

Speak Cast Biographies

Milena Casciani (Rachel/Ensemble)

Milena is a junior at Upper St Clair High School and is playing Rachel. She has been involved with theatre most of her life and is so thrilled to have this opportunity to work at Prime Stage. *Speak* is such an amazing play, and Milena hopes everyone appreciates it as much as she does being part of it. She would like to say a big thank you to all of the cast and staff for making this show possible!

Aylee Gardner (Melinda)

Aylee is thrilled to be making her Prime Stage debut! All the way from Tennessee, she is currently a sophomore acting major at Point Park University. Some of her past roles include Leisl in *The Sound of Music* (Center for the Arts), Little One in *Sometimes the Rain, Sometimes the Sea* (Point Park University), and Pilar in *Legally Blonde* (Central Magnet School). In addition to acting, she loves to write, direct, and choreograph. She also teaches acting, dancing, and improv skills to young artists back home. She would like to give a big shout-out to all of her family, friends, mentors, and professors who have inspired and pushed her to be where she is today—especially her mom, Heather, from whom she learned how to lead with motivation, empathy, and love. Finally, she would like to thank Laurie Halse Anderson and the production team, who have inspired and brought to life the important voices of so many young individuals. Remember: you are strong, you are seen, you are heard.

Jacqueline Germer (Melinda 2)

Jacqueline is currently studying at Carnegie Mellon University to pursue her Bachelor's Degree in Vocal Performance. This year she performed in CMU School of Music productions as the Young Woman in *Putting it Together*, a Sondheim revue, and in the opera *L'étoile*, as a Maid of Honor. While Jacqueline has extensive training in voice, she also has ample stage experience in Theatre and Musical Theatre as well. She performed as Ashleigh in *Horse Girls* and Rita in *Prelude to a Kiss*. Jacqueline has also played Carrie in *Carrie The Musical*, Audrey in *Little Shop of Horrors*, and Adelaide in *Guys and Dolls*. She is very grateful for the opportunity to work with the creative team to shape and fully realize Melinda 2's character, and she is so excited to share it with audiences.

Grace Gouwens (Heather/Ensemble)

Grace is a Pittsburgh based actor and musician. This is her first show with Prime Stage and she is so excited to play Heather in *Speak*. Grace has been active in the theater community in Pittsburgh. She is enrolled in the CLO Academy for musical theater, where she dances, sings, and studies acting. Memorable credits include Emily Webb in *Our Town!* at Fox Chapel, Judy Turner in *A Chorus Line* at CLO Academy and Volunteer Clinician in *Watson* streaming on CBS. While she is not committed to a college yet, Grace plans to attend a four-year university to study acting. Grace hopes you enjoy the show, and that it "Speaks" to you!

Jeff Johnston (Mr. Freeman)

Prime Stage Debut! Jeff is an actor, director, and producer based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He most recently was the director and producer for Steel City Cabaret's production of *The Last Five Years*. Jeff's performance credits include Sweeney Todd (*Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*), Officer Lockstock (*Urinetown*), Karl (*Big Fish*), Fred Casley (*Chicago*), Jake (*Evil Dead*), William Barfée (*The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*), Jim (*All Shook Up*), Tilden (*Buried Child*), Robert (*Boeing Boeing*) and Dennis (*Rock of Ages*). Directing credits include *Into the Woods*, *Assassins*, *Doubt: A Parable*, *Fuddy Meers*, *A Christmas Story: The Musical*, *Ripcord*, and *Sylvia*. Locally, he has worked with Pittsburgh Musical Theater, Lincoln Park Performing Arts Center, The Strand Theater, Stage 62, Mon River Arts, Little Lake Theatre and others! Next up, Jeff will be directing *Anything Goes* at Mon River Arts!

Sadie Karashin (Nicole/Ensemble)

Sadie is thrilled to be Nicole/Ensemble as well as the choreographer for Prime Stage's production of *Speak!* She has previously been in two other Prime Stage shows; *And Then They Came For Me: Remembering the World of Anne Frank* as Young Eva Geiringer Schloss and *I Never Saw Another Butterfly and the Terezin Promise* as Eva Passerova. Sadie also participates in many classes at Pittsburgh Musical Theater in their TPIP program. Past PMT productions include Louise Bigelow in *Carousel*, Wendy Darling in *Peter Pan*, Martha Cratchit in *A Lyrical Christmas Carol*, Young Lucy in *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, and Dance Ensemble in *Newsies* and *Annie*. She attends Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Highschool as a sophomore and is a varsity cheerleader. She would like to thank her parents, family, friends, and teachers for always helping her reach for the stars and God for blessing her with many opportunities to tell important stories.

Eamonn Mcelfresh (Andy/Ensemble)

Eamonn is a Senior at Pgh CAPA, is thrilled to be back at The New Hazlett with Prime Stage Theater. Eamon was recently seen in The Public's performances of *Scut Farkus A Christmas Story*. Other selected professional theater credits include Wyatt Crachit in The PCLO's *Christmas Carol*, Christian Bechdel in Front Porch Theatricals in *Fun Home* and Bellboy in *Grand Hotel*, Edmund in Prime Stage Theater's *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe* and Henry in *The Boxcar Children* and Edward in Quantum Theater's *Chatterton*. For several years he has been a Top Five Finalist in The Public's Shakespeare Competition. In 2025, Eamonn represented The CLO in NYC at The Jimmy Awards (Pierre) as a semi-finalist. This fall he will be heading to Ithaca College to pursue a BFA in acting. Eamonn would like to thank his teachers and family for their support.

Justin Mohr (Father/Ensemble)

Justin is excited to be working with Prime Stage again and working with Dana Hardy. He previously appeared in *Edgar Allen Poe Presents* and *Fahrenheit 451* at Prime Stage. Justin graduated from the University of Pittsburgh with a BA in Theater Arts. He spent several years in NYC and Chicago performing with sketch comedy/improv groups, various theater companies, and commercials. Justin has worked on several major films and TV shows. He was also in *The Baristas*, a Pittsburgh based web series that is on YouTube. Favorite past roles include Jack (*Leading Ladies*), Gary Lejune (*Noises Off*), John Smith (*Run for Your Wife*), Bernard (*Boeing, Boeing*), and many others. Love and thanks to this cast and crew. Special thanks to his friends and family for their ongoing love and support.

Zora Rose (Ivy/Ensemble)

Zora is a musical theater student at Pittsburgh CAPA and is excited to be a part of this production. She has previously performed in *A Christmas Story: The Play* (Pittsburgh Public Theater), *Our Song* (Demaskus Theater Collective/August Wilson Center), and various productions at her high school. Outside of theater, Zora enjoys volunteering, crafting, and reading. She would like to thank everyone who has shown her love and support.

Anne Marie Sweeney (Mother/Ensemble)

Anne is delighted to be making her debut with Prime Stage and in particular with this remarkable production of *Speak*. Recent theater roles include Vernet in Little Lake Theatre's *The DaVinci Code*, Chelsea in Little Lake Theatre's *On Golden Pond* and Leslie in South Park Theatre's *Slyvia*. Prior collaborations include CLIMB Theater in St Paul, Minnesota, Hyde Park Players in Chicago and Hustlebot Improv here in Steel City. She would like to especially thank Josh who lately has been doing a lot of dinner clean-up and kid bedtimes!

Evan Vay (David/Ensemble)

Evan is thrilled to be back in Pittsburgh in his very first Prime Stage production! Evan earned his BFA from Baldwin-Wallace University in 2024, where he performed in a variety of productions, including Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*, Evan in *The Aliens*, and Edwards in *Blue Stockings*. He has also been involved in training programs with many different theaters across the country, including Powerhouse Theater, the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center, and the Tepper Semester at Syracuse University. Within these programs, he has helped develop an assortment of new works from up-and-coming playwrights. Evan would like to thank his family, friends, and castmates, and mentors for their unwavering support throughout this production.

David Wang (Principal Principal/Ensemble)

David is excited to be part of the cast of *Speak!* He has performed as Nikos in *Big Love*, the Purser in *Anything Goes*, performed the K-pop dance *Jellyous*, sung in an acapella group with extremely off-beat snaps (my arms were practically flailing), and written many lines of poetry. That's me!

Abigail Brown (Understudy/Ensemble)

Abigail is a senior at North Catholic. She is part of CLO Academy's Pre-Professional Development Program and takes lessons from Daina Griffith and Molly Stater. Abigail plans to attend a 4-year college for a BFA in Musical Theater or Acting. This is her first production with Prime Stage! She is very grateful for this opportunity.