

For Immediate Release  
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**THINKERY & VERSE**  
Proudly Present the World Premiere of

# THOU SHALT NOT

“GRIPPING PRODUCTION” – [Tapinto Phillipsburg](#)

“A DARK, FUNNY, WELL RESEARCHED AND ALTOGETHER DAZZLING PLAY” –  
*Blood & Ink* by Joe Pompeo (Harper Collins)

Audiences Exclaim:  
“BRILLIANT WRITING”  
“A FIVE-STAR EVENT”  
“A MARVELOUS DESCENT INTO MADNESS”  
“ENGROSSING THEATER”

## ***THOU SHALT NOT***

***A Site-Specific Stage Play About the Hall-Mills Double Homicide***

Written by **J.M. MEYER, KAREN ALVARADO, and TOMMI BYRNE**

Directed by **KAREN ALVARADO** and **J.M. MEYER**

**LIMITED ENGAGEMENT  
SEPTEMBER 15 – OCTOBER 8, 2022  
CHURCH OF SAINT JOHN THE EVANGELIST, THE HOME OF THE  
RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY THAT ENABLED, CONCEALED, and  
COVERED UP THE CRIME**

**OPENING NIGHT IS SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 17 AT 7:30 P.M.**

**[TICKETS ON SALE NOW](#)**

**THINKERY & VERSE** are pleased to announce the return engagement of **Thinkery & Verse's *THOU SHALT NOT: A Site-Specific Play about the Hall-Mills Double Homicide***, directed by **Karen Alvarado** and recognizing the 100th Anniversary of the crime. **THOU SHALT NOT** will play a site-specific limited engagement in the Assembly Hall at the Church of Saint John the Evangelist (189 George Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901) the church most closely associated, 100 years ago. Performances begin Thursday, September 15, and continues through Saturday, October 8. Opening Night is Saturday, September 17 (7:30 p.m.). Tickets are \$45+ and are available at <https://www.eventbrite.com/organizations/events>. Press performances are Thursday, September 15 and Friday, September 16 at 7:30 p.m. (and any subsequent performance).

In 1922, near the banks of the Raritan River, a small-city priest and a choir singer were slaughtered in the most infamous unsolved double homicide of the 20th century. Incompetent cops, political operatives, and the poorest and most powerful families in New Jersey were all swallowed in the circus that followed. Thinkery & Verse, working with the Church of Saint John the Evangelist, now present **THOU SHALT NOT**, a nightmare narrative seen through the perspective Charlotte Mills, a young woman desperate to find her mother's murderer.

**THOU SHALT NOT** is a theatrical exploration of real events. As a guest of the Church of Saint John the Evangelist, the audience will meet Reverend Edward Hall, Mrs. Frances Hall, Eleanor Mills, and all the main players of New Brunswick in 1922. The audience will be guided through a dark and surreal journey of the events leading to and following the vicious murders of "the minister and the choir singer," and the "circus" that surrounded it. **THOU SHALT NOT** is a re-assessment of history, the complicity of a community, and the

sharp exploration of the female voices long since hushed. The staging of this play will be site-specific, peripatetic, and immersive.

For years, the male-dominated vestry did not allow the Church of Saint John the Evangelist to discuss the murders. Now the vestry is mostly women, and so they do not just talk about it, they sponsored this play--Women do not cover up violence against women. Martha Godfrey, who is a member of the vestry at Saint John's reflects on the tragedy, "*The Hall-Mills case is something that we've had hanging over our heads for a long time. It used to be, people would get mad at you for talking about it. I think, as a congregation, we need to get out in front of it. The play is a way of doing that.*" The organist, Dr. Susan Huslage agrees, adding, "*Why wouldn't we be allowed to talk about it? It's how the community views us, though it was a long time ago—certainly before any of us were around. But growing up here, we knew the people involved. It's not a good thing to have in your past.*"

Director Karen Alvarado adds "*The church's reputation remains mired in the Hall-Mills double homicide. When my son's godparents heard that we would get our son baptized there, they were shocked that the church was even still open. When we perform in the space, it certainly becomes a 'thin place,' where the past haunts the present. For theater people, it's got Macbeth vibes--only very, very real.*"

JM Meyer remarks about the current production, "*We are using color-conscious casting, so the ethnicity of the cast reflects the ethnic diversity of the congregation in 2022 rather than 1922. The church is no longer a haven for the wealthy, but instead a gathering place for the working-class, and ex-patriots of Sierra Leone. That informs how we cast the play, and how we approach the material. The community never lets us forget how racism, misogyny, class prejudice, and politics created an environment ripe for violence, and how we must seek to create a community that is safer for our most vulnerable members.*"

The production stars a cast that draws from the Rutgers Mason Gross conservatory. **Andrew Bambridge** (*Rita, the Cleaning Lady*) debuts as Willie Stevens, **Erin Bogert** (*That's How the Story Goes: Season 1 and 2, Dinah*) returns as Pearl Bahmer, **Celine Dirkes** (*Rita, the Cleaning Lady*) slides into the roles of Jane Gibson (infamously labeled 'the Pig Lady' by the tabloids) and church gossip Minnie Clarke, newcomer **Gio Guanill** as Ralph Gorsline/The Judge/Detective 2, **Kaitlin Ormerod Hutson** (*That's How the Story Goes*) reprises the star-crossed Eleanor Mills, **Johnny Kavanagh** (*Thou Shalt not, Last Days of Judas Iscariot*) returns as the abusive Raymond Schneider, **Madhu Murali** debuts (*Rita, the Cleaning Lady*) as Charlotte Mills, **Lazarus Simmons** joins the cast (*Ghost Hunt, Dinah*) as the doomed Reverend Edward Hall, and **Aline Stokes** joins Thinkery & Verse for the first time in the role of the wealthy heiress and murder suspect Frances Hall.

The production features music direction and sound design by **Sean Ulmer**, scenic and costume design by **Ashley Basile**, and lighting design by **Sarah Woods**. Stage management by **Hillel Adiv**. **Henry Strehlo** serves as Director of Photography for the co-current film project. **Jackie Mercer** is the Production Manager. Publicity by **Katie Rosin/Kampfire PR**.

**THOU SHALT NOT** plays the following regular schedule through Saturday, October 8:

Thursdays at 7:30 p.m.  
Fridays at 7:30 p.m.  
Saturdays at 7:30 p.m.

Tickets are \$45 each (goes up July 31) and are available at <https://www.eventbrite.com/organizations/events>. Tickets can be purchased at the church, a half hour prior to the performance. 10 tickets will be reserved for each show at a 'pay what you can' rate.

Running Time: 120 minutes

Website: [www.thinkeryandverse.org](http://www.thinkeryandverse.org)

Twitter: [thinkery\\_verse](https://twitter.com/thinkery_verse)

Instagram: [thinkery\\_and\\_verse](https://www.instagram.com/thinkery_and_verse)

Facebook: [thinkeryandverse](https://www.facebook.com/thinkeryandverse)

### [Media Kit with Photos](#)

Thinkery & Verse is a proud member of Fractured Atlas and the New Play Exchange.

## **BIOGRAPHIES**

**DR. J.M. MEYER** (*Lead Playwright, ensemble*) works as a playwright-performer in Austin and New York. He performed at the Obama White House thanks to Aquila Theatre's outreach program, "Ancient Greeks/Modern Lives." In 2016 he performed off-Broadway in *Sophocles' Philoctetes* with Aquila Theatre, and returned to the company in 2017 to perform at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, and in the U.S. national tour of *Our Trojan War*. His plays have received support from The Great Plains Theatre Conference, the Cohen New Works Festival, Lawrence University, University Co-Op, and Frontera Fest. In 2015 he performed with the Veteran Artist

Project at the Lincoln Center Home Show. In the spring of 2016 he began a six-month fellowship with BEDLAM theatre thanks to the Mission Continues project. His work as a playwright and an actor has been featured in the Austin Chronicle, The Austin American-Statesman, KUT radio, the BBC online, The Scotsman, and The List. His stage play *American Volunteers* won the 2010 Mitchell Award at the University of Texas, and subsequently made the long-list for the Dylan Thomas Prize in the United Kingdom. Alongside Karen Alvarado he is the co-artistic director of Thinkery & Verse, where he directed and performed in a four-actor *Much Ado About Nothing*, toured Manhattan living rooms with *The Priceless Slave*, and created *Bride of the Gulf*, a transnational collaboration with artists from Basra, Iraq that toured to the 2018 Edinburgh Festival Fringe. His upcoming projects include the movies 'Dinah' and *The Six, Seventh, Eighth*.

Much of John's artistry draws on his experiences as an NSF graduate research fellow specializing in organized violence (PhD 2020), and his time in the United States Army. He served in both Iraq and Afghanistan, and his military awards and badges include the Bronze Star, Good Conduct Medal, Combat Infantry Badge, Parachutist Badge, and Ranger Tab.

**KAREN ALVARADO** (*Lead Director*) is a theater artist from south Texas with Latina and indigenous ancestry. She last appeared as Mistress Quickly in *BEDLAM: the Series*, and she will rejoin the BEDLAM ensemble for *Hedda Gabler* and *Winter's Tale*. Alvarado recently received her MFA in acting from the conservatory at Rutgers Mason Gross. Recent credits include Johnna in *August: Osage County* (Delaware REP), Penelope in a workshop of *The Odyssey* (Aquila/Brooklyn Academy of Music), and Hero, Claudio, and Don John in *Much Ado About Nothing* (Thinkery & Verse). As the co-artistic director of Thinkery & Verse she is producing the award-winning *Transhumance* at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe and the critically acclaimed *Thou Shalt Not* in New Brunswick, New Jersey. Directing or co-directing credits include *Aftershock/La Réplica* and *Dionysus in America* (Austin, Texas), *Bride of the Gulf* (Edinburgh Festival Fringe), and *Ghost Hunt: the Hall-Mills Double Homicide* (Buzzsprout). Personal website: [www.karenalvarado.com](http://www.karenalvarado.com). Company website: [www.thinkeryandverse.org](http://www.thinkeryandverse.org).

The **Thinkery & Verse** partnership (**Co-Artistic Directors J.M. Meyer and Karen Alvarado**) was founded in 2017 to create and produce *The Priceless Slave*, a searing indictment of America's 19th century slavocracy and 21st century complacency. The team created the play while closely studying Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, a play that provides a rich understanding of complicity and entitlement. Though set in the South in the 1850s, they performed *Priceless* in Manhattan living rooms, and in modern dress. They built the play, which is based on a true story, in part by interviewing descendants of the title character. For each project, Alvarado and Meyer set specific goals for inclusivity. They often work with international ensembles, military veterans, or immigrants and refugees, in this case, the majority of the cast was BIPOC.

In 2018, Thinkery & Verse created and performed *Bride of the Gulf* for the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. *Bride of the Gulf* told the story of an Iraqi woman and her mother-in-law in the moment when the British withdrew from Basra, Iraq in 2007, and the hardships that radical militias subsequently inflicted upon the civilian population. The creation of the play required a transnational collaboration between a military veteran playwright, an international cast, and artists in Basra, Iraq. *Bride* received four-star reviews and critical acclaim from The Scotsman and The List.

In addition, the team was commissioned to produce the world-premiere of their four-actor version of William Shakespeare's ***Much Ado About Nothing***. In the spring of 2019, Thinkery & Verse worked with a collective of refugee and immigrant women and artists to create a new adaptation of Aeschylus' ***The Suppliants***, adapted and directed a shortened version of ***A Midsummer Night's Dream*** for an arts school in New Jersey, and produced a workshop run of a new New Jersey musical, ***Rita the Cleaning Lady*** (inspired by Brecht's Three Penny Opera).

In September of 2019 Thinkery & Verse premiered ***Thou Shalt Not*** in New Brunswick, New Jersey, at the church most closely associated with the Hall-Mills murders. In September of 2022 they hope to revive the play to mark the centenary of the tragedy.

In the fall of 2019 the team traveled to Austin, Texas, to collaborate with Art Spark Texas, Canopy Theatricals, The VORTEX, and Teatro Vivo to debut two new plays, ***Dionysus in America*** and ***AFTERSHOCK / La Réplica***. After COVID-19 canceled the New York debut of *Thou Shalt Not*, they spent the summer of 2020 creating two new podcasts--***Decameron 2020*** and ***That's How the Story Goes***. In August 2022 Thinkery & Verse will produce the Edinburgh Festival Fringe debut of Ania Upstill's award-winning physical theater piece, *Transhumance*. In the winter of 2022 they will wrap shooting on ***Dinah***, a film about an enslaved New Brunswick woman who survived 106 years of American history, 1760 to 1866.

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### **Listings Information:**

**Who:** Thinkery & Verse

**What:** ***Thou Shalt Not***

**Where:** Assembly Hall at the Church of Saint John the Evangelist (189 George Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901)

**When:** **SEPTEMBER 15 – OCTOBER 8, 2022**

**How:** <https://www.eventbrite.com/organizations/events>

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