Three Acts, Two Dancers, One Radio Host

Ira Glass, Monica Bill Barnes, Anna Bass

Ira Glass, Monica Bill Barnes, Anna Bass  Performers
Monica Bill Barnes  Director and Choreographer
Jane Cox  Lighting Designer
Kelly Hanson  Set and Costume Designer

Robert Saenz de Viteri  Creative Producing Director
Tess James  Lighting Director and Stage Manager
Isabella F. Byrd  Lighting Director and Stage Manager
David Nelson  Production Manager

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THIS AMERICAN LIFE host Ira Glass has collaborated with Monica Bill Barnes & Company to invent a show that combines two art forms that, as Mr. Glass puts it, “have no business being together—dance and radio.” One is all words and no visuals. One is all visuals and no words. The result is a funny, lively, and very talky evening of dance and stories that brought down the house in its first test run at Carnegie Hall. “What makes it work,” says Mr. Glass, “is a shared sensibility. As dancers, Monica and Anna [Bass] are these amazingly relatable and funny storytellers without words.”

Radio host Ira Glass and choreographer Monica Bill Barnes thought their work shared a sensibility, even though hers includes no talking and his involves no physical movement whatsoever. “There’s something funny and intensely personal in her dances,” Mr. Glass says, “with these moments of awkwardness or self-consciousness or striving that I find so relatable.”

“Ira has a way of telling stories that makes me feel like I am playing a supporting role,” says Ms. Barnes. “I will cringe, laugh, and sometimes be heartbroken—basically, I empathize, which is what I want an audience to do when we are dancing.”

In May 2012, they collaborated on three short dances that were part of a This American Life variety show that was beamed into movie theaters nationwide. It was such a success that they decided to do a full show that combines stories and dance.

Some are performed together onstage by Mr. Glass, Ms. Barnes, and Ms. Bass. For a few, the dancers or the radio host take over for a while.

“People who like This American Life will probably like this,” says Mr. Glass, “because it’s just like the radio show, um, if you picture dancers during all the stories.”

“I think it’s important that we put the phrase ‘risk taking’ into the press materials and show description,” adds Ms. Bass. “That’s important in the dance world.”

“Done,” says Mr. Glass. “Well done.”
Ira Glass is the host and creator of the public radio program *This American Life*. The show is heard on more than 500 public radio stations in the United States, and also on public radio in Canada and Australia. Most weeks, it’s the most popular podcast in America. Under Mr. Glass’s editorial direction, *This American Life* has won the highest honors for broadcasting and journalistic excellence. A television adaptation of the program ran on the Showtime network for two years, winning three Emmy Awards. The radio show has put out its own comic book, greatest hits compilations, live stage shows, two feature films, a “radio decoder” toy, temporary tattoos, and a paint-by-numbers set. A spin-off program called *Serial* ran for twelve weeks in 2014 and quickly became a pop-culture phenomenon, the most listened-to podcast ever created. *Three Acts, Two Dancers, One Radio Host* is Mr. Glass’s professional dance-show début.

Monica Bill Barnes (Director and Choreographer) is the Artistic Director of Monica Bill Barnes & Company Productions, a New York City-based dance company founded in 1997. Ms. Barnes creates full-length shows that tour the country’s biggest stages and tiniest rooms, bringing dance where it doesn’t belong: making site-specific dances in public places, mounting collaborations with radio hosts, and bringing down the house at comedy shows. MB&B&Co has performed in more than 70 cities throughout the United States, at venues including the American Dance Festival, the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival. Since 2006, Ms. Barnes has been making duets for herself and Anna Bass. She is continually inspired by their partnership on and off stage. Ms. Barnes began working with Ira Glass in 2012, when she created a solo for David Rakoff and performed with MB&B&Co as a part of *This American Life Live!* Her current projects include a collaboration with author and visual artist Maira Kalman to create a guided museum workout, and *Happy Hour*, the world’s first-ever cocktail-party dance show, featuring Ms. Barnes and Ms. Bass.

Anna Bass (Dancer) began working with MB&B&Co in 2003 and now serves as its Associate Artistic Director. She has performed Ms. Barnes’s work all over the country, on stages ranging from public fountains and city parks to New York City Center and Carnegie Hall. Ms. Bass performed in Mr. Glass’s two most recent *This American Life Live!* events: catching boxes while dancing as a part of a cinema event, and appearing as a roller-skating mouse alongside Mike Birbiglia in *The Radio Drama Episode* at the BAM Opera House. She often assists Ms. Barnes with theater projects, and served as the assistant choreographer for productions at the Atlantic Theater, Public Theater, and Yale Repertory Theatre. Ms. Bass is originally from a small town in Virginia, where she studied almost every dance style, from classical ballet to country line dancing. She lives in Brooklyn, New York.

Jane Cox (Lighting Designer) has designed with MB&B&Co for more than a decade, and her collaboration with the company is central to her creative life. In 2014, Ms. Cox was nominated for both the Tony and Drama Desk awards for her work on *Machinal*, and she also designed *All The Way* on Broadway. In 2013, Ms. Cox was awarded the Henry Hewes Design Award for her work on *The Flick*. Her other recent designs in New York City include *Picnic* and *Dinner with Friends* for the Roundabout Theatre, *Passion* at Classic Stage Company, and *The Whale* at Playwrights Horizons. Her opera designs have appeared at Sydney Opera House, Houston Grand Opera, and New York City Opera. Ms. Cox has a longstanding relationship with the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and has been teaching about light and design at Princeton University since 2007.

Kelly Hanson (Set and Costume Designer) is an original company member of MB&B&Co,
and has been collaborating with Ms. Barnes since 2001. She is also an Emmy Award-nominated art director for television. Ms. Hanson currently spends most days directing art for *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*. She was born in Bryan, Texas, earned her M.F.A. in set design at UC San Diego, and joined the New York community in 2001. She lives in Brooklyn, with her husband, two children, and a big, black dog.

**Robert Saenz de Viteri** (*Creative Producing Director*) has been working with MBB&Co and Ira Glass since 2013. He began working in theater as an audio-script assistant to Anna Deavere Smith while she developed *Let Me Down Easy*. He went on to lead many productions and festivals at the Public Theater, including the *Public Lab Series* and Mark Russell’s international festival, *Under the Radar*. He has created performances and toured productions throughout the world with the Obie Award–winning Nature Theater of Oklahoma. As a director in New York, he has worked at the Ensemble Studio Theater, The Flea, the Atlantic Theater, Office Ops, and Access Theater, where he directed the *New York Times* “Critic’s Pick” production of *Michael & Edie*. In 2014, he joined Ira Glass and *This American Life*, producing Episode 528, “The Radio Drama Episode,” live on stage at BAM. He recently created *The Spiritual Life of Modern America*, based on Knut Hamsun’s mostly unread book of the same title and the experiences of many people moving to America. The show premiered at the Brageteatret in Norway.

**Tess James** (*Lighting Director and Stage Manager*) is a freelance lighting director and designer. Throughout her career, she has had the privilege of working with a wide range of amazing artists and companies, including New York City Opera, BAM, New York City Center, Glimmerglass Opera, the American Repertory Theater, Dallas Opera, Center Stage in Baltimore, the Public Theater, Summer Scape at Bard College, and Den Nye Opera in the Netherlands. She currently resides in Brooklyn, New York.

**Isabella F. Byrd** (*Lighting Director and Stage Manager*) is a Brooklyn-based lighting designer with designs ranging from theater and opera to experimental installation. Her recent designs and associations include the Humana Festival at Actors Theatre of Louisville, Dallas Theater Center, Pig Iron Theatre Company, Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center Festival, Spoleto Festival USA, Williamstown Theatre Festival, and PigPen Theatre Co. She was an administrative member of the defunct 13Playwrights, Inc. and is an editor at *CHANCE* magazine.

**David Nelson** (*Production Manager*) is currently Production Manager for Elevator Repair Service. His Elevator Repair Service credits include: *Fondly, Collette Richland* (New York Theatre Workshop), *The Sound and the Fury* (Public Theater), and *Arguendo* (tour). Mr. Nelson has managed productions for the Vineyard Theatre, the Foundry Theater, Naked Angels, and Sundance Theater Labs. Mr. Nelson was Technical Supervisor for Theatre for a New Audience’s *Tamburlaine* and Soho Rep’s *An Octoroon*. He received his B.A. in theater arts from the University of North Texas in his hometown of Denton, Texas.

**Monica Bill Barnes & Company** (*MBB&Co*) is a contemporary American dance company under the artistic direction of Monica Bill Barnes. She is joined by a core of long-time collaborators: Associate Artistic Director and performer Anna Bass; Lighting Designer Jane Cox; and Set and Costume Designer Kelly Hanson. This team has created over 30 shows for stages large and small, formal to site-specific, and has been producing work together for over a decade. MBB&Co’s mission is to celebrate individuality, humor, and the innate theatricality of everyday life, and to uncover and delight in the underdog in all of us. Visit www.monicabillbarnes.com.
ABOUT THE ARTISTS

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MUSIC AND WRITING CREDITS

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Several stories in *Three Acts, Two Dancers, One Radio Host* were adapted from radio stories first heard on *This American Life*.

The poem “Last Days,” from Donald Hall’s collection *Without*, is used with permission.