

1995



2025

DIRECTED  
BY  
STEVE VERNON

# MERCURY

STARRING  
JEFF PHILLIPS

A NEW PRODUCTION

WRITTEN BY  
LEE LOWRIMORE

A brand-new local play that invites you to experience a bold, witty, and touching exploration of friendship, love, and the unbreakable spirit that insists that "the show must go on"!

The show contains adult language, mature themes, and moments both hilarious and moving.

# August 21st-31st, 2025

Thur-Sat 7:30 pm / Sun 3 pm

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# Mercury

Written by Lee Lowrimore

This production marks the world debut of **Mercury**

## Crew:

Director.....Steve Vernon  
Stage Manager.....Dorothy Rankin  
Light Design.....Jeff Loy  
Light Board Operator.....Jennifer Cox  
Sound Operators.....Courtney Harding, Dorothy Rankin  
Set Design and Construction.....Terry Collins  
Costume Design.....Stephanie Scheu Aman and  
Cape Fear Costume  
Sound Design.....Steve Vernon

## Cast:

Jeff Phillips.....Jeremy  
Benjamin Thomas-Reid.....Chad  
Jace Carlyle Berry.....Vonnie  
Devin DiMattia.....Finn  
Blair Houtz.....Selwin  
Paula Davis.....Mrs. Lipschitz  
The Switchboard.....Controls designed and built  
by Eric Robinson, controls re-wired by Dave Hill,  
sound designed and wired by Jeff Loy,  
cabinet built by Lee Lowrimore

Special Thanks to Eric Robinson, Dave Hill, Jeff Loy, Gina Gambony, the Staff and Volunteers of Thalian Hall, Lula's A Pub



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### **Setting:**

A small, crowded, office in an old building in an old neighborhood in the East Village of Manhattan. The room has two functions. It is the home of Mercury Message Service, a telephone answering service staffed by human beings. It is also the box office, and costume and props storage for the off off Broadway theater in the room on the other side of the wall.

### **Time:**

1978

There will be a 15 Minute Intermission

#### **Act One**

Scene 1-Early Summer  
Scene 2-Five Days Later  
Scene 3-Ten Days Later  
Scene 4-Same Night, After  
Midnight  
Scene 5-The Next Day  
Scene 6-Two Days Later

#### **Act Two**

Scene 1-Three Days Later  
Scene 2-Later That Night  
Scene 3-The Next Day  
Scene 4-One Week Later  
Scene 5-Two Weeks Later  
Scene 6-Later That Night  
Scene 7-Three Weeks Later

### **Writer's Notes:**

There are so many people to thank for making Mercury happen. First, there's the nearly endless list of folks who read the manuscript and gave me thoughtful and insightful feedback. This list includes one dear friend who read every single draft of the play (was it 13? 17? more?), and still plans to come see the production. Thank you, Rich - above and beyond. Then there are the dozens of actors who did the many table reads, whether in my living room, at the now defunct TheatreNow, or at the Big Dawg Productions rehearsal space. I will not try to name them all because I would surely forget someone, and I couldn't bear that. I will simply say that I love you all, and the play



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became better for your efforts. Thank you to the talented folks in this cast who are bringing these characters to life for the first time. They are a delight, and I hope you enjoy their work as much as I have. Then there are the design and technical folks who dress and light and house this work. Without them the actors would be standing on a bare stage, naked, in the dark, which may sound like theater to somebody, but not to me. Thank you. A special shout out to Eric Robinson, who built the console of the switchboard, the central ongoing set piece. There are two more people who must be thanked above others because the play would not have happened without them. First, there's Steve Vernon, the director of the play and Artistic Director of Big Dawg. Steve has always treated the play with respect, and has never given up on it, even when our efforts to produce it eight years ago didn't come to fruition. He has also found a way, if somewhat acerbically, to deal with the fact that I never met a scene I couldn't rewrite. Thank you, Brother. And thank you to the person who said to me ten years ago, "would you just finish the play? For me?" My wife, Dorothy Rankin. Somehow our lives turn and twine and always wind up bringing us together, and that means the world to me. Finally, thanks to everyone who comes to see this play. What we do as theater people may be silly, but it would be infinitely sillier without you. Thank you.

### **Bios**

**Jeff Phillips (Jeremy)** is celebrating 35 years in Wilmington theater. This is his first show with Big Dawg (second show with Steve Vernon.) A few of Jeff's leading roles include Edna in *Hairspray*, Sweeney Todd in *Sweeney Todd, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, Billy Flynn in *Chicago*, and Albin/ Zaza in *La Cage Au Folles*. Jeff thanks Steve, Lee, and Dorothy for letting him come play.

**Benjamin Thomas-Reid (Chad)** is checking off another name on his list of working with the who's who of Wilmington Theatre Royalty! In just three short years, Ben has been able to work with Opera House, Thalian Association, Big Dawg, and Cape Fear Shakespeare. He was last seen onstage as one of the Clowns in *The 39 Steps*, and he made his Wilmington directing debut this summer with *Beetlejuice Jr.*, and is looking forward to his next directing gig, *Dracula: A Comedy of Terrors* coming this October! Thank you to Lee for writing such amazing characters, Steve for the phenomenal direction, this insanely talented cast, and as always, my husband Matthew for tackling bedtime with Bash while Dada is away at rehearsal.

**Jace Carlyle Berry (Vonnie)** is honored to be performing in *Mercury*. Previous Big Dawg acting credits include: *What the Constitution Means to Me* (Debater), *Real Inspector Hound* (Felicity), *Night of the Living Dead* (Barbara), *Women Playing Hamlet* (Jessica), *Let the Right One In* (Eli,) *Men on Boats* (Old Shady), *The Revolutionists* (Charlotte Corday), and *Agnes of God* (Agnes). Big Dawg directing credits: *God of Carnage*, *Airness*, and *Always a Bridesmaid*. Endless thanks to Steve, Dorothy, and the cast, and a special thanks to Lee for trusting us with his words.

**Devin DiMattia (Finn)** is honored to be returning to The Ruth and Bucky Stein Theater after playing Simon Gascoyne in Big Dawg's 2024 production of *The Real Inspector Hound*. He would like to thank Steve and Lee for giving him this opportunity, and to his partner, Sully, for all of his continued love and support. Devin's favorite Lou Reed song is "Perfect Day" (although if we're counting Velvet Underground songs, then it's "Oh! Sweet Nuthin").

**Blair Houtz (Selwin)** grew up in the theatre community around Raleigh, starting with Raleigh Little Theatre and DPAC; progressing into middle school plays at St. Timothys School, and finally at Cardinal Gibbons High School. He then took his talents to University of North Carolina at Wilmington which led him to this city to stay. At UNCW he majored in English with a concentration in Shakespeare Studies. During this time he took a break from stage acting and spent more time

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acting in commercials and short films with friends in the Film Department— eventually leading to working with local film companies like Lighthouse Films, Wallaby Films, & Boot Scrap. Blair recently made his return to the stage this summer as Ross in Cape Fear Shakespeare's *Macbeth* at Greenfield Lake Amphitheater, and now is looking to keep the thespian momentum going.

**Paula Davis (Mrs. Lipschitz)** says it is a great honor to be part of a new show in any capacity, but to be trusted with being the first actor to portray one of the characters is beyond special. Thank you to Lee Lowrimore for the opportunity and words, dear Dorothy for keeping the ship going, and Steve for plotting the course. To be sharing the stage with such wonderful actors is a privilege.

**Steve Vernon (Director)** dabbles in theatre.

**Lee Lowrimore (Playwright)** worked and studied at the Dallas Theater Center from 1980 to 1984. While there he adapted *The Wind in the Willows* for the main stage, and wrote and starred in a studio production of the one man show *Bertrand*. His work at the Theater Center earned him an MFA in acting and playwriting. Since moving to Wilmington he has written and produced the award winning short film, *Regular Kids*. *Mercury* is his first full length play in 40 years.



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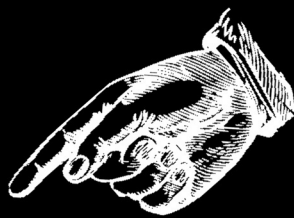
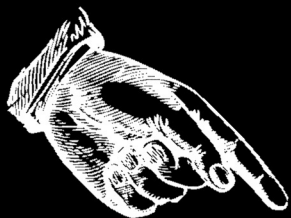
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Directed by Mirla Criste



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Big Dawg Productions extends its sincere thanks to all those who donated to us in the last year. Every dollar supports local theatre, local actors and crews, and allows us to continue bringing unique and thought provoking (or at least funny) theatre to the stage and expand our community impact with new programs.

### **GRANT SPONSORS**

The Arts Council of Wilmington/NHC, The Landfall Foundation, The Wilson Center at Cape Fear Community College

### **EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS**

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Susan Auten, Allison Callahan, Barbara Clouse, Anabela Freeland, Karl Hess, Michelle & Clark Wheeler



## **History of Big Dawg Productions**

Founded in 1995, Big Dawg Productions initially performed in rented spaces like Thalian Hall's Studio Theater, the company established its first permanent home in 2008 at the historic Cape Fear Playhouse on Castle Street, opening in 2009 with *A Thousand Clowns*. Following the pandemic, the company returned to Thalian Hall's Studio Theatre, where the company reopened with the acclaimed *The Lifespan of a Fact*, delighting sold-out audiences with one of the first live post-pandemic productions in the area.

## **Big Dawg's Mission**

To produce entertaining, thought provoking, and socially responsible theater, with an emphasis on involving youth and the community in the performing arts.

## **Board Of Directors**

Zach Peschl - President

Randy Davis - Vice President

Chad Hsu - Treasurer

Terri Hsu - Secertary

Jennifer Cox, La'Tuan Danns, Jeff Loy, Holli Saperstein, Benjamin Thomas-Reid

Steve Vernon - Artistic Director

## **AND**

Our small, but dedicated group, of community advisors and volunteers who work in the community to support the company in fundraising, and outreach.

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Directed by Benjamin Thomas-Reid

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Sunday matinees at 3:00 pm