

# 2023-2024 ANNUAL REPORT



STUDIO

# FROM LEADERSHIP

## FRIENDS,

We can't decide what's the headline story for Studio's 23-24 season: A Season of Firsts, or A Quintessential Studio Season.

We kicked off the season with our first English/Spanish production in *Espejos: Clean*, for which we challenged ourselves to provide a fully bilingual experience from website to program to production. It was a year of milestone productions in our newly renovated Victor Shargai Theatre: its first fully proscenium production, with an act curtain and three fully realized interior sets; and its first immersive production, which brilliantly put the museum in *The Colored Museum*. Half of the season's writers were new to Studio (and to DC). And this year's world premiere production of *Problems Between Sisters* was the first in Studio's history to require six tons of hay!

Alongside this newness, we welcomed back a host of beloved familiar faces. Playwright James Ijames returned for the second season in a row, and his play *Fat Ham* became one of the biggest sensations in Studio's history. We produced our fourth Mike Bartlett production. It was a banner year for our affiliated artist group, the Studio Cabinet, featuring the second production for Sivan Battat, the fourth for Natsu Onoda Power and Psalmayene 24, the thirteenth for Holly Twyford, and the fourteenth for Tom Story. The season also featured Nancy Robinette, performing in her seventeenth production, 43 years after her first!

This mixture of the fresh and the familiar is part of the essential nature of Studio. Every year for over four decades, Studio has remained committed to delivering what it's known for: plays by some of the most significant playwrights of our time, produced with artistry and skill, and presented in especially intimate spaces. But we like to think we're equally recognized for a certain artistic restlessness that leads us, and our audience, in new and challenging directions. This report aims to illustrate how our 45th season struck that balance.

None of it would have been possible without the innumerable contributions of our talented staff, inspired artists, devoted board, generous donors, and loyal audiences. For whatever role you played in helping make our season a success, we offer our sincerest thanks.

Sincerely,



David

David Muse  
Artistic Director



Rebecca

Rebecca Ende Lichtenberg  
Executive Director

# FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

## DEAR STUDIO SUPPORTERS,

This past year, my first as Board Chair, we saw audiences that were hungry for theatre. We had more single ticket buyers than before the pandemic, including thousands of new patrons who walked through our doors for the first time. We welcomed new and more diverse audiences, many drawn in by our first ever fully bilingual production and the second best-selling show in Studio's history, *Fat Ham*.

Even with robust audiences, the work on our stages would not be possible without all of the long-time supporters and new donors whose contributions fuel all that we do at Studio. Our donors were eager to deepen their connection by our annual fundraising event, featuring Broadway star Jelani Alladin (who launched his career here at Studio) or by venturing out to Chicago in March to experience the theatre scene there.

Our Board of Trustees, which it is my privilege to lead, plays an essential role in charting the path forward for Studio. This year we've focused on fiscal health and long-term sustainability for the organization while encouraging our progress towards a more equitable and inclusive Studio with expanded outreach for new Board members and opportunities to learn directly from diverse artist perspectives. The Board also championed a much-needed renovation of some of our artist housing units to improve the experience of our visiting artists.

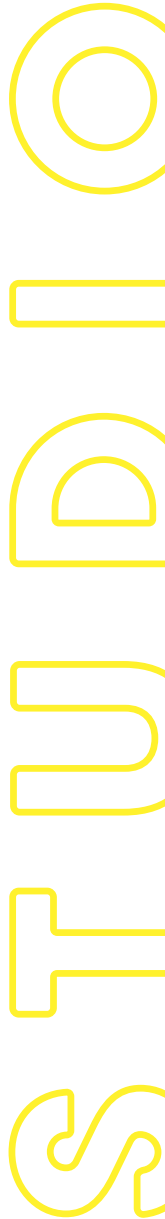
So many people make up our Studio community: our talented artists, our hard-working staff and apprentices, our long-time community partners, our dedicated Trustees, our generous donor circles, and our audiences. I want to thank all of you for the critical role you've played in making all of this possible.

Sincerely,



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rob".

Rob Batarla  
Board of Trustees, Chair



# SEASON BY THE NUMBERS



## OUR AUDIENCE

**47,082**

TOTAL AUDIENCE MEMBERS

**12,084**

FIRST-TIME ATTENDEES

**46**

WEEKS OF PRODUCTIONS

## OUR COMPANY

**121**

ARTISTS HIRED

**26**

FULL-TIME STAFF

**118**

PART-TIME STAFF

## OUR COMMUNITY

**12**

ARTISTS IN CONVERSATION EVENTS

**350**

STUDENTS AT STUDENT MATINEES

**4,018**

TICKETS PURCHASED  
USING STUDIO'S TICKET  
AFFORDABILITY PROGRAMS

Marquis D. Gibson. Photo by Margot Schulman.

# SEASON IN REVIEW



## ESPEJOS: CLEAN

BY CHRISTINE QUINTANA  
SPANISH TRANSLATION AND ADAPTATION  
BY PAULA ZELAYA CERVANTES  
DIRECTED BY ELENA ARAOZ

SEPTEMBER 13, 2023-OCTOBER 22, 2023

**“A HEART-  
WRENCHING  
TWO-HANDER”**

—DC THEATER ARTS

*Espejos: Clean*, Christine Quintana’s potent look at isolation and the connection between two women, is a bilingual, dual monologue play, written in Spanish and English. The design team—set designer Raul Abrego, lighting designer Alberto Segarra, and projections designer Luis Garcia—worked with director Elena Araoz to create an elegant Cancun luxury resort to showcase the play’s indelible central performances. Studio invested in its outreach to bilingual audiences new to the theatre as well as in our language-based accessibility programs, with the marketing and front-of-house staff providing bilingual information on our website, printed programs, and building signage to welcome Spanish-speaking audiences.

Lauren Karaman and Legna Cedillo.  
Photo by Margot Schulman.



## FAT HAM

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BY JAMES IJAMES

DIRECTED BY TAYLOR REYNOLDS

OCTOBER 25, 2023-JANUARY 14, 2024

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**“EACH FUNNY  
TWIST FEEDS  
THE COMIC  
MOMENTUM,  
LEADING TO  
A DYNAMITE  
FINISH.... STUDIO  
THEATRE SERVES  
UP A DELECTABLE  
PLATTER OF  
FAT HAM.”**

—THE WASHINGTON POST

It's rare that Studio produces two plays by the same author in consecutive seasons, but when the writer is James Ijames, and the plays are a commission custom-fit to Washington DC's Black middle class (*Good Bones*, 2023) and his Pulitzer Prize-winning take on *Hamlet* that trades generational violence for a celebration of queer Black chosen family...you treat audiences to two seasons of James Ijames. Taylor Reynold's production built *Fat Ham's* mix of vengeance and comedy with illusions by Ryan Phillips and a total production experience from the full design team. Critics and audience responded, and the play extended six weeks beyond its original close date and became the second-highest grossing play of Studio's history.

Kelli Blackwell, Tanesha Gary, and Greg Alvarez Reid. Photo by Margoſ Schulman.

# AT THE WEDDING

BY BRYNA TURNER

DIRECTED BY TOM STORY

MARCH 13, 2024-APRIL 28, 2024

**“WICKEDLY  
FUNNY AND...  
AWFULLY  
ENTERTAINING.”**

—DC THEATER ARTS

Studio welcomed spring with Bryna Turner’s sweet-tart comedy *At the Wedding*, which opens at the eponymous wedding as the bride’s ex-girlfriend shows up unannounced, considers running away with the bride, and ends up reckoning with her past. It was a show featuring DC talent, including director Tom Story and actor Holly Twyford, both of whom are members of The Cabinet, Studio’s affiliated artist program. Anchored by Dina Thomas, joining Studio for her third production, most of the rest of the cast were likewise area stalwarts, many making their Studio debut. Set designer Luciana Steconi evoked the Northern California barn wedding, replete with a 40 by 12-foot wall of flowers, intricately lit by designer Mary Louise Geiger.



Dina Thomas and Holly Twyford.  
Photo by Margot Schulman.

# PRODUCING AMBITIOUSLY IN THE

Since renovating the Victor Shargai Theatre in 2021 as a part of our Open Studio Campaign, we have taken advantage of the flexibility of a theatre without fixed seating to create an endstage for *The Hot Wing King*; an alley for *People, Places & Things*; and a thrust stage for *Clyde's*. This season we added two new configurations that we wouldn't have been able to achieve before our renovation: Alexander Woodward designed Studio's first full proscenium set for *Love, Love, Love* and Studio Cabinet Member Natsu Onoda Power designed an immersive museum-like experience from lobby to theatre for *The Colored Museum*.



## **LOVE, LOVE, LOVE**

**BY MIKE BARTLETT  
DIRECTED BY DAVID MUSE**

**JANUARY 10, 2024-MARCH 3, 2024**

**“MUSE’S STERLING  
CAST TRAVERSES  
THE DECADES-  
SPANNING  
NARRATIVE  
WITH APLOMB.”**

—THE WASHINGTON POST

Artistic Director David Muse has had his eye on directing *Love, Love, Love* since its premiere in 2010, and once Studio hatched plans to create a fully reconfigurable space, he knew it was finally time to produce it. The play, which traces 44 years in one couple's lives while tracking the cultural pull of the Baby Boomers and their political choices, requires three full rooms of increasing luxury. Supported by Montana Levi Blanco's class- and period-specific costumes alongside the work of lighting designer Cha See and sound designer Matthew M. Nielson, the production was artistically ambitious and critically acclaimed.

Max Jackson, Max Gordon Moore, and Madeline Seidman. Photo by Margot Schulman.



# VICTOR SHARGAI THEATRE

## THE COLORED MUSEUM

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BY GEORGE C. WOLFE

DIRECTED BY PSALMAYENE 24

JULY 3, 2024-AUGUST 18, 2024

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**“PRODUCED  
WITH ELECTRIC  
VITALITY,  
THIS DAMNING  
SATIRE ENTERS  
A NEW CENTURY  
AT STUDIO  
THEATRE.”**

—WASHINGTON CITY PAPER

Studio's production of George C. Wolfe's 1986 classic *The Colored Museum* was no less ambitious—designer Natsu Onoda Power took over the lobby and full theatre space to create an immersive environment with a custom-built seating area within a structure fashioned after a 17<sup>th</sup>-century slave ship alongside art objects and artefacts echoing each of Wolfe's short plays or “exhibits” that explore the legacy and power of Black lives in the United States. Studio's Community Engagement department facilitated a partnership with Duke Ellington High School of the Performing Arts leading to student-created response boxes to the play, which became part of the production's designed environment.



Matthew Elijah Webb.  
Photo by Teresa Castracane.

# NEW WORK AT STUDIO



WORLD PREMIERE

## **PROBLEMS BETWEEN SISTERS**

BY JULIA MAY JONAS  
DIRECTED BY SIVAN BATTAT

MAY 8, 2024–JUNE 16, 2024

**“THE SNEAKY  
BRILLIANCE OF  
‘PROBLEMS BETWEEN  
SISTERS’ IS THAT [IT  
ASKS THE] COMPLEX  
QUESTION: ‘WHAT  
IF THE SISTERS  
GAVE THEMSELVES  
PERMISSION TO ACT  
AS MEN DO?’”**

—THE NEW YORK TIMES

Since 2011, Studio has premiered at least one play a season, introducing new work into the international repertoire. This season, we produced Julia May Jonas’s *Problems Between Sisters*. This play is part of her five-play ALTAS cycle (“All Long True American Stories”), in which Jonas radically reimagines canonical 20<sup>th</sup> century American plays that center on male protagonists and experiences as they’d be experienced by other characters, mostly women. *Problems Between Sisters* is her sly re-vision for Sam Shepard’s *True West*, offering a version of Shepard’s look at violence and birthright embodied by sisters who are both eight months pregnant. Directed by Studio Cabinet Member Sivan Battat, the production captured the not-quite naturalism that animates both Jonas’s and Shepard’s plays, supported by the work of set designer Emmie Finckel, lighting designer Colin K. Bills, and sound designers UptownWorks.

Annie Fox and Stephanie Janssen.  
Photo by Margot Schulman.



## STUDIO R&D

Studio R&D is our incubator for new plays, new relationships, and new modes of collaboration. In addition to producing the world premiere of Julia May Jonas's *Problems Between Sisters*, Studio commissioned four artists to develop projects for future seasons.

Studio's commissioning program invites new and established writers and directors from the US and beyond to develop work specifically for Studio's intimate spaces. Studio's director commissions are unique in the field, paying directors to develop their ideas for future productions, focusing on ways to make creative use of Studio's intimate and flexible performance spaces.

In the 2023-2024 season, Studio commissioned playwrights **Molly Smith Metzler**, author of *Cry It Out* (Studio, 2018) among many other plays and the showrunner for *Maid* and the upcoming *Sirens*, both on Netflix, as well as **a. k. payne**, whose plays include *Amani* (Rattlestick Theater/National Black Theatre, 2023) and *Furlough's Paradise* (Alliance Theatre, 2023; Geffen Playhouse, 2024). Studio extended director's commissions to **Taylor Reynolds** (*Fat Ham*, 2023) and **Margot Bordelon** (*POTUS* at Arena Stage, 2023).

Julia May Jonas and David Muse at the 2023 ADC Dinner. Photo by Avi Littky.

# PARTNERSHIPS

The logo for Solas Nua, featuring the words "SOLAS" and "NUA" stacked vertically in a bold, white, sans-serif font against a solid magenta background.

## **PANTI BLISS: IF THESE WIGS COULD TALK**

**WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY PANTI BLISS  
DIRECTED BY PHILLIP MCMAHON**

**JUNE 26, 2024-JULY 7, 2024**

In a four-way partnership with DC new Irish arts organization Solas Nua, Ireland-based company THISISPOPBABY, and The Abbey Theatre, Ireland's national theatre, Studio was thrilled to present *Panti Bliss: If These Wigs Could Talk*, a salacious, funny, and political solo turn from Irish drag queen Panti Bliss, tracing her life from rural Ireland to wide-spread fame as a somewhat reluctant spokeswoman in favor of same-sex marriage in the 2015 referendum to the country's current, more reactionary moment.



## **THE THEATRE LAB'S ARTS INSTITUTE FOR CREATIVE ADVANCEMENT (AICA)**

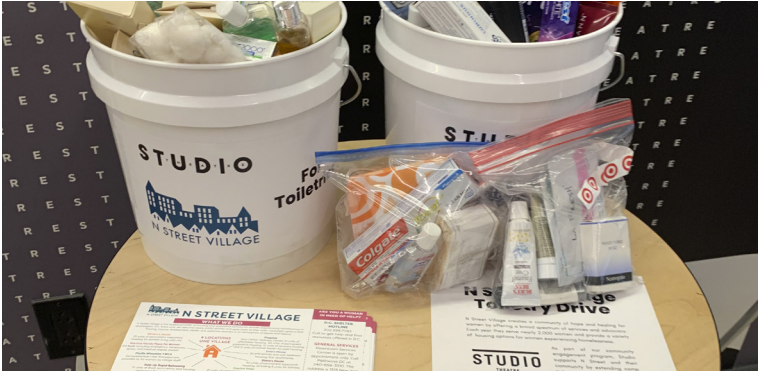
The AICA is an intensive education and apprenticeship program that targets youth who are disconnected from or under-engaged in school and work, many of whom have never seen a theatrical production. The program prepares these young people for careers as offstage theater professionals, with training in lighting and audio engineering, set construction, scenic painting, rigging, and stage management. As one of the AICA's core training partners, Studio hosted a group of students from The Theatre Lab during the season for a series of technical theatre workshops in platform and flat construction, lighting plot installation, installation of audience risers, speaker rigging, and programming a sound system to a designer's specifications. Studio has continued to work with participants including hiring them to run wardrobe, run light board, and work on the backstage crew.



## **IN RESIDENCE: WASHINGTON IMPROV THEATER**

Washington Improv Theater (WIT) brought unscripted performances to Studio for the second season in a row. WIT's residency featured Harold Night, a 13-year-and-running free weekly event, shows by their company ensembles including the musical ensemble iMusical, and special director-led performances.

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

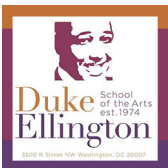


Toiletry drive for community partner N Street Village

Studio Theatre’s Community Engagement activities are grounded in our values of inclusion and stewardship. Studio fosters connections that build bridges between professional theatre and educational, service, and support groups. These activities include long-standing partnerships with eight organizations whose missions align with ours, shorter-term partnerships aligned with specific productions in any given season, and other programs to make Studio’s programming affordable and accessible to all and to engage the people at the core of the stories we produce on stage.

One highlight of our engagement work was the opportunities we had to bring art, service, and audience together through donation drives. During the run of *Espejos: Clean*, Studio worked with unhoused women’s shelter N Street Village, a multi-year partner in our neighborhood, to organize a toiletry drive. In just four weeks, nearly a thousand travel-sized toiletry items were donated, far surpassing both Studio and N Street’s expectations. During the run of *Fat Ham*, Studio held a food drive alongside the extra-long run of the show, collecting over 500 food supplies for multi-year partner SMYAL (Supporting and Mentoring Youth Advocates and Leaders) to contribute to their food pantry for youth.

## Other community partners during the season include:

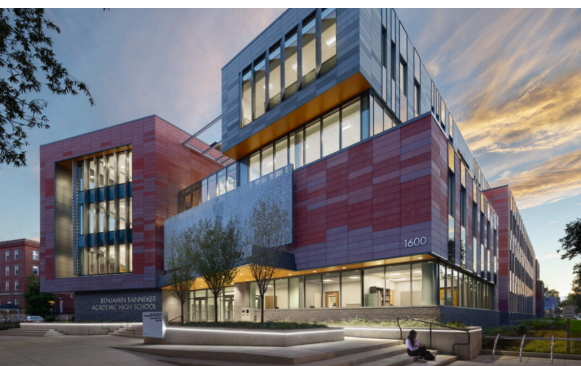


# STUDENT ENGAGEMENT



## STUDENT MATINEES

During the 2023-2024 season, Studio held two student matinees of James Ijames's play *Fat Ham*. Approximately 350 students attended from six high schools. To deepen student engagement, educators were provided with a curriculum guide that aligns with local and federal curriculum goals. During the post-show conversations, students reflected on the play's themes of generational trauma and Ijames's decision to end the play in a place of joy, in contrast to its source play, *Hamlet*.



## BANNEKER VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

For the second year, Studio joined other area non-profits as a Community Lab partner for Benjamin Banneker Academic High School, located in the Logan Circle area. Over the course of the year, Studio hosted five weekly Banneker volunteers. The students were mentored by Studio staff.



## THE COLORED MUSEUM AND DUKE ELLINGTON

Museum and Visual Arts majors at Duke Ellington School for the Arts, a public high school in DC, received a workshop from *The Colored Museum* director Psalmayene 24 and environmental designer Natsu Onoda Power. They discussed the play and were given the invitation to create their own responses to it. Set in 3-D found object collage boxes, each of the pieces provides an interpretation of the themes, scenes, and characters in the play. The boxes were included within the scenic environment of the production.

TOP: Cast of *Fat Ham*. Photo by Margot Schulman.

# APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM



2023-2024 Apprentices: Ranteá Thompson, Diana Carey, Tyandria Jaaber, Mae Mironer, Alexa Locarno, Josh Morales, Cleopatra Mavhunga, Malaika Fernandes, Lucas Gomes, Niara Richards, and David Plummer

During the 2023-2024 season, Studio Theatre was joined by 11 early-career professionals as part of the Apprenticeship Program. The program, an integral part of Studio's operations, has provided on-the-job training for over 150 individuals since 2006. The 2023-2024 apprentice class was the first to benefit from an increase in compensation as Studio took time to launch our new salaried Fellows-in-Residence program.

Over the season, Studio's apprentices gained substantive hands-on experience in the work of a professional theatre. Directing Apprentice Cleopatra Mavhunga supported each of the season's directors and directed the public reading of *True West* by Sam Shepard during the run of *Problems Between Sisters*. Stage Management Apprentice Lucas Gomes was involved in the five rehearsal processes and productions during their time at Studio, reflecting that by the third play of the season they were "ready for anything and unafraid of any challenges." Technical Directing Apprentice Mae Mironer built and led a two-day scenic workshop for interested apprentices. Other examples of the Apprentices' work included: Artistic Producing Apprentice Malaika

Fernandes organized and administered Equity Principal Auditions and Non-Equity General Auditions; Marketing Apprentice David Plumer researched Studio history both in the building and by visiting Studio's archives at the University of Maryland; and Development Apprentice Niara Richards interviewed past guest artists and drafted letters for Studio's Calendar Year End Campaign.

The alumni of the Apprenticeship Program are now working locally and across the country at institutions including Manhattan Theatre Club, Signature Theatre, Ford's Theatre, Spiegelworld Atlantic City, Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company, and transitioning to full-time positions at Studio. In addition, alumni have participated in fellowships with New York Theatre Workshop, Roundabout Theatre Company, and the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society.

In 2024 we launched the application process for the Fellows-in-Residence workforce development program. In addition to housing, all fellows receive a salary and full benefits. Over 400 applicants applied to be part of the first class of Fellows-in-Residence.

# FISCAL YEAR 2024 IN CONTEXT

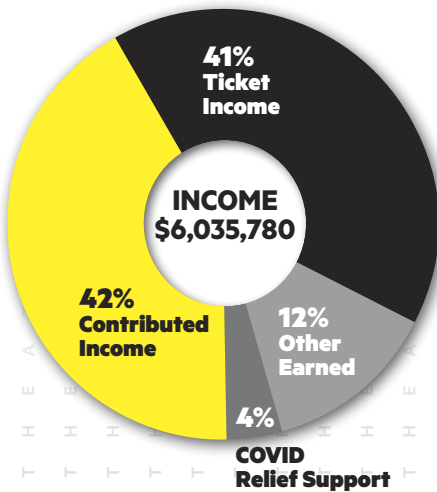
The 2023-2024 season featured six productions, including *Fat Ham*, our second-highest grossing show of all time. **Single ticket income and overall attendance for the season exceeded pre-pandemic levels.** We have focused on building space rental income into a meaningful revenue stream, surpassing \$400k in FY24.

While most areas of fundraising, including government, corporate and foundation support have remained steady, we grew individual giving 8% over the prior year.

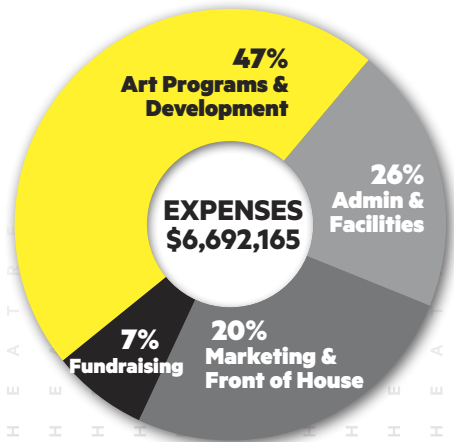
We continue to operate with a smaller staff and have reduced operational expenditure in many areas. **In FY24, we doubled the stipends for our Apprentice Program, a step towards paying full wages with benefits in FY25,** but overall expenses were flat compared to the prior year.

Despite significant income growth of 18% since before the pandemic, inflation and our commitment to paying equitable salaries has left an operating deficit of approximately 10% of our budget. Part of that deficit was offset in FY24 by a last installment of the Employee Tax Retention Credit. The rest of the deficit was covered by remaining surplus funds from FY21 and FY22, which will also sustain us in FY25 as we work towards a balanced budget through increasing fundraising.

## ANNUAL OPERATING INCOME



## ANNUAL OPERATING EXPENSES





# 2023-2024 STUDIO BOARD

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# THANK YOU TO OUR SEASON



Dina Thomas and Jonathan Atkinson in  
*At the Wedding*. Photo by Margot Schulman.

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\*In memoriam

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Studio Theatre extends our gratitude to all of our 2023 – 2024 donors who supported our work on stage and in the community.

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\*In memoriam

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