluna Theatre: a multi-award-winning company that creates, develops, produces and presents interdisciplinary and intercultural theatre. Beatriz is also the artistic director and curator for RUTAS International festival of Performance and The CAMINOS national festival of works-in-progress.

Over the last two decades, Beatriz has built Aluna into an international company recognized for its unique approach to creation, its daring political work, and its experimentation with multiple-language productions. Her bold creations, in English and Spanish, and other languages as well, are marked by a distinct theatrical language drawing from the heritages, cultures, and languages from across the Americas.

Recent directing selected credits include: 12 Litres 8800 (co-director) by Anita La Selva, Dead Korean Girl Comedy Show by Emily Jung & Jennifer Park, The Cunning Linguist by Monica Garrido, Rubble by Suvendrini Lena, Children of Fire by Anna Chatterton and Shahrzad Arshadi, The Walls by Griselda Gambaro, The Solitudes by Beatriz Pizano with text by the ensemble. As an actor she has received a Dora Award nomination for On the Other Side of the Sea and a Toronto Critics Award and a Dora Award for her performance in Blood Wedding.

CREATIVE TEAM

As a playwright her work has received numerous Dora Award nominations. She has been the senior playwright in residence at Banff Centre for the Arts and has worked as a dramaturge in numerous projects.

Most recent awards include: the 2025 TAPA's Silver Ticket Award, the Trailblazer & Lifetime Achievement from CALTAC.

ANDREW NASTURZIO

COSTUME DESIGNER



Andrew Nasturzio is a Toronto based costume and set designer. He is a graduate from Toronto Metropolitan University's Performance Production + Design program. His work ranges from opera, theatre, dance, and film. More of his work can be found at andrewnasturzio.com.

Selected recent credits: costume/set designer, Viva La Mamma!, U of T Opera; costume designer, Buddy Holly, Grove Theatre (BroadwayWorld Toronto Award Nomination); costume designer, Così Fan Tutte, U of T Opera; costume designer, Three Islands, U of T Opera; costume designer, Stranger Sings, Mansfield Entertainment (BroadwayWorld Toronto Award Nomination); costume/set designer, L'enfant et les Sortilèges, Glenn Gould School; costume/set designer, L'enfant Prodigue, Glenn Gould School; costume designer, Carmen, Toronto City Opera; costume designer, Cendrillon, U of T Opera; costume designer, Lysistrata, U of T Opera; costume designer, Il Capello di Paglia di Firenze, U of T Opera; costume designer, The SpongeBob Musical, Mansfield Entertainment (BroadwayWorld Toronto Award Nomination).

CREATIVE TEAM

TREVOR SCHWELLNUS

LIGHTING DESIGNER



Trevor is a scenographer, designing sets, lights, and video for performances with independent groups. One of his chief obsessions is the intersection of design, dramaturgy, and cross-cultural art-making. He is artistic producer of Aluna Theatre, where he directed, designed, and toured collective creations like *What I learned from a decade of fear*, and *Nohayquiensepa* (No one knows).

Selected design credits include: *Dividing Lines*, *Blood Wedding*, *Rubble* (Aluna Theatre); *Monster* (Factory Theatre), *Here are the Fragments*, *Out the Window* (Theatre Centre), *Our Fathers Sons Lovers and Little Brothers*, *Marine Life* (Tarragon Theatre), *White Girls in Moccasins*, *Of A Monstrous Child*, *The Silicone Diaries* (Buddies in Bad Times), *Alien Creature*, *The Sheep and the Whale* (Theatre Passe Muraille), *Children of Fire*, *Birds' Eye View*, *Ajax & Little Iliad*, *Relay*, */dance/songs/*, *Smell of the Soul*, *We Keep Coming Back*, among many others. He redesigned Toronto's Dora Award statuette in 2019, has six Dora Awards (of 20 nominations), and was shortlisted for the 2015 Siminovich Award.

CREATIVE TEAM

DANIEL TESSY

SOUND & PROJECTION DESIGNER



Daniel Tessa is an Iraqi-Jamaican-Canadian sound/projection designer, composer, recording artist and educator. Since a recent cross-country move to Toronto he has worked for companies such as Art of Time Ensemble, Young People's Theatre, Crow's Theatre, King Theatre Company, Shaw Festival, Danse Danse and more. He is a lecturer at the University of Toronto's CDTPS.

SICHUN XIA

STAGE MANAGER



Sichun Xia 夏思纯 is currently a fourth-year drama specialist student from China. This is her last year at U of T. She is very excited and grateful to work with this amazing team, and have it be her final production on campus. She just directed her first play, This Is A Play, last semester. Recently selected credits for design and production include stage manager and sound designer for Exchanged Souls 错位余生; sound designer and stage manager for Pool(no water)(CDTPS); stage manager for On Spring's Promise(UCfollies).

CREATIVE TEAM

YIZHOU ZHANG

DRM403 TA



Yizhou Zhang (pronounced Yee-joh Jang) is a PhD candidate at the University of Toronto's CDTPS. Her doctoral research explores the concept of "gesture" at the intersection of performance arts and sciences in early twentieth-century Europe. Her research brings embodiment, performance, and theatricality into dialogue with science and technology, labour, (bio)politics, space-time, and modes of inscription.

As a theatre artist, Yizhou enjoys facilitating intercultural collaborations and making documentary theatre, where she interweaves personal stories with historical, political, and sociological facts. Her directorial, dramaturgical, and playwriting credits include: Marat+Sade (TNT Theatre, Beijing), War Eagle: A Schizophreniac's Sexual Fantasy and a Middle-Class College Girl's New Year's Eve Adventure (706 Youth Space, Beijing), Sky of Darkness (TheatreLab, NYC), Vom Armen Bb Et aL. (V.A.B.E.L) (Brecht Festival, Augsburg), Oskar and the Screaming Drum, Or A Tiny History of Violence (University of Toronto), Benevolence (Tarragon Theatre; Lincoln Centre).

CREW

SABRINA KOUSAIAN

ASSISTANT COSTUME DESIGNER



Sabrina Kousaian is a fourth-year English and drama major. She has a background in acting having done shows such as *Les Misérables* in local community theatre and *Young Frankenstein* with the SMC Troubadours. This is her first time participating in helping create costumes for a show and she is so excited to help bring these stunning visuals to life with Kostroma!

ANNIE TANG

ASSISTANT COSTUME DESIGNER



Annie Tang is a third-year drama specialist at the University of Toronto in the Faculty of Arts and Science. For this show, she helped oversee costume design coordination and execution from concept to performance. Annie enjoys photography, music and interdisciplinary creative projects that merge design with narrative. She aims to have further professional development in both design and other fields related to drama in the future.

CREW

SOPHIST YANG

ASSISTANT COSTUME DESIGNER



I really enjoyed folding butterflies for the show, though mine are moth-ish.

SHERYL XIE

ASSISTANT COSTUME DESIGNER



My name is Tianxue Xie (Sheryl) and I am a third-year student double-majoring in drama and political science. My academic and creative interests lie at the intersection of performance, visual storytelling, and political discourse. Through both critical research and hands-on production experience, I explore how design and staging shape audience perception and narrative meaning. As part of the costume department, I am particularly interested in how clothing functions not only as an aesthetic detail but as a tool for character construction and social commentary.

I am drawn to theatre as a space where artistic expression and political thought meet. I believe the stage has the power to question social structures and reimagine identity, and I am fascinated by how costume and visual design participate in that process.

CREW

MAHI CHOWDHURY

ASSISTANT SET DESIGN



Mahi is a fourth-year architecture student at the Daniel's Faculty at the University of Toronto. She enjoys music, art, and has an interest in production and set design/construction work.

ISLA MUNNIK

ASSISTANT SET DESIGN

Isla Munnik is a second-year drama major, an assistant set designer, and member of the painting crew. They are very excited to work on this production and would like to thank Daniel, Beatriz, Adrien, Polly Phokeev, and all the members of the design class for this opportunity.



ADELE THOMPSON

ASSISTANT SET DESIGN



Adele is a somethingth year drama and psychology student, who loves and does all things theatre. Theatre as a catalyst for social change is her passion, and prior to returning to school, she worked on December Man (2019,) Gruesome Playground Injuries (2018,) Lady in the Van (2017,) and Agnes of God (2016) as a part of a community project to use theatre to spark talk-back discussions alongside DBT coaches. She is excited to expand her experience by working on the set design crew for Kostroma! What an honour!

CREW

JESSICA LEE

ASSISTANT PROPS DESIGN



Jessica (Jaeyun) Lee is a fourth-year student at the University of Toronto's Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape, and Design, completing a specialist in architectural studies with a minor in mathematics. Her work explores the relationship between material, structure, and narrative, with a particular interest in wood construction and design-building practices. Alongside her academic work, Jessica is part of the props crew for Kostroma, where she contributes to the fabrication and preparation of objects that help construct the world of the show. This hands-on experience has deepened her interest in how material details and crafted elements shape atmosphere and storytelling. Jessica is passionate about bridging conceptual design with physical making, and she sees both architecture and theatre as disciplines that transform space through craft, intention, and imagination.

VIVIAN NGUYEN

ASSISTANT PROPS DESIGN



Vivian is a fourth-year University of Toronto student working towards a specialist degree in architecture. With a strong interest in production design, she is particularly drawn to how space and form can support storytelling and shape the audience's experience. Being part of Kostroma has offered her the opportunity to explore the relationship between design and narrative in a collaborative environment. She is excited to be a part of the design team bringing the vision of this production to life, and hopes audiences feel immersed in the world created on stage.

CREW

YIFEI FAN

ASSISTANT LIGHTING DESIGN



Yifei Fan is a third-year drama major at the University of Toronto with minors in women and gender studies and cinema studies. Beyond academics, Fei enjoys dance and performance production. She brings tech and design experience from Conjugal (2025 CDTPS Mainstage), the 2025 Directors' Showcase, and projects outside the university including Camp XULF and Moving in Flux. Fei is thrilled to join the production team of Kostroma and hopes you enjoy the show!

JIA YUN

ASSISTANT SOUND DESIGN



Jia Yun is currently a fourth-year student at the Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape & Design, specializing in the technology stream. While her academic background is in architecture, she has always been drawn to performance and storytelling, particularly through sound and set design. Outside of school, Jia enjoys watching films, listening to music, baking, and playing guitar. In 2025, Jia worked as an assistant stage manager for the Directors' Showcase, where she assisted during rehearsals, supported backstage communication, and helped with transitions throughout the performances. She is grateful for the opportunity to now be part of the sound production team and is looking forward to contributing to the 2026 mainstage show Kostroma.

CREW

ALICE ZHAO

ASSISTANT PROJECTION DESIGN



Alice is a second-year drama student at CDTPS. She has a profound interest in design, and how designs convey different emotions. In her spare time, she also plays bass, guitar, and piano, and does modeling and cosplay. Alice is also the founder of U of T's East Asian Queer Support Group(Emergence), and she is very grateful to be working on this year's mainstage production.

ANGELINA ZHOU

ASSISTANT PROJECTION DESIGN



Angelina is delighted to be a projection assistant for Kostroma. Previously, she focused on the creation and research of musicals. She served as set designer and constructor for the musicals Heathers and Footloose, and as design assistant for Conjugal. She is happy to work with this warm team and is very grateful for everyone's help. She is thrilled to be able to try projection technology, live recording technology, and many other technologies that make Kostroma great. These are all technologies that she hadn't tried before. She hopes everyone enjoys the show and thanks everyone for their trust and support.

An opening night reception will be held on
March 5 following the performance.

A talkback session with the playwright will
follow the matinee performance on Sunday,
March 8.

SPECIAL THANKS

Adelaine Aniag

Martin Austin

Kit Dixon

Colin Harris

Tara Maher

Niamh Moll

Polly Phokeev

Cici Nie

Melis Vanli

University of Toronto Opera Division