

Dear Director: Chelsea Anderson on Love, Letters, and *Daddy Long Legs*

By Elizabeth Montgomery



Carmiña Monserrat* as Jerusha and Liam Boyd* as Jervis. (Photo by Brennen Russell)

When Jean Webster published *Daddy Long Legs* in 1912, critics warned it wasn't something women should be reading. The novel was considered radical for its time: a story about a woman pursuing education, independence, and a voice of her own.

More than a century later, that story is heading to The Phoenix Theatre Company as a two-person musical.

Daddy Long Legs follows Jerusha Abbott, an orphan with big ambitions, who is given a scholarship by a benefactor she's never allowed to meet. Instead, she writes him letters. Over the course of those letters, both their lives change in ways neither of them expected.

We sat down with director Chelsea Anderson to talk about what makes this intimate two-person format so compelling and so demanding, and why a 114-year-old love story about a woman finding her voice still resonates today.

Q: *Daddy Long Legs* is a two-person show. How are you approaching that dynamic, especially since the characters spend most of the show apart?

Anderson: Both Carmiña Monserrat* and Liam Boyd* have been on our stage many times. They're familiar with how our productions work and the aesthetic our audiences love. They're both performers with a lot of depth, both in their craft and in their life experience, and that helps them access something really nuanced and three-dimensional in these roles.

The interesting thing about this show is that the characters don't actually interact until very specific points in the story. For most of the show, they're each performing what are essentially monologues, creating the other side of the conversation, imagining who they're talking to, imagining the reactions, all in real time without actually looking at anyone. That's a very specific and difficult skill. Our actors and our understudies all have that ability, and it's going to make for a really nuanced, layered story.

The script is also incredibly clever. There's a lot of fun, academic, playful language pulled directly from the book, and I think our audience will really appreciate that wit. Even though it's a story that tugs at your heart, there's a cerebral quality to it too.

Q: What excites you most about this production?

Anderson: The music is gorgeous; the composer and lyricist, Paul Gordon, wrote something really lovely. But equally, the people we have in the room — our two leads and our two understudies — they're all wonderful human beings. Being in a rehearsal space with people who are eager, curious, fun, and playful is a joy. Add Kevin Robert White, our Resident Music Director, who is a fantastic collaborator, plus the beautiful costumes and all of the incredible production elements our staff has put together. I'm just really excited to be in that warm, welcoming theater space.

Q: How would you describe the show in a few words?

Anderson: Witty, clever, warm, and it gives you a sense of gumption. Both of these characters have a lot of get-up-and-go in them. I hope the audience enjoys the sweetness of this story and can also walk away feeling a little spunky. It's comedic, it's emotional, and it's the kind of show where you leave humming the songs and thinking, "What a nice evening at the theater."

Q: What do you hope audiences take away from the show?

Anderson: I hope they take away a nice evening of theater, of course, but beyond that, I hope they see that you get to be your own person, whatever your circumstances. Whether you're someone without a lot of means or someone with quite a lot, you get to have access to education, to philosophy, to exploring the world with curiosity. I really hope our audience walks out of this story with the idea of being just a little more curious about the world.

Q: As both the director and TPTC's casting director, what did you look for when casting this show — and do you have any tips for actors wanting to audition for future productions?

Anderson: This was a really fun one to cast. Our Resident Music Director, Kevin Robert White, is working on the show with me, and we had a lot of conversations about how much acting work happens inside the music in this particular show. It's not just a cute little song, the actors really have to emote and play with their scene partner through the music. The score has more of a pop sensibility than a classical sound, so it's closer to something you'd hear today than something from *Carousel*. That style can be tricky for a lot of actors, so we needed people who really excel in that particular sound.

For any actor going out for auditions, my biggest tip is to really pay attention to the style of the piece you're auditioning for. *Jersey Boys* sounds a whole lot different than *Les Misérables*, right? Finding that balance of what the actual style is for a given show will take you a lot further in the process.

And please, name your files. Headshots, résumés, all of it. If I can't find you, I can't hire you. No random file names like "IMG_02569." Put your name on everything.

Event Details

What: *Daddy Long Legs*

When: April 1 – May 3, 2026

Where: The Phoenix Theatre Company, Hormel Theatre, 1825 N. Central Ave., Phoenix, AZ 85004

Tickets: Available at www.phoenixtheatre.com or by calling the Box Office at (602) 254-2151

Click [here](#) to watch the full recording of the Director's Download.

*Courtesy of Actors' Equity Association