



A New Comedy by
RAJIV JOSEPH

**THEATER
WORKS
HARTFORD**

LeBron James and Cleveland

Although you don't need to be a basketball fan to understand this play, if you heard "King James" and thought it was about the Bible or Shakespeare, rather than the NBA's all-time highest scorer, you may appreciate a little context about LeBron James and the City of Cleveland.

Our play spans 2004-2016, beginning with LeBron's rookie season -- a sudden success for Cleveland after decades of sports humiliation. Despite many wins, the Cavaliers struggled to win the championship, and in 2010, LeBron left for the Miami Heat, prompting extreme fan backlash. After success in Miami, LeBron returned to Cleveland in 2014, and in 2016 broke the city's 50 year sports curse.

And that is the backdrop for this story of friendship (with a little basketball).

– Naysan Moigani, Dramaturg

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TheaterWorks Hartford is celebrating its 39th season as a non-profit,
professional theater company. Founded in 1985.

KING JAMES is the 2nd show of the 2024-2025 Season.

January 30 – March 2, 2025



KING JAMES

by **RAJIV JOSEPH**
directed by **ROB RUGGIERO**

THE CAST



GREGORY PERRI*



**GEORGE ANTHONY
RICHARDSON***

Cleveland 2004 – 2016

Set Design

Costume Design

Lighting Design

Sound Design

Dramaturg

Casting

Stage Manager

Assistant Director

LUKE CANTARELLA

DANIELLE PRESTON

JOHN LASITER

KEVIN L. ALEXANDER

NAYSAN MOJGANI

SARAH COONEY

TOM KOSIS*

TONY N. KING

Produced in partnership with

**ROUND HOUSE THEATRE &
BARRINGTON STAGE CO.**

Producing Partners

DINA PLAPLER & EARL MCMAHON

ETCH

KING JAMES was co-commissioned by Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Anna D. Shapiro, Artistic Director, David Schmitz, Executive Director, and Center Theatre Group, Michael Ritchie, Artistic Director, Douglas C Baker, Producing Director, and received its world premiere in 2022 in co-productions at Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Chicago and Center Theatre Group/ Mark Taper Forum, Los Angeles

KING JAMES is presented by special arrangement with Broadway Licensing, LLC, servicing the Dramatists Play Service imprint. (www.dramatists.com)



WHO

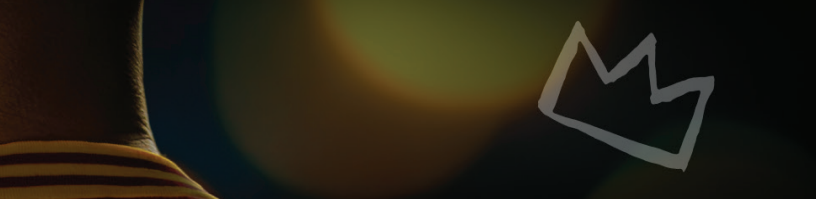
GREGORY PERRI (Matt) is making his TheaterWorks Hartford debut. Gregory recently served as the understudy for Matt in MTC's production of *King James*. Other select NY credits include: *Good People* (Broadway, MTC), *Idea of Me* (Cherry Lane Theater), *A Loss of Roses* (Peccadillo). Select regional credits include *Smart People* (Arena Stage), *The Whipping Man* (Syracuse Stage), *Macbeth* and *The Comedy of Errors* (Shakespeare on the Sound). TV: *The Other Two*, *New Amsterdam*, *FBI: Most Wanted*, *The Jack and Triumph Show*, *The Good Wife*. Select Film: *Not Fade Away*, *The Wolf of Wall Street*, *All is Bright*, *Bastards of Young*, *Thinking with Richard*. MFA: Rutgers University.

GEORGE ANTHONY RICHARDSON (Shawn) is making his TheaterWorks Hartford debut. The roots of George Anthony Richardson are grounded in Merced, CA. A 2021 graduate of The Juilliard School, past productions include Tanya Barfield's *Blue Door* (Juilliard), and *Cardboard Piano* by Hansol Jung. He made his Broadway debut in the 2023 Tony Award-winning revival of Suzan Lori-Parks' *Topdog/Underdog* before completing another run of the play at Palm Beach Dramaworks. Developing a keen lens for the human capacity through storytelling as an actor has propelled him to step into writing and directing as well. Anthony's past directing credits include the Off-Broadway production of Terrance Arvelle Chisholm's *Hooded; or Being Black For Dummies* at 59e59 Theaters. IG @_anthonyrich

RAJIV JOSEPH'S (Playwright) play *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* was a 2010 Pulitzer Prize finalist for Drama and also awarded a grant for Outstanding New American Play by the National Endowment for the Arts. He has twice won the Obie Award for Best New American Play, first in 2016 with *Guards at the Taj* (also a 2016 Lortel Winner for Best Play) and for *Describe the Night*. Other plays include *Archduke*, *Gruesome Playground Injuries*, *Animals Out of Paper*, *The Lake Effect*, *The North Pool* and *Mr. Wolf*. Joseph has been awarded artistic grants from the Whiting Foundation, United States Artists and the Harold & Mimi Steinberg Charitable Trust. He is currently a Language Lecturer at NYU with the School of Art and Public Policy and the Expository Writing Program. He served for three years in the Peace Corps in Senegal, West Africa and now lives in Brooklyn, NY.

ROB RUGGIERO (Director/Artistic Director) Now in his 13th season as artistic director at TheaterWorks Hartford, Rob has directed dozens of local premieres including *Fever Dreams*, *The Garbologists*, *Fun Home*, *The Legend of Georgia McBride*, *Next to Normal*, *Relativity* (starring Richard Dreyfuss), and *Christmas on the Rocks*, which he also conceived. Broadway: *Looped* (starring Valerie Harper); *High* (starring Kathleen Turner, premiered at TWH). Rob conceived and directed the musical revue *Make Me a Song: The Music of William Finn* which ran off-Broadway, and conceived and directed the musical *Ella*, which saw sold-out runs in 24 regional theaters and a National Tour. His work can also be seen across the country at Goodspeed, The Muny, St. Louis Rep, Cincinnati Playhouse, among other regional theaters. Rob also directed *Fiddler on the Roof* in Athens, Greece.

LUKE CANTARELLA (Set Design) is pleased to be returning to TheaterWorks Hartford. His favorite projects at TWH include this season's *Fever Dreams*, *Fun Home*, *The Understudy*, *Woody Sez*, and *Lobby Hero*. His work has been seen at theaters nationwide including the Repertory Theater of St. Louis, The Muny, A.R.T., Yale Repertory Theater, Pittsburgh Public, the Atlantic, and many others. Upcoming: *Women With*



Eyes Closed (Pittsburgh Opera), *Cunning Little Vixen* (DMMO), *Of Mice and Men* (Houston Grand Opera). Film/TV: *Call Jane*, *The Plot Against America*, *Players*, *Julie & Julia*. Awards: Connecticut Critics Circle, Kevin Kline, Barrymore, St. Louis Critics Circle, Joseph Jefferson. Luke is the chair of Film and Screen Studies at Pace University. lukecantarella.com

DANIELLE PRESTON (Costume Design) is a costume designer based in Washington, D.C. This is her **Theaterworks Hartford** debut. Recent regional credits include *Topdog/Underdog* at Round House, *Primary Trust* and *Blues for an Alabama Sky* at Barrington Stage Company, *The Sensational Sea Minkettes* at Woolly Mammoth Theatre, *Queens Girl: Black in the Green Mountains* at Everyman Theater, *Primary Trust*, *Passing Strange* and *Penelope* at Signature Theatre, *Long Way Down* and *A Nice Indian Boy* at Olney Theatre Center, *At The Wedding*, *Fat Ham*, *Clyde's* at Studio Theatre. She holds an MFA in Costume Design from the University of North Carolina School of the Arts. daniellepreston.com

JOHN LASITER (Lighting Design) *King James* marks John's 53rd show at **TheaterWorks Hartford** and his 26th year of association with the theater. Broadway: *High* starring Kathleen Turner. Regional: Actors Theatre of Louisville, Arena Stage, Arizona Repertory Theatre, Asolo Repertory Theatre, Center Stage, Cincinnati Playhouse, Cleveland Play House, Dallas Theater Center, Florida Stage, George Street Playhouse, Geva Theatre, Goodspeed Musicals, The Guthrie Theater, Hartford Stage, Long Wharf Theater, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, The Muny in St. Louis, Pioneer Theater Company, Paper Mill Playhouse, Pittsburgh Public Theater, South Coast Repertory, Syracuse Stage, Virginia Stage Company and Repertory Theatre of St. Louis. Off-Broadway: Alarm Dog Repertory Company, Blue Light Theater Company. johnlasiter.com

KEVIN L. ALEXANDER (Sound Design) is thrilled to join **TheaterWorks Hartford** for this production of *King James*. Recent regional credits include *Spells of the Sea* and *Acoustic Rooster's Barnyard Boogie* (Kennedy Center), *Long Way Down* (Olney Theatre), *Quilters* (1st Stage), *Miss Nelson is Missing* (Imagination Stage), *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* (First Stage Milwaukee), and *Once on This Island* (Constellation Theatre). Kevin holds a Master's in Entertainment Business from Full Sail University and a Bachelor's in Theatre from the University of Maryland.

SARAH COONEY (Casting Director) is Round House Theatre's Casting Director & Associate Producer. With Binder Casting, she cast *The Lion King* Broadway and National Touring productions and the *Encores!* series at New York City Center. In addition to casting for Round House, other Washington DC casting credits include The Kennedy Center, Signature Theatre, Shakespeare Theatre Company, Studio Theatre, Olney Theatre Center, and Rep Stage. Other Regional casting credits include Barrington Stage, Hartford Stage, Seattle Rep, Drury Lane Theatre, Weston Playhouse, McCarter Theatre, ACT of Connecticut, and others. Film and TV casting credits include *The Big Sick* (Apatow Productions), *Crashing* (HBO), *Kevin Can Wait* (CBS), and *Clipped* (HGTV). Sarah taught at West Virginia University and is a New York University alum.

NAYSAN MOJGANI (Dramaturg) is making his **TheaterWorks Hartford** debut. As former Associate Artistic Director of Round House Theatre, Naysan's dramaturgical and producing work includes new plays by Morgan Gould, Aaron Posner, Inda Craig-Galván, Mary Kathryn Nagle, and Sharyn Rothstein, among others. Additionally, Naysan has worked with theaters across the country, including Arena Stage, La Jolla Playhouse, Theatre Squared, Signature Theatre, and CATF. PhD: UC San Diego. nmojgani.com

WHO

TONY N. KING (Assistant Director) makes his **TheaterWorks Hartford** debut with *King James* and is thrilled to join the directorial team. A multi-hyphenate artist, Tony works on stage, television, and as a playwright and voice-over actor, recently voicing for the 2024 Masters Tournament. He is represented by Avalon Artists Group and Innovative Artists. Notable stage credits include *The Royale* (Jay Jackson), *Rent* (Tom Collins), *A Raisin in the Sun* (Asagai), *Toni Stone* (King Tut), and *Little Shop of Horrors* (Audrey II). Tony holds an MFA in Acting from the University of Connecticut. tonynking.com.

TOM KOSIS (Stage Manager) *King James* marks Tom's 13th production with **TheaterWorks Hartford**. Broadway: *Mary Poppins*, *Side Show*, *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, *Flower Drum Song*, *Bye Bye Birdie*, *A Chorus Line*, *Ann*, *My Fair Lady*, *Grand Hotel*, *Nice Work If You Can Get It*. National and International Tours: *Irving Berlin's White Christmas*, *A Chorus Line*, *Song & Dance*, *West Side Story*, *Dreamgirls*. Tom was the Associate Director/Choreographer for *The Radio City Music Hall Christmas Spectacular*. tomkosis.com

ROUND HOUSE THEATRE: Dubbed the "current meteor in DC theatre" by Peter Marks of The Washington Post, Round House Theatre is one of the "Big Six" professional theaters in the Washington, DC area. Round House is a theater for everyone. They enrich their community through bold, outstanding theatrical and educational experiences that inspire empathy and demand conversation. roundhousetheatre.org

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Lauren Marina

Carpenters
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Kailey Linden

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Full-Court Friendship: The Origins of King James

By Naysan Mojangani, Dramaturg

Many friendships involve sitting at a bar, watching basketball, and arguing with each other. For playwright Rajiv Joseph and actor Glenn Davis, that's how their friendship began. But in their case, that friendship and their shared love of basketball grew into **KING JAMES** – a play about friendship between two basketball fans.

Years before Rajiv started writing **KING JAMES**, the two men first met while working on the 2009 world premiere of Rajiv's first major play, *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*. (Glenn had, appropriately enough, heard about the play during a game of pickup basketball with another actor.) During rehearsals for *Bengal Tiger*, the two men would spend their dinner breaks at Rush Street sports bar watching LeBron James and the Cleveland Cavaliers in the playoffs. This was both the foundation of their friendship and the seed for **KING JAMES**: it was during these nights at the bar where the Cleveland-born Rajiv and the Chicago-transplant Glenn would debate whether LeBron or Michael Jordan was truly the Greatest Of All Time. One night, Glenn challenged Rajiv to write a play about the GOAT, to which Rajiv replied "Okay, I'll write a play about LeBron." Additionally (and more seriously), Glenn suggested his friend write a two-person play for him to perform in, ideally at Steppenwolf. Those two challenges eventually connected, resulting in **KING JAMES**.

Looking back on the early stages of the play, Rajiv says it started with nostalgia: *"I had been rooting for LeBron for so many years at that point. I was aware of how much this guy had been in my life, and I think I was feeling pre-nostalgia. You know, 'it's gonna be sad when LeBron's no longer playing basketball, when this guy's no longer in my life as an athlete.' And when I feel that pang of nostalgia, my instinct is to write about it. Because that's a way of holding on to something."*

As a Cleveland native, there are other touches of nostalgia woven into the play. For instance, the first half of the play is set at **La Cave du Vin**, an actual Cleveland wine bar where Rajiv and his college friends were regulars. The second half takes place in **Armand's**, a family-run antique shop: it too is based on a real place. *"Not quite as crazy as it's presented in the play, but there was a consignment shop that I bought my first tuxedo at, a used tuxedo, when I was a junior in high school, called Armand's Echo. And I always laughed at that name, I thought that name was so interesting. So I named this place Armand's."*

But the heart of the play is friendship. Specifically, that uniquely masculine friendship, where sports provides a cover for the emotional vulnerability that men have traditionally not allowed themselves to express. As Glenn puts it, in discussing the GOAT debate, *"It's a way that we relate. It's not meant to end, it's not meant to convince. It's a way of saying to the other person 'I appreciate you, and I want to be engaged in this dialogue with you. I appreciate who you are in my life.'"*

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