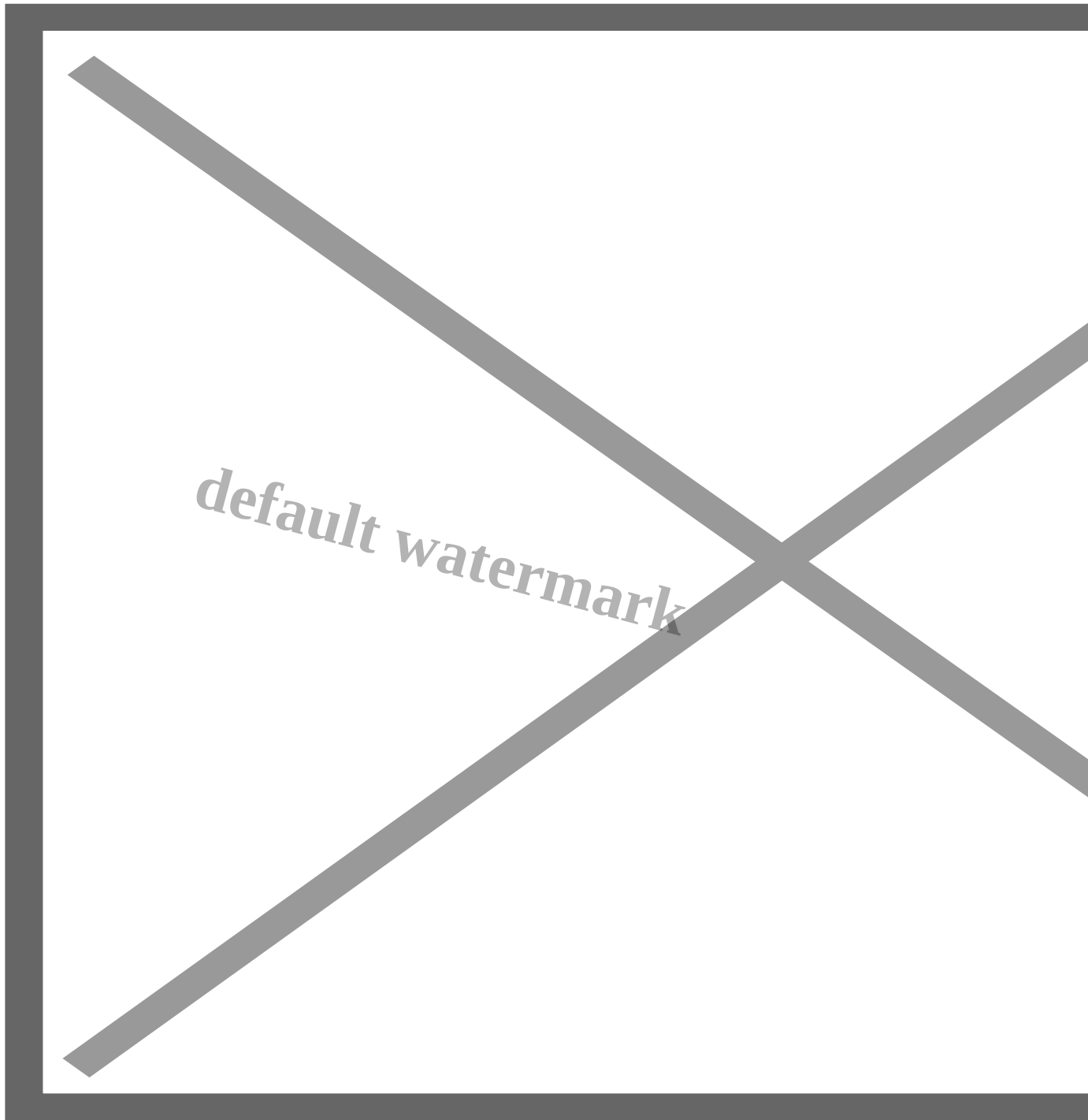




## Messy, Honest, and Unforgettable: *Waitress* at PTC

### Description

**Salt Lake City, UT**—In its long-awaited Utah premiere, *Waitress* arrives at **Pioneer Theatre Company** (PTC) with sweetness, soul, and substance. Directed by **Melinda Pfundstein** in her PTC debut, this production of the beloved Broadway musical—featuring a book by **Jessie Nelson** and music and lyrics by **Sara Bareilles**—offers a nuanced meditation on self-worth, and the quiet radicalism of everyday women seeking agency within constrained lives. Based on **Adrienne Shelly**'s 2007 Sundance film, *Waitress* retains its small-town setting and bittersweet tone while pulsing with theatrical energy and musical depth under Pfundstein's sensitive, ensemble-centered direction.



Claire Saunders | Credit: BW Productions

## A Modern Classic with Staying Power

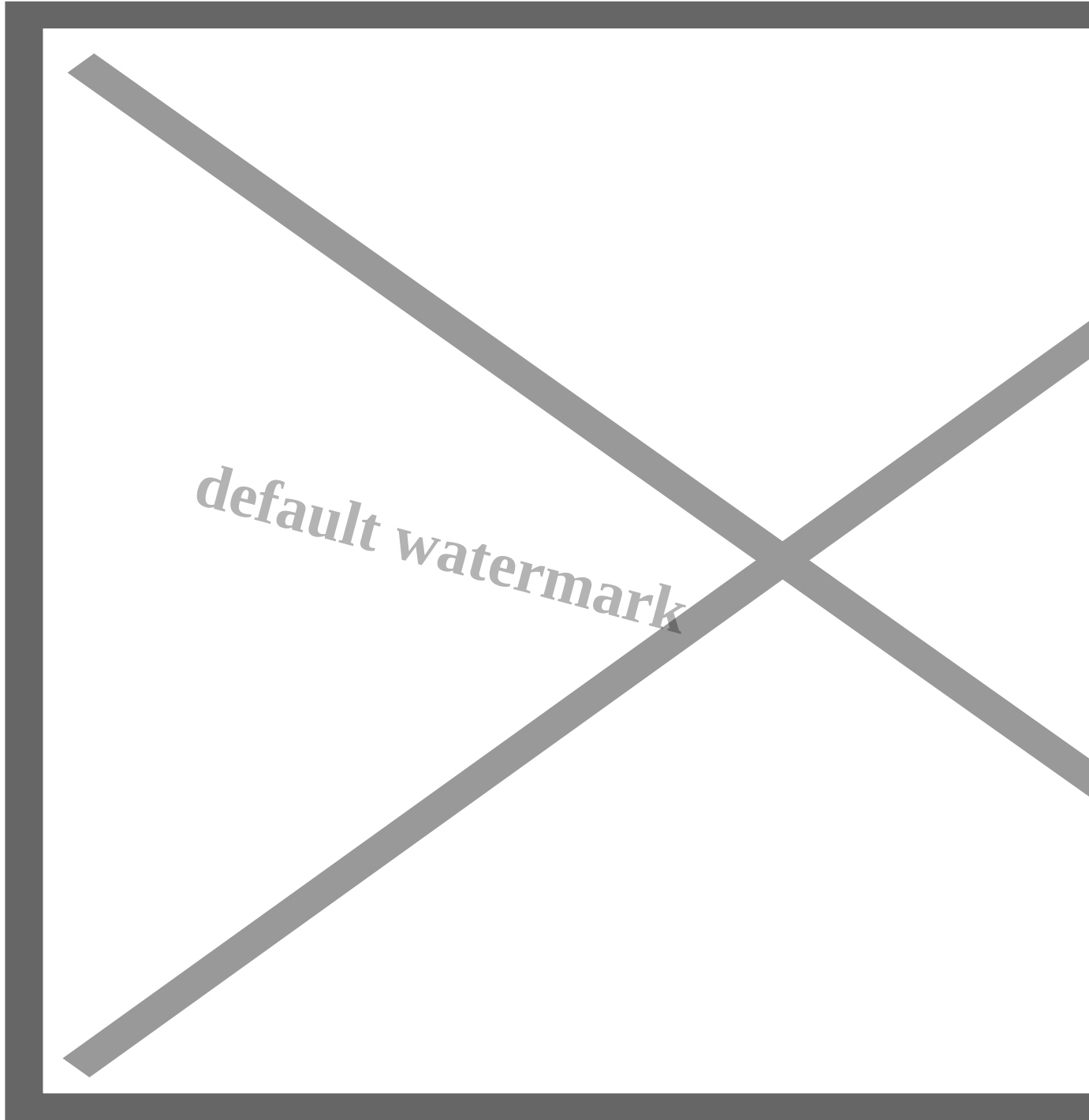
Since its Broadway debut in 2016, *Waitress* has earned a place in the contemporary musical theatre canon not only for its innovative all-female creative team—making history as the first Broadway musical with an all-women top-tier team—but also for its emotional resonance and genre-defying score. Nominated for four Tony Awards, including **Best Musical** and **Best Original Score**, *Waitress* has become a favorite among regional theatres, school productions, and community organizations for

its balance of humor, heartache, and healing. **Sara Bareilles**'s Grammy-nominated score marries pop sensibilities with musical theatre storytelling, creating songs that are emotionally rich and vocally dynamic.

The show's composer and lyricist, Grammy-winning pop star (**Sara Bareilles**) has been instrumental to *Waitress*'s widespread and lasting appeal. Like **Lin-Manuel Miranda** in *Hamilton*, Bareilles not only wrote the score but also stepped into the starring role of Jenna on Broadway, offering a rare fusion of authorship and performance. Her casting brought emotional immediacy to the role and helped bridge the worlds of pop music and musical theatre, drawing new audiences to the stage. Bareilles's heartfelt, melodic songwriting—already known to fans of hits like “[Brave](#)” and “[Love Song](#)”—translates seamlessly into theatrical storytelling, making *Waitress* a resonant experience both musically and emotionally. Her dual role set a powerful precedent for crossover artists and helped establish *Waitress* as a defining musical of the last decade.

**Sara Bareilles's score tells more than Jenna's story—it voices the raw, beautiful messiness of being human.**

Culturally, *Waitress* endures because it tells the story of a woman not through romance or fantasy, but through the lens of work, community, and personal transformation. It avoids the tropes of “escape” narratives, focusing instead on the subtle, slow reclamation of self in the face of emotional abuse and economic hardship. Its appeal is multigenerational: mothers, daughters, working-class audiences, and musical theatre lovers alike find something personal in its melody and message. The show's successful national tours, West End run, and even a filmed live performance released during the pandemic (my first exposure to this musical but not to Bareilles) speak to its ongoing relevance.



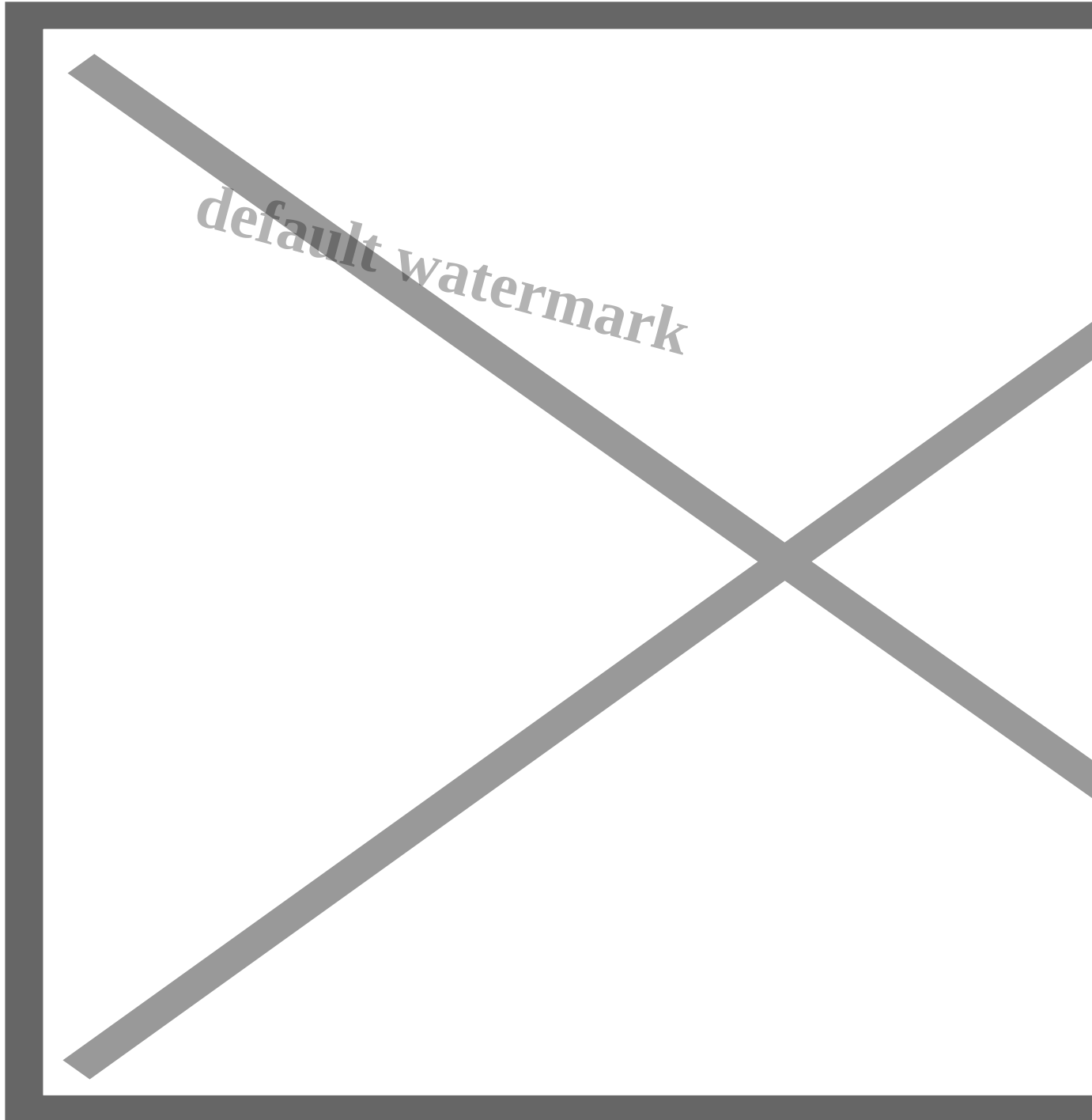
Aaron Arnell Harrington, Candice Marie Woods, Claire Saunders, Hailey Harding, Lexi Rabadi, and Daniel Plimpton | Credit: BW Productions

## PERFORMANCES

At the heart of the production, **Claire Saunders** as Jenna brings an emotionally rich and complex portrayal to the fiercely imaginative waitress and pie baker whose pregnancy prompts a reexamination of her stifled dreams. Saunders, making her PTC debut, brings a grounded vulnerability to the role, eschewing caricature in favor of layered emotional truth. Her vocal performances are emotionally

resonant, most notably in “She Used to Be Mine,” which lands with aching clarity and grace. Saunders’s Jenna feels lived-in and present—a woman whose strength is found in small rebellions and the flavors she dares to invent.

I’ve seen *Waitress* twice now, and both times it has moved me to tears—not an easy feat for this seasoned theatre reviewer.

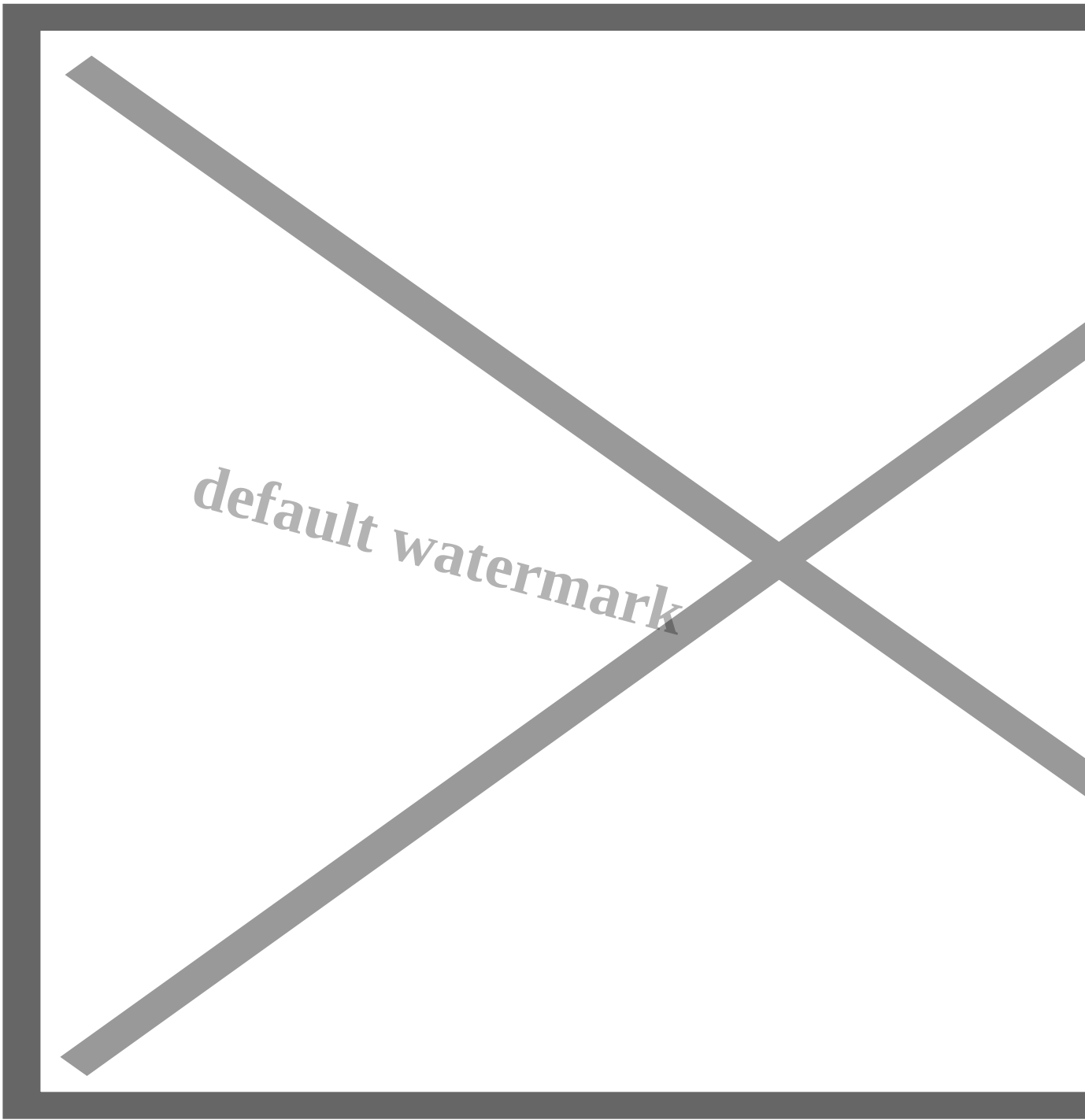


Claire Saunders and Ben Jacoby | Credit: BW Productions

Pioneer Company has put together a stellar cast for the ensemble. With knockout vocals and layered warmth, **Lexi Rabadi**’s Dawn and **Candice Marie Woods**’s Becky bring comic levity while illuminating the challenges faced by working-class women navigating friendship, labor, and love. Rabadi’s quirky earnestness plays off **Daniel Plimpton**’s exuberant Ogie with delightful charm. **Ben Jacoby**’s Dr. Pomatter balances awkwardness with sincerity, making his ethically questionable relationship with Jenna feel complicated rather than romanticized. Meanwhile, **Brent Thiessen**’s Earl skillfully avoids one-note villainy, embodying a complicated partner shaped by his own insecurities and limitations.

PTC veteran **William Parry** lends gravitas and sardonic wit to the role of Joe, Jenna’s curmudgeonly confidant, whose brief moments of wisdom serve as a moral compass within the diner’s world. The ensemble brings warmth and fluidity to the production’s movement, guided by choreographer **Natalie Malotke**’s clean, story-driven style.

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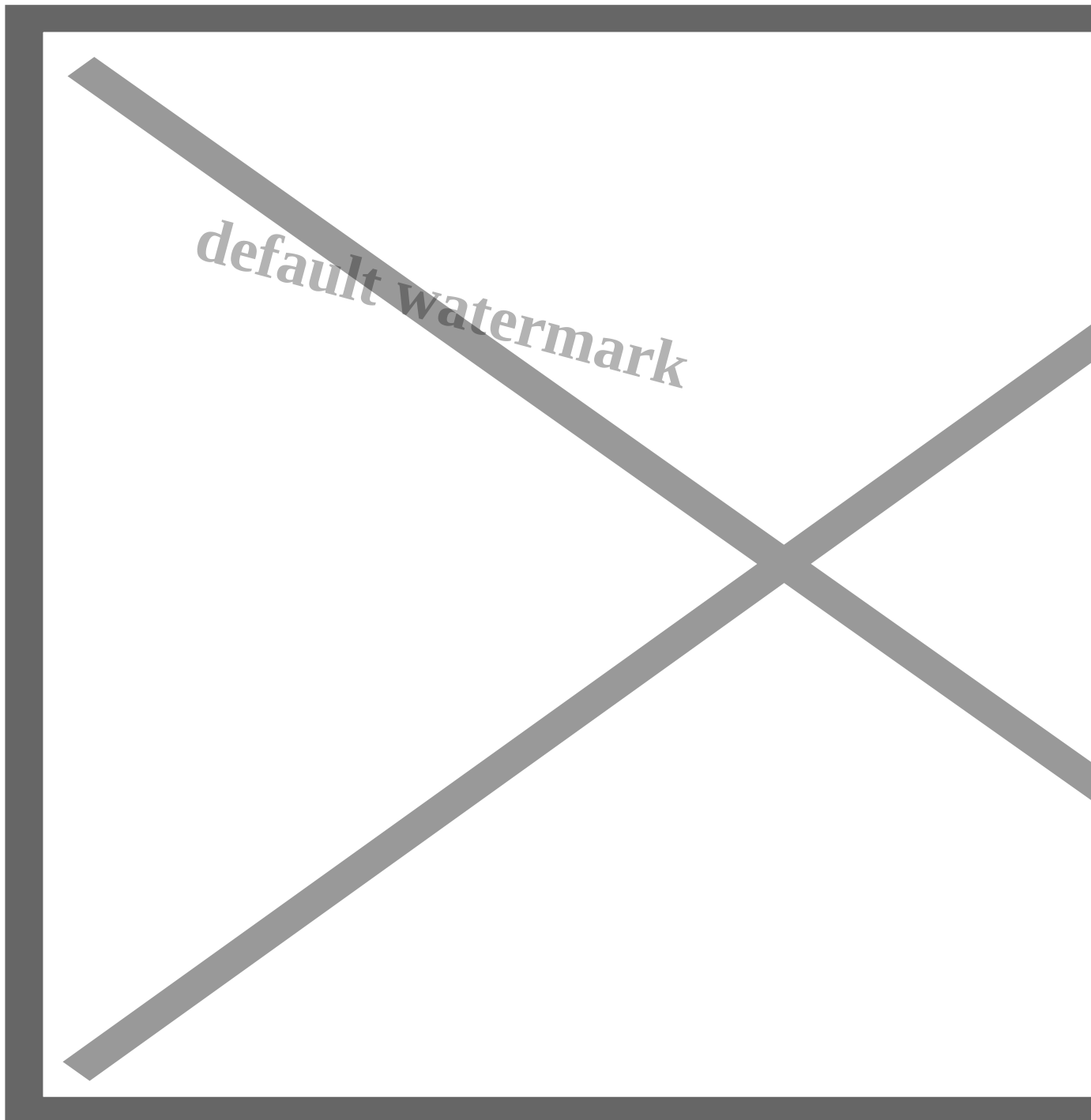


Zeth Dixon, Kamaluonalani Matthias, Claire Saunders, Courtney McMullin, and Jordan Cruz  
| Credit: BW Productions

Technically, the production shines. **Yoon Bae**’s scenic design evokes the warm, lived-in charm of a Southern diner, with inviting textures and layered visual depth—every detail is spot-on. **Patrick Holt** ’s costume design brings personality and narrative clarity, from Jenna’s flour-dusted uniform to Becky’s bold prints and Dawn’s quirky glasses. Each outfit is carefully calibrated to reflect individual identity, socioeconomic context, and emotional evolution. Subtle shifts in fabric texture, color palette, and silhouette reinforce the characters’ internal arcs, anchoring their transformations in

visual storytelling.

**Paul Miller's lighting turns rosy and golden backlight into metaphor:  
sunsets and sunrises marking the cycles of loss and renewal.**  
*~Rhetorical Review~*

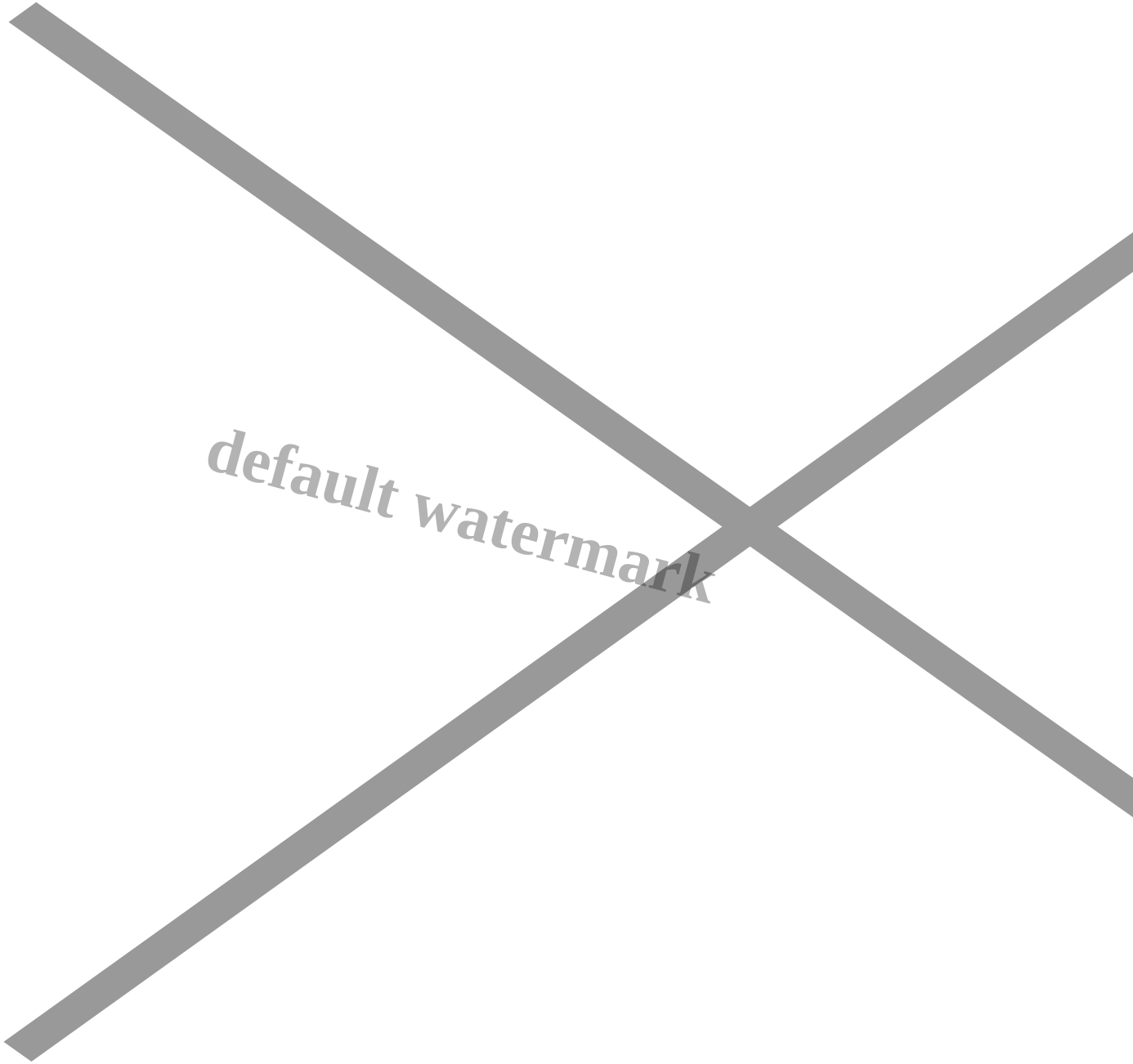


Company | Credit: BW Productions

**Paul Miller**'s lighting design is both dynamic and visually arresting, enriching the show's emotional arc with intentional shifts in color temperature and intensity. His use of golden, rosy hues and soft, glowing backlight to evoke sunsets and sunrises adds radiant warmth and symbolic weight. These atmospheric moments frame Jenna's story in natural cycles of endings and beginnings—the light shifting not only with the time of day but with her slow awakening to self-worth and possibility. The musical direction by **Tom Griffin** ensures that Bareilles's pop-infused score retains its lush harmonies and emotional intimacy, even in the expansive **Simmons Pioneer Memorial Theatre**.

**Waitress doesn't resolve trauma with romance—it reclaims it with voice, appetite, and self-worth.**

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Daniel Plimpton and Lexi Rabadi | Credit: BW Productions

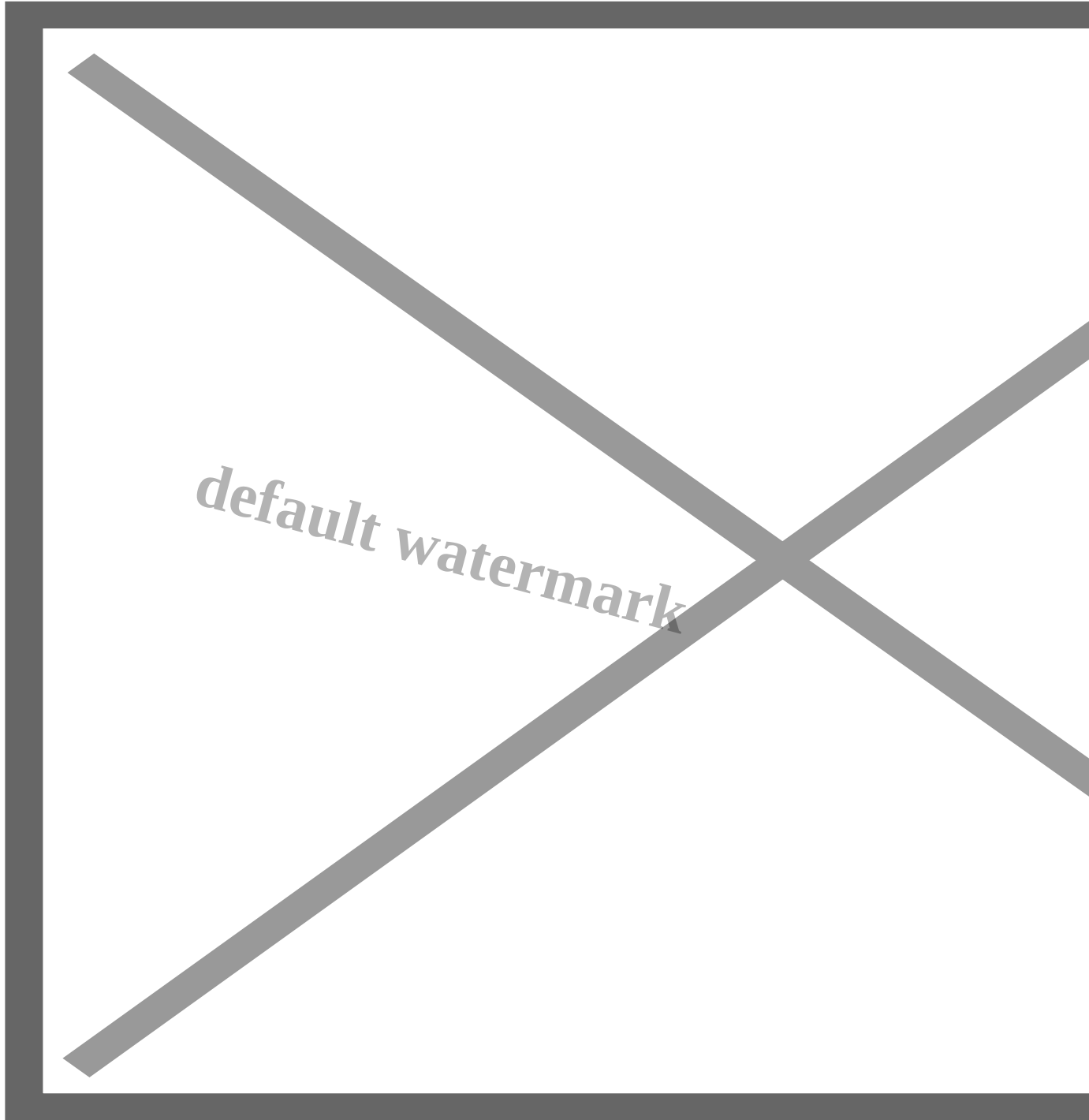
## Empathy in Every Slice: Humanization as Resistance

*Waitress* is a celebration of flawed, funny, deeply human characters navigating the messy middle of life. Through Bareilles's emotionally rich score and Nelson's compassionate book, the musical offers something increasingly rare in mainstream entertainment: a narrative that refuses to simplify or idealize

its characters. Instead, it extends deep empathy to people who are often overlooked—working-class women, small-town dreamers, and survivors of emotional abuse. The pies Jenna invents are more than a quirky narrative device; they function as embodied metaphors, giving voice to pain, defiance, longing, and hope. Her baking becomes an act of resistance, a way to narrate her own life when words fail.

***Her pies aren't just desserts—they're acts of resistance, memory, and longing baked into metaphor***

What *Waitress* succeeds at so powerfully is humanizing trauma without sensationalizing it. Jenna is not a victim trope, but a full person—tired, talented, kind, conflicted. Through her story, the musical challenges audiences to extend compassion to people caught in complex relationships, including Jenna's own affair with Dr. Pomatter, which is portrayed with equal parts romantic charge and ethical ambiguity. Bareilles intentionally drew on her own experiences of feeling lost and remade that emotion into song, particularly in the show's emotional center, "She Used to Be Mine." That ballad—and the show as a whole—invites viewers to see themselves in Jenna's contradictions, to recognize that growth often starts in the quiet moments of self-reckoning.



Candice Marie Woods | Credit: BW Productions

Thereâ??s something honest in its storytelling that bypasses sentimentality and lands instead in the realm of truth. While nearly every song in this show is exceptional, my personal favorite remains â??I **Didnâ??t Plan It**,â?• sung by Becky because of the message. This is an anthem of complicated survival that refuses shame while acknowledging imperfection, and it cuts deep. In this song, Becky sings:

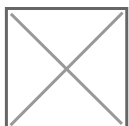
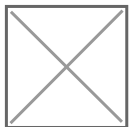
*I didn't plan it  
But the light turned red, and I ran it  
And I'm still standing  
It's not what I wanted, but now that it's right here  
I understand it!  
I didn't plan it  
But it's finally something to feel.â•*

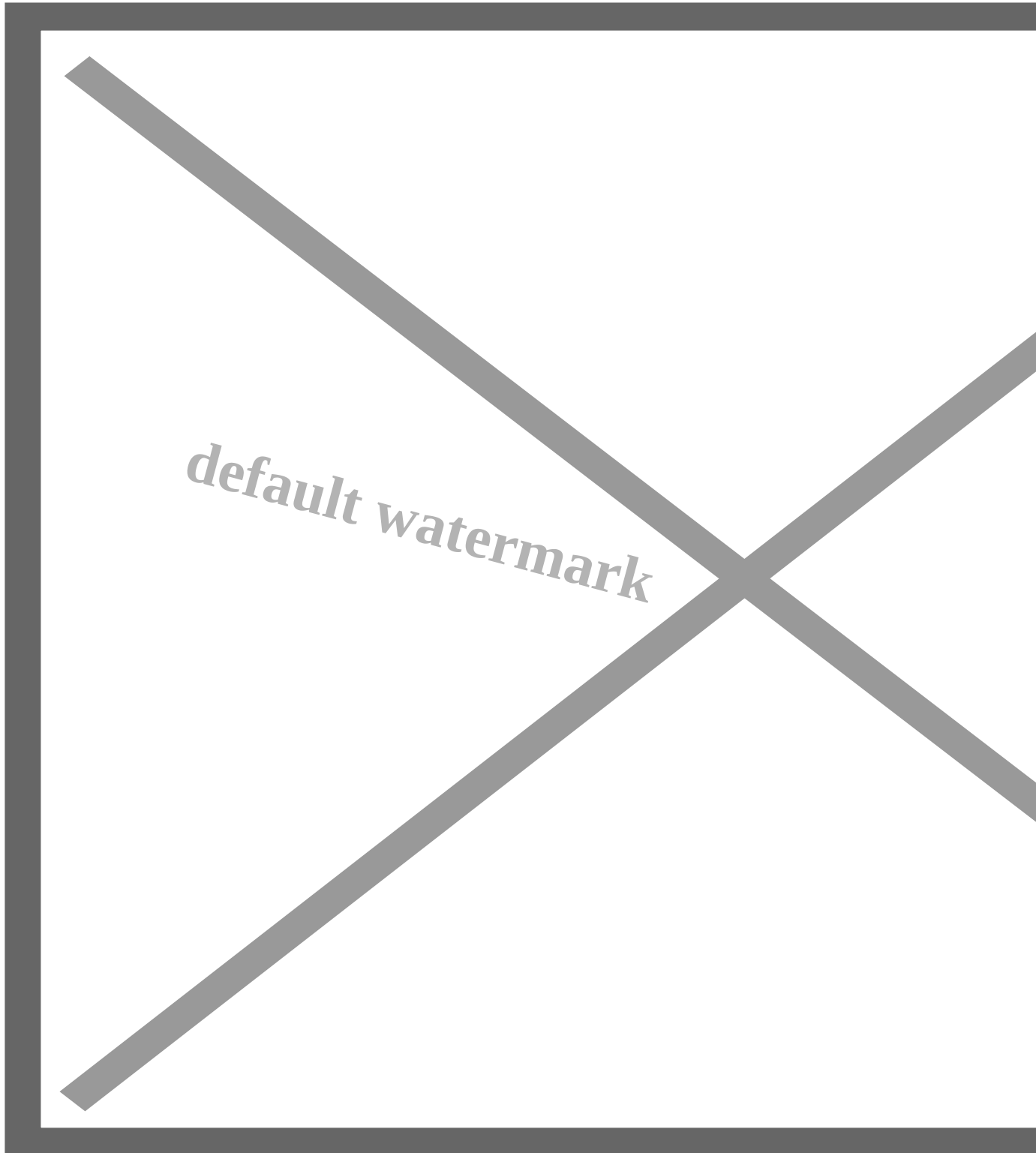
Those lyrics resonate with the marrow of what makes *Waitress* so extraordinary. The show doesn't offer neat resolutions or polished moral arcs. Instead, it embraces the jagged edges of being human—our mistakes, our longings, and our unexpected chances at joy. It's not just a musical; it's a mirror. And it's finally something to feel. I believe that is why this musical succeeds when so few succeed in portraying moral ambiguity with care. What makes *Waitress* particularly affecting is its attention to the emotional and ethical contours of Jenna's journey. Nelson and Bareilles resist the temptation to resolve Jenna's story with a pat romantic ending. Instead, they emphasize Jenna's internal transformation—the reclaiming of voice, appetite, and self.

In the Utah premiere, the addition of an intimacy director, **Sarah Shippobotham**, is a welcome one; scenes of touch and vulnerability are handled with care, underscoring the stakes of consent and emotional complexity.

**Pioneer Theatre Company doesn't just revive a Broadway hit—they  
reframe it with intimacy, care, and a deep respect for transformation.  
~Rhetorical Review~**

Pioneer Theatre Company's *Waitress* is more than a regional debut of a Broadway favorite; it is a thoughtful, intersectional rendering of a modern classic. With its talented cast, cohesive direction, and ethical framing, PTC invites its audience not only to witness Jenna's journey but to taste a bittersweet transformation—the kind that rises, slowly but surely, like a well-baked pie.





## Performance Schedule

**Presented by Pioneer Theatre Company**  
**May 2â??17, 2025 | Simmons Pioneer Memorial Theatre**

# Salt Lake City, Utah

## Venue

**Simmons Pioneer Memorial Theatre**  
300 South 1400 East, Salt Lake City, UT 84112

Directions: [here](#)

- **Monday–Thursday** at 7:00 PM
  - **Friday & Saturday** at 7:30 PM
  - **Saturday Matinee** at 2:00 PM
  - **Special Events:**  
*Curtain Call for All* – Pay What You Can: **Monday, May 12 at 7:00 PM**
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## Ticket Information

- **General Admission:** \$57–\$83 (advance)
  - **Day-of Tickets:** +\$5
  - **Students K–12:** Half-price (Monday–Thursday only)
  - **Limited Promo:** \$63 tickets available using code **PTC63**
  - **Box Office:** (801) 581-6961
  - **Online Tickets:** [www.pioneertheatre.org](http://www.pioneertheatre.org)
  - **Box Office:** (801) 581–6961
  - **Box Office Hours:** Monday–Friday, 10:00 a.m.–6:00 p.m.
  - **Run Time:** Approximately 2 hours 30 minutes with intermission
  - **Audience Advisory:** Recommended for ages 12 and up
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## ACCESSIBILITY

- <https://pioneertheatre.org/visit-us/>

*Waitress* – **Monday, May 12 at 7:00pm** – ASL Interpreted

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## Parking & Directions

- Pioneer Theatre Company is located on the University of Utah campus, directly across the street from Rice-Eccles Football Stadium.
  - **University parking for PTC performances is FREE**, and there is a fair amount of it within a two-block distance of Simmons PMT. You will enjoy better parking than you receive at most downtown events, and you don't have to pay for it.
  - The **12 hour** reserved parking stalls, the ones that are reserved until 8 pm, **ARE AVAILABLE** to PTC patrons during performances. Holders of those permits know those spots will not be held for
-

them during PTC performances.

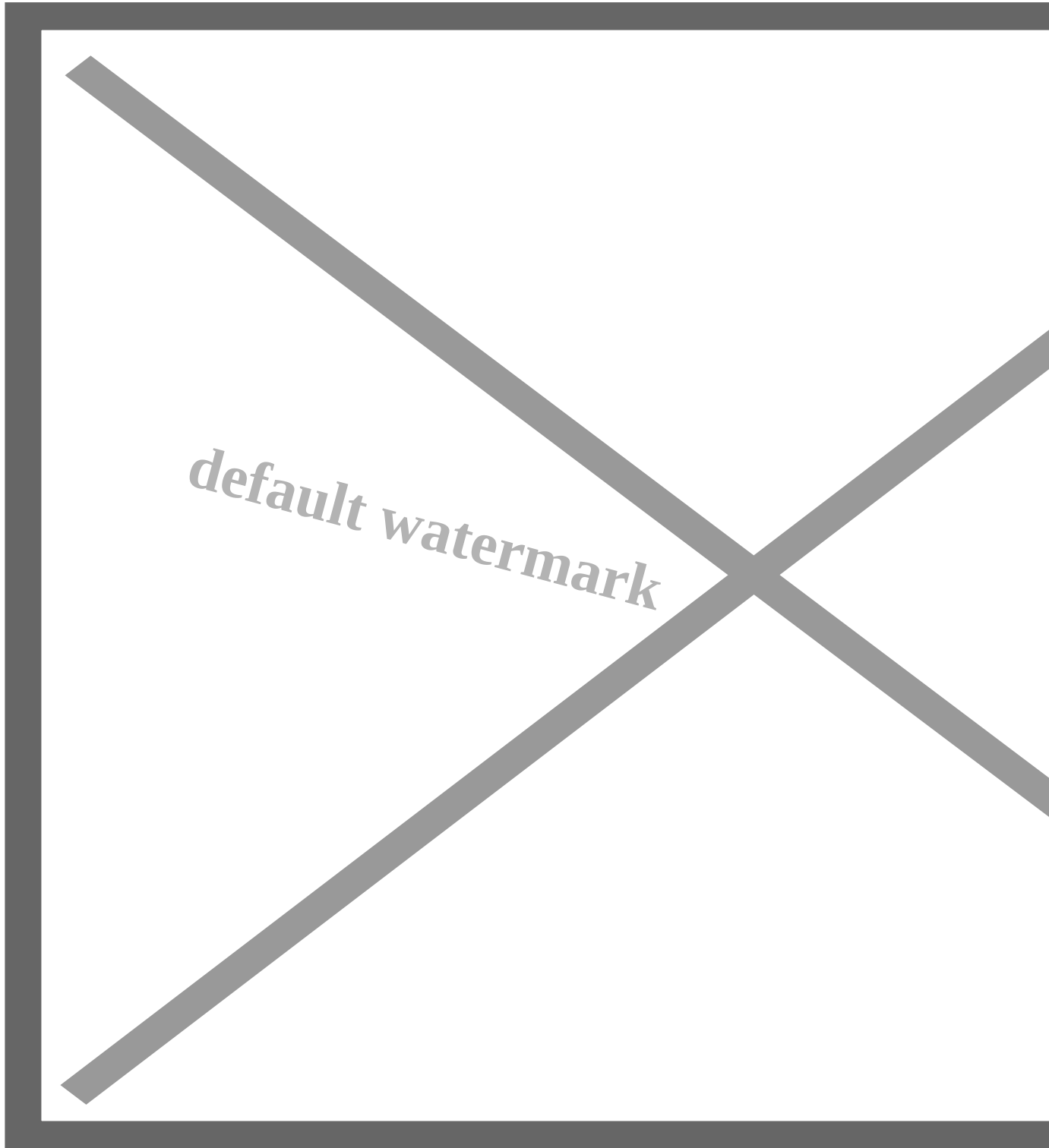
- The **24 hour** reserved spots **ARE NOT available**.
  - The lot to the north of the old Field House is available to PTC patrons at no cost.
  - We advise most patrons to park in the **Rice-Eccles Stadium parking lot**, which is a one-block walk from the theatre. Patrons who park in this lot should walk through the tunnel which passes under South Campus Drive (400 South) and takes them directly to the sidewalk leading to Simmons PMT. The tunnel is located in the northeast corner of the Rice-Eccles lot.
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## Creative Team

- **Director:** Melinda Pfundstein
  - **Book:** Jessie Nelson
  - **Music & Lyrics:** Sara Bareilles
  - **Musical Director/Conductor:** Tom Griffin
  - **Choreographer:** Natalie Malotke
  - **Scenic Designer:** Yoon Bae
  - **Costume Designer:** Patrick Holt
  - **Lighting Designer:** Paul Miller
  - **Sound Designer:** Aaron Hubbard
  - **Hair & Makeup Designer:** Natalia Castilla
  - **Intimacy Director:** Sarah Shippobotham
  - **Casting:** Bob Cline
  - **Production Stage Manager:** James O. Hansen
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## Cast

- **Claire Saunders** as Jenna
  - **Ben Jacoby** as Dr. Pomatter
  - **William Parry** as Joe
  - **Candice Marie Woods** as Becky
  - **Lexi Rabadi** as Dawn
  - **Brent Thiessen** as Earl
  - **Daniel Plimpton** as Ogie
  - **Aaron Arnell Harrington** as Cal
  - **Marjorie Failoni** as Nurse Norma
  - **Ensemble:** Kyle Brand, Jordan Cruz, Zeth Dixon, Luke Foti, Kamaluonalani Matthias, Courtney McMullin
  - **Lulu** (alternating performances): Iris Fernelius, Hailey Harding, Hazel Wilde Pearce
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**Study Guides:** [PTC Study Guide](#), [Lesson Plan and Study Guide](#), [Study Guide](#)

**Category**

1. Musicals
2. Premiere
3. Reviews

## Tags

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15. Hazel Wilde Pearce
16. Iris Fernelius
17. James O. Hansen
18. Jessie Nelson
19. Jordan Cruz
20. Kamaluonalani Matthias
21. Keola Kinghorn
22. Kyle Brand
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- 47. William Parry
- 48. Yoon Bae
- 49. Zeth Dixon

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**Author**

keola06

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