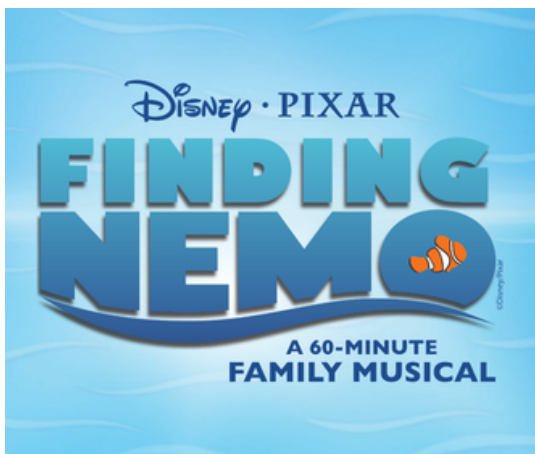


Wheelock Family Theatre Announces *Finding Nemo* to Open 2026/2027 Season

The Beloved Animated Adventure Comes to Life in a New Musical Celebrating Courage, Independence, and the Brave Steps That Help Us Grow.

BOSTON, MA — Wheelock Family Theatre at Boston University opens its 2026/2027 season with Disney Pixar's *Finding Nemo*, a new family musical running November 14 through December 13, 2026. Directed by Wheelock Family Theatre Executive Director Nick Vargas, with music direction by Jordan Oczkowski and choreography by Hannah Shihdanian, this imaginative stage adaptation of the beloved 2003 Disney Pixar film invites audiences to dive into a vibrant underwater world filled with unforgettable characters, memorable music, and a heartfelt story about family, bravery, and growing up.



The musical features the book, music, and lyrics by Kristen Anderson-Lopez and Robert Lopez, the award-winning songwriting team behind *Frozen*, with the book adaptation by Lindsay Anderson and music and orchestrations adapted and arranged by Myrna Conn.

Leading the multigenerational cast are Boston favorites **Jared Troilo** as Marlin, **Joy Clark** as Dory, and introducing 11-year-old **Herman Xu** as Nemo. Together, they bring to life a story that resonates with children

discovering their independence and the adults learning to trust in them along the way. As the first production of Wheelock Family Theatre's 46th season, *Finding Nemo* introduces audiences to the season's central theme, "the courage to begin." Through Nemo's determination to discover his own abilities and Marlin's journey beyond the safety of the reef, the musical reminds us that courage can take many forms, from taking the first step into the unknown to trusting someone you love to take that step on their own.

"I've loved Finding Nemo for years, and I'm excited to bring it to life in a way that reflects what we value at Wheelock, artists of different generations creating together and stories that speak to children and adults alike," says Vargas. **"My vision is for the theatre to be a place where families feel welcome, young people see their experiences taken seriously, and we can all discover something together. Finding Nemo gives us a joyful way to do that, asking us to consider how we support the people we love while giving them room to grow."**

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About the Show

When young clownfish Nemo is unexpectedly taken far from home, his cautious and overprotective father, Marlin, must leave the familiar safety of the Great Barrier Reef and embark on an extraordinary journey across the ocean to find him. Along the way, Marlin encounters an unforgettable cast of sea creatures, including the endlessly optimistic Dory, who challenges him to confront his fears and discover that the world beyond the reef holds more possibilities than he ever imagined. Meanwhile, Nemo must summon his own courage, make new friends, and learn to navigate unfamiliar surroundings without his father's protection.

Returning to Wheelock Family Theatre as Marlin, Jared Troilo brings both extensive theatrical experience and a deeply personal connection to the role of Nemo's devoted father. Wheelock audiences may recognize him from previous productions of *Billy Elliot*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Little Women*, *James and the Giant Peach*, and *Make Way for Ducklings*. For Troilo, *Finding Nemo* is an opportunity to share a story that has remained meaningful to him since childhood.



"I just adore this story and have since the original movie came out when I was a kid," Troilo shared. **"I'm thrilled to be able to share it with a whole new generation of children. No matter how many times I watch the movie, read the script, or listen to the music, I find myself overcome with all kinds of emotion. I know audiences will have the same experience!"** Troilo goes on to share, **"As an anxious, overprotective father myself, I can very much relate to where Marlin is coming from. I wish I could keep them safe inside the 'anemone' forever, but sometimes what's best for them is to let them go experience the world for themselves. Easier said than done."** That personal connection speaks directly to one of the musical's central themes: the delicate balance between protecting children and giving them the freedom to discover their own strength.

For Troilo, the story offers something meaningful to audiences on both sides of that relationship. **"I hope children come away from this show with a sense of empowerment, knowing there is nothing they can't overcome regardless of their circumstances,"** Troilo said. **"I also hope kids leave with a little bit of empathy for their parents, and perhaps a little understanding for why they act so crazy sometimes. We're doing our best!"**

Joining Troilo on this underwater adventure is another returning Wheelock artist, Joy Clark, who brings to life the endlessly optimistic, delightfully forgetful, and utterly lovable blue tang, Dory! Dory brings humor, heart, and a much-needed splash of sunshine to Marlin's journey. Dory's ability to embrace uncertainty and approach unfamiliar situations with an open heart offers a counterpoint to Marlin's cautious outlook, reminding audiences that sometimes moving forward begins with taking a chance.



Clark previously appeared at Wheelock Family Theatre in Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* and choreographed many recent memorable productions including last season's *Annie*, *The SpongeBob Musical*, and *Make Way for Ducklings*.

A Boston-based performer, choreographer, and theatre educator, Clark is excited to return to collaborate with this company of young and professional artists.

"I can't wait to get up to lots of fishy nonsense with so many talented young and professional performers in this colorful company," Clark shared. **"I am so very excited to bring the under-the-sea world of *Finding Nemo* to life for Boston audiences!"**

For Clark, Dory's humor and openness offer a meaningful way for audiences to recognize themselves in the story. **"It's safe to say that Dory is my favorite forgetful fish. I love her spontaneity, her heart, and her silliness,"** Clark shared. **"She humorously portrays cognitive differences, neurodivergence, and hidden disability, and in doing so, has made generations of children and adults, including myself, feel seen."** Clark hopes families leave the theatre feeling more confident in the capabilities of young people. **"I hope that young people leave knowing that we are ALL capable of doing hard things! I hope parents leave with a sense of how beautifully capable their children are,"** she said.

At the heart of the production is student performer Herman Xu as Nemo, the adventurous young clownfish whose growing independence sets the story in motion. Nemo's journey reflects the experiences of young people discovering their abilities, learning to trust themselves, and finding the courage to take their first steps into unfamiliar territory.

Xu, an 11-year-old sixth grader at Milton Academy, is an actor and musician who has previously participated in Wheelock Family Theatre summer classes, longing to perform in a mainstage production. Outside of theatre, Xu plays piano and violin, participates in his school's jazz ensemble, and enjoys playing chess, volleyball, and writing his own books.



"I am most excited to finally perform on the Wheelock stage. I first came to Wheelock through a summer camp, and I loved it right away," Xu shared. **"Every time I walked past the building after that, I would stop and look at all the huge production photos and headshots out front. I never thought that one day I would get to be one of those performers."**

Xu also identifies with Nemo's adventurous spirit. **"I feel like [Nemo], and I share a very strong trait: we are both adventurous,"** he said. **"Just like Nemo, who has always dreamed of exploring the big blue world, I always want to see what's beyond my own world."** He is optimistic that other young audience members will feel encouraged to take risks even when they feel unsure. **"I hope that after watching this show, kids and families leave with that same feeling: that it's okay to feel like you can't do something, but you try anyway. I feel that way too."**

Bringing professional actors and student performers together onstage is central to Wheelock Family Theatre's approach to multigenerational storytelling. Every artist, no matter their age, has the opportunity to learn and grow through their engagement with productions like Finding Nemo, and audiences are treated to world-class performances where the diversity of experiences on stage is matched by those in the seats.

For Wheelock Family Theatre, Finding Nemo serves as an introduction to a season that celebrates the many forms courage can take. Whether it is Nemo discovering his independence, Marlin confronting the unfamiliar, or Dory embracing the possibilities of an uncertain journey, each character must find the courage to move forward. The production reflects Wheelock Family Theatre's ongoing commitment to creating accessible, engaging theatrical experiences that encourage young audiences to see themselves in the stories unfolding onstage.

"My hope is that young people leave the theatre feeling that their curiosity, their questions, and their courage matter," says director Nick Vargas. **"And I hope the adults beside them leave reminded of how much we can learn from the children in our lives. The magic of a story like this is its ability to bring the whole family into a world of wonder, where even the impossible feels within reach. As we head into the holiday season, I think we could all use that sense of possibility and the chance to share it with one another."**



As families across Greater Boston return to the theatre this fall, Finding Nemo offers a shared experience that celebrates the possibilities awaiting those willing to take the first step.

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Principal Cast

Sam Belknap (Tad), Alexander Boyle (Chum/Crush), Molly Brown (Anchor/Nigel), Dziko Caplan (Moonfish), Joy Clark* (Dory), Drew Factor (Moonfish), Brynn Kilgore (Moonfish), Allie Knupp (Gurgle), Kiko Laureano* (Coral/Bloat), Andrea Leonarte (Moonfish), Maria Isabel Espinal Lopez (Pearl), Ruby Mark (Reef Kid), Bella Nevin (Reef Kid), Gray Oliveira (Sheldon), Darren Paul (Bruce), Chip Phillips* (Gill), Carolyn Saxon* (Professor Ray/Peach), Nicholas Shay (Squirt), Jared Troilo* (Marlin), and Herman Xu (Nemo).

Understudies

Ohad Ashkenazi (Crush/Chum and Marlin), Josie Mishelle Dixon (Reef Kid & Moonfish), Haven Foley (Moonfish), Katelyn Germak (Pearl & Sheldon), Livvy Hoglund (Reef Kid), Kiko Laureano* (Dory), Andrea Leonarte (Gurgle), Bella Nevin (Squirt), Gray Oliveira (Nemo), Sydney Peterson (Professor Ray/Peach, Anchor/Nigel, and Coral/Bloat), and Ivis Tostes (Bruce and Gill).

Full Creative Team Listing

Becca Cottrell* (Assistant Stage Manager), Hope Debelius (Lighting Designer), Amanda Gibson (Props Designer), Fanni Horvath* (Stage Manager), Anika Nayak (Assistant Stage Manager), Sarah Nolen (Puppet Designer), Jordan Oczkowski (Music Director), Jimmy Rotondo+ (Scenic Designer), Kate Sheridan (Associate Director), Hannah Shihdanian (Choreographer), Eric Tran (Costume Designer), Nick Vargas (Director), Irene Wang (Sound Designer), and Marissa Wolf (Associate Costume Designer/Wardrobe Supervisor).

*Indicates member of Actors' Equity Association.

+Indicates member of United Scenic Artists (USA).

Full Access Performances

The following performances will feature ASL interpretation, audio description, and open captioning, with braille and large print programs available upon request.

- December 6, 2026, at 2:00 PM
- December 9, 2026, at 10:30 AM (student matinee)
- December 11, 2026, at 7:30 PM

Run Time: 60 minutes

Recommended Ages: 4+

Location: Wheelock Family Theatre, 180 Riverway, Boston, MA

Tickets and Information: wheelockfamilytheatre.org

About Wheelock Family Theatre

Wheelock Family Theatre is the Greater Boston area's only professional theatre offering a shared theatrical experience for the entire family. Founded in 1981, Wheelock Family Theatre's longstanding commitment to equity, diversity, accessibility, and inclusion has garnered recognition and awards at the local and national levels. The theatre's productions have served over half a million audience members, and Wheelock Family Theatre education programs have provided hands-on training to tens of thousands of students across Massachusetts.