

“Proof”, a Pulitzer Prize winning play by David Auburn

Directed by Scott Pollak with Dru Weaver

Runs March 13 – March 28, 2026

Auditions will be held Sunday, December 14th at 5:00 p.m. and Monday, December 15th at 7 p.m. at Magic Circle.

“Proof” focuses on Catherine, the daughter of Robert, a recently deceased mathematical genius in his fifties and professor at the University of Chicago, and her struggle with mathematical genius and mental illness.

Catherine had cared for her father through a lengthy mental illness. Upon Robert's death, his ex-graduate student Hal discovers a paradigm-shifting proof about prime numbers in Robert's office.

The title refers both to that proof and to the play's central question: Can Catherine prove the proof's authorship? Along with demonstrating the proof's authenticity, Catherine also finds herself in a relationship with Hal. Throughout, the play explores Catherine's fear of following in her father's footsteps, both mathematically and mentally and her desperate attempts to stay in control.

Characters:

Catherine; late 20's to late 30's

Robert: Catherine's dad, recently deceased, late 50's – 70'ish

Claire: Catherine's older sister who comes into town for the funeral and to try to persuade Catherine to move back to New York with her, as she is concerned about Catherine's mental well-being. Age: early 30's to early 40's

Hal: Former student of Robert. Now teaching math. Has a romantic interest in Catherine and is obsessed with poring through 101 of Robert's notebooks searching for more groundbreaking mathematical proofs. Age: late 20's to late 30's.

All 4 characters are main characters in this show.

We'll cast the show quickly and do a read-thru within a week of auditions.

Then everyone will be OFF for 4-6 weeks. Enjoy the holidays and spend your time learning lines.

In approximately late January we'll begin about 6 weeks of rehearsals, currently planned for 3 nights a week.

AUDITION FORM

Actor's Information

Name: _____

Address: _____

Home Phone: _____ Work Phone: _____

Cell: _____ Do You Text: _____

Email: _____ Age: _____

Please List any Theatrical Experience: _____

Part for Which You Wish to Audition: (Please list your order of preference)

ROLE _____

ROLE _____

ROLE _____

Please list any commitments or travel that will conflict with our rehearsals.

For Director's Use

Notified of Casting Decision By: _____ Date: _____

Comments:

CLAIRE. That's Harold Dobbs?
CATHERINE. Yes.
CLAIRE. He's cute.
CATHERINE. *(Disgusted.)* Eugh.
CLAIRE. He's a mathematician?
CATHERINE. I think you owe me an apology, Claire.
CLAIRE. We need to make some decisions. But I shouldn't have tried to start first thing in the morning. I don't want an argument. *(Beat.)* Maybe Hal would like a bagel? *(Catherine doesn't take the hint. She exits.)*

Fade

Scene 3

Night. Inside the house a party is in progress. Loud music from a not-very-good but enthusiastic band. Catherine is alone on the porch. She wears a flattering black dress. Inside, the band finishes a number. Cheers, applause. After a moment Hal comes out. He wears a dark suit. He has taken off his tie. He is sweaty and revved-up from playing. He holds two bottles of beer. Catherine regards him. A beat.

CATHERINE. I feel that for a funeral reception this might have gotten a bit out of control.
HAL. Aw come on. It's great. Come on in.
CATHERINE. I'm okay.
HAL. We're done playing, I promise.
CATHERINE. No, thanks.
HAL. Do you want a beer?
CATHERINE. I'm okay.
HAL. I brought you one. *(Beat. She hesitates.)*
CATHERINE. Okay. *(She takes it, sips.)* How many people are in there?
HAL. It's down to about forty.
CATHERINE. Forty?

HAL. Just the hard-core partyers.
CATHERINE. My sister's friends.
HAL. No, mathematicians. Your sister's friends left hours ago.
The guys were really pleased to be asked to participate. They worshiped your dad.
CATHERINE. It was Claire's idea.
HAL. It was good.
CATHERINE. (*Concedes.*) The performance of "Imaginary Number" was ... sort of ... moving.
HAL. Good funeral. I mean not "good," but —
CATHERINE. No. Yeah.
HAL. Can you believe how many people came?
CATHERINE. I was surprised.
HAL. I think he would have liked it. (*She looks at him.*) Sorry, it's not my place to —
CATHERINE. No, you're right. Everything was better than I thought. (*Beat.*)
HAL. You look great.
CATHERINE. (*Indicates the dress.*) Claire gave it to me.
HAL. I like it.
CATHERINE. It doesn't really fit.
HAL. No, Catherine, it's good. (*A moment. Noise from inside.*)
CATHERINE. When do you think they'll leave?
HAL. No way to know. Mathematicians are insane. I went to this conference in Toronto last fall. I'm young, right? I'm in shape, I thought I could hang with the big boys. Wrong. I've never been so exhausted in my life. Forty-eight straight hours of partying, drinking, drugs, papers, lectures ...
CATHERINE. Drugs?
HAL. Yeah. Amphetamines, mostly. I mean I don't. Some of the older guys are really hooked.
CATHERINE. Really?
HAL. Yeah, they think they need it.
CATHERINE. Why?
HAL. They think math's a young man's game. Speed keeps them racing, makes them feel sharp. There's this fear that your creativity peaks around twenty-three and it's all downhill from there. Once you hit fifty it's over, you might as well teach high school.
CATHERINE. That's what my father thought.
HAL. I dunno. Some people stay prolific.

CATHERINE. Not many.

HAL. No, you're right. Really original work — it's all young guys.

CATHERINE. Young guys.

HAL. Young people.

CATHERINE. But it is men, mostly.

HAL. There are some women.

CATHERINE. Who?

HAL. There's a woman at Stanford, I can't remember her name.

CATHERINE. Sophie Germain.

HAL. Yeah? I've probably seen her at meetings, I just don't think I've met her.

CATHERINE. She was born in Paris in 1776. *(Beat.)*

HAL. So I've definitely never met her.

CATHERINE. She was trapped in her house.

The French Revolution was going on, the Terror. She had to stay inside for safety and she passed the time reading in her father's study. The Greeks ... Later she tried to get a real education but the schools didn't allow women. So she wrote letters. She wrote to Gauss. She used a man's name. Uh, "Antoine-August Le Blanc." She sent him some proofs involving a certain kind of prime number, important work. He was delighted to correspond with such a brilliant young man.

Dad gave me a book about her.

HAL. I'm stupid. Sophie Germain, of course.

CATHERINE. You know her?

HAL. Germain Primes.

CATHERINE. Right.

HAL. They're famous. Double them and add one, and you get another prime. Like two. Two is prime, doubled plus one is five: also prime.

CATHERINE. Right. Or 92,305 times 2^{16998} plus one.

HAL. *(Startled.)* Right.

CATHERINE. That's the biggest one. The biggest one known ... *(Beat.)*

HAL. Did he ever find out who she was? Gauss.

CATHERINE. Yeah. Later a mutual friend told him the brilliant young man was a woman.

He wrote to her: "A taste for the mysteries of numbers is excessively rare, but when a person of the sex which, according to our customs and prejudices, must encounter infinitely more difficulties

than men to familiarize herself with these thorny researches, succeeds nevertheless in penetrating the most obscure parts of them, then without a doubt she must have the noblest courage, quite extraordinary talents and superior genius."

(Now self-conscious.) I memorized it ... *(Hal stares at her. He suddenly kisses her, then stops, embarrassed. He moves away.)*

HAL. Sorry. I'm a little drunk.

CATHERINE. It's okay. *(Uncomfortable beat.)* I'm sorry about yesterday. I wasn't helpful. About the work you're doing. Take as long as you need upstairs.

HAL. You were fine. I was pushy.

CATHERINE. I was awful.

HAL. No. My timing was terrible. Anyway, you're probably right.

CATHERINE. What?

HAL. About it being junk.

CATHERINE. *(Nods.)* Yes.

HAL. I read through a lot of stuff today, just skimming. Except for the book I stole —

CATHERINE. Oh, God, I'm sorry about that.

HAL. No, you were right.

CATHERINE. I shouldn't have called the police.

HAL. It was my fault.

CATHERINE. No.

HAL. The point is, that book — I'm starting to think it's the only lucid one, really. And there's no math in it.

CATHERINE. No.

HAL. I mean, I'll keep reading, but if I don't find anything in a couple of days ...

CATHERINE. Back to the drums.

HAL. Yeah.

CATHERINE. And your own research.

HAL. Such as it is.

CATHERINE. What's wrong with it?

HAL. It's not exactly setting the world on fire.

CATHERINE. Oh come on.

HAL. It sucks, basically.

CATHERINE. Harold.

HAL. My papers get turned down. For the right reasons — my stuff is trivial. The big ideas aren't there.

CATHERINE. It's not about big ideas. It's work. You've got to

chip away at a problem.

HAL. That's not what your dad did.

CATHERINE. I think it was, in a way. He'd attack a question from the side, from some weird angle, sneak up on it, grind away at it. He was slogging. He was just so much faster than anyone else that from the outside it looked magical.

HAL. I don't know.

CATHERINE. I'm just guessing.

HAL. Plus the work was beautiful. It's streamlined: no wasted moves, like a ninety-five-mile-an-hour fastball. It's just ... elegant.

CATHERINE. Yeah.

HAL. And that's what you can never duplicate. At least I can't.

It's okay. At a certain point you realize it's not going to happen, you readjust your expectations. I enjoy teaching.

CATHERINE. You might come up with something.

HAL. I'm twenty-eight, remember? On the downhill slope.

CATHERINE. Have you tried speed? I've heard it helps.

HAL. *(Laughs.)* Yeah. *(Beat.)*

CATHERINE. So, Hal.

HAL. Yeah?

CATHERINE. What do you do for sex?

HAL. What?

CATHERINE. At your conferences.

HAL. Uh, I uh —

CATHERINE. Isn't that why people hold conferences? Travel. Room service. Tax-deductible sex in big hotel beds.

HAL. *(Laughs, nervous.)* Maybe. I don't know.

CATHERINE. So what do you do? All you guys. *(Beat. Is she flirting with him? Hal is not sure.)*

HAL. Well we are scientists.

CATHERINE. So?

HAL. So there's a lot of experimentation.

CATHERINE. *(Laughs.)* I see. *(Beat. Catherine goes to him. She kisses him. A longer kiss. It ends. Hal is surprised and pleased.)*

HAL. Huh.

CATHERINE. That was nice.

HAL. Really?

CATHERINE. Yes.

HAL. Again?

CATHERINE. Yes. *(Kiss.)*

PROOF

ACT ONE

Scene 1

Night. Catherine sits in a chair. She is twenty-five, exhausted, haphazardly dressed. Eyes closed. Robert is standing behind her. He is Catherine's father. Rumpled academic look. Catherine does not know he is there. After a moment:

ROBERT. Can't sleep?

CATHERINE. Jesus, you scared me.

ROBERT. Sorry.

CATHERINE. What are you doing here?

ROBERT. I thought I'd check up on you. Why aren't you in bed?

CATHERINE. Your student is still here. He's up in your study.

ROBERT. He can let himself out.

CATHERINE. I might as well wait up till he's done.

ROBERT. He's not my student anymore. He's teaching now.

Bright kid. *(Beat.)*

CATHERINE. What time is it?

ROBERT. It's almost one.

CATHERINE. Huh.

ROBERT. After midnight ...

CATHERINE. So?

ROBERT. So: *(He indicates something on the table behind him: a bottle of champagne.)* Happy birthday.

CATHERINE. Dad.

ROBERT. Do I ever forget?

CATHERINE. Thank you.

ROBERT. Twenty-five. I can't believe it.

CATHERINE. Neither can I. Should we have it now?

ROBERT. It's up to you.
CATHERINE. Yes.
ROBERT. You want me to open it?
CATHERINE. Let me. Last time you opened a bottle of champagne out here you broke a window.
ROBERT. That was a long time ago. I resent your bringing it up.
CATHERINE. You're lucky you didn't lose an eye. *(She opens the bottle.)*
ROBERT. Twenty-five!
CATHERINE. I feel old.
ROBERT. You're a kid.
CATHERINE. Glasses?
ROBERT. Goddamn it, I forgot the glasses. Do you want me to —
CATHERINE. Nah. *(She drinks from the bottle. A long pull. Robert watches her.)*
ROBERT. I hope you like it. I wasn't sure what to get you.
CATHERINE. This is the worst champagne I have ever tasted.
ROBERT. I am proud to say I don't know anything about wines. I hate those kind of people who are always talking about "vintages."
CATHERINE. It's not even champagne.
ROBERT. The bottle was the right shape.
CATHERINE. "Great Lakes Vineyards." I didn't know they made wine in Wisconsin.
ROBERT. A girl who's drinking from the bottle shouldn't complain. Don't guzzle it. It's an elegant beverage. Sip.
CATHERINE. *(Offering the bottle.)* Do you —
ROBERT. No, go ahead.
CATHERINE. You sure?
ROBERT. Yeah. It's your birthday.
CATHERINE. Happy birthday to me.
ROBERT. What are you going to do on your birthday?
CATHERINE. Drink this. Have some.
ROBERT. No. I hope you're not spending your birthday alone.
CATHERINE. I'm not alone.
ROBERT. I don't count.
CATHERINE. Why not?
ROBERT. I'm your old man. Go out with some friends.
CATHERINE. Right.
ROBERT. Your friends aren't taking you out?
CATHERINE. No.

ROBERT. Why not?

CATHERINE. Because in order for your friends to take you out you generally have to have friends.

ROBERT. (*Dismissive.*) Oh —

CATHERINE. It's funny how that works.

ROBERT. You have friends. What about that cute blonde, what was her name?

CATHERINE. What?

ROBERT. She lives over on Ellis Avenue — you used to spend every minute together.

CATHERINE. Cindy Jacobsen?

ROBERT. Cindy Jacobsen!

CATHERINE. That was in third grade, Dad. Her family moved to Florida in 1983.

ROBERT. What about Claire?

CATHERINE. She's not my friend, she's my sister. And she's in New York. And I don't like her.

ROBERT. I thought she was coming in.

CATHERINE. Not till tomorrow. (*Beat.*)

ROBERT. My advice, if you find yourself awake late at night, is to sit down and do some mathematics.

CATHERINE. Oh please.

ROBERT. We could do some together.

CATHERINE. No.

ROBERT. Why not?

CATHERINE. I can't think of anything worse. You sure you don't want any?

ROBERT. Yeah, thanks.

You used to love it.

CATHERINE. Not anymore.

ROBERT. You knew what a prime number was before you could read.

CATHERINE. Well now I've forgotten.

ROBERT. (*Hard.*) Don't waste your talent, Catherine. (*Beat.*)

CATHERINE. I knew you'd say something like that.

ROBERT. I realize you've had a difficult time.

CATHERINE. Thanks.

ROBERT. That's not an excuse. Don't be lazy.

CATHERINE. I haven't been lazy, I've been taking care of you.

magazines. You come back with a stack of magazines this high — I don't know how you read that crap. And those are the good days. Some days you don't get up, you don't get out of bed.

CATHERINE. Those are the good days.

ROBERT. Bullshit. Those days are lost. You threw them away. And you'll never know what else you threw away with them — the work you lost, the ideas you didn't have, discoveries you never made because you were moping in your bed at four in the afternoon.

(*Beat.*) You know I'm right. (*Beat.*)

CATHERINE. I've lost a few days.

ROBERT. How many?

CATHERINE. Oh, I don't know.

ROBERT. I bet you do.

CATHERINE. What?

ROBERT. I bet you count.

CATHERINE. Knock it off.

ROBERT. Well do you know or don't you?

CATHERINE. I don't.

ROBERT. Of course you do. How many days have you lost?

CATHERINE. A month. Around a month.

ROBERT. Exactly.

CATHERINE. Goddamn it, I don't —

ROBERT. HOW MANY?

CATHERINE. Thirty-three days.

ROBERT. Exactly?

CATHERINE. I don't know.

ROBERT. Be precise, for Chrissake.

CATHERINE. I slept till noon today.

ROBERT. Call it thirty-three and a quarter days.

CATHERINE. Yes, all right.

ROBERT. You're kidding!

CATHERINE. No.

ROBERT. Amazing number!

CATHERINE. It's a depressing fucking number.

ROBERT. Catherine, if every day you say you've lost were a year, it would be a very interesting fucking number.

CATHERINE. Thirty-three and a quarter years is not interesting.

ROBERT. Stop it. You know exactly what I mean.

CATHERINE. (*Conceding.*) 1,729 weeks.

ROBERT. 1,729. Great number. The smallest number expressible —

CLAIRE. Katie, some policemen came by while you were in the shower.

CATHERINE. Yeah?

CLAIRE. They said they were "checking up" on things here. Seeing how everything was this morning.

CATHERINE. (*Neutral.*) That was nice.

CLAIRE. They told me they responded to a call last night and came to the house.

CATHERINE. Yeah?

CLAIRE. Did you call the police last night?

CATHERINE. Yeah.

CLAIRE. Why?

CATHERINE. I thought the house was being robbed.

CLAIRE. But it wasn't.

CATHERINE. No. I changed my mind. (*Beat.*)

CLAIRE. First you call 911 with an emergency and then you hang up on them —

CATHERINE. I didn't really want them to come.

CLAIRE. So why did you call?

CATHERINE. I was trying to get this guy out of the house.

CLAIRE. Who?

CATHERINE. One of Dad's students.

CLAIRE. Dad hasn't had any students for years.

CATHERINE. No, he WAS Dad's student. Now he's — he's a mathematician.

CLAIRE. Why was he in the house in the first place?

CATHERINE. Well he's been coming here to look at Dad's notebooks.

CLAIRE. In the middle of the night?

CATHERINE. It was late. I was waiting for him to finish and last night I thought he might have been stealing them.

CLAIRE. Stealing the notebooks.

CATHERINE. YES. So I told him to go.

CLAIRE. Was he stealing them?

CATHERINE. Yes. That's why I called the police —

CLAIRE. What is this man's name?

CATHERINE. Hal. Harold. Harold Dobbs.

CLAIRE. The police said you were the only one here.

CATHERINE. He left before they got here.

CLAIRE. With the notebooks?

CATHERINE. No, Claire, don't be stupid, there are over a hundred notebooks. He was only stealing ONE, but he was stealing it so he could give it BACK to me, so I let him go so he could play with his band on the North Side.

CLAIRE. His band?

CATHERINE. He was late. He wanted me to come with him but I was like Yeah, right. *(Beat.)*

CLAIRE. *(Gently.)* Is "Harold Dobbs" your boyfriend?

CATHERINE. No!

CLAIRE. Are you sleeping with him?

CATHERINE. What? Euughh! No! He's a math geek!

CLAIRE. And he's in a band? A rock band?

CATHERINE. No a marching band. He plays trombone. Yes a rock band!

CLAIRE. What is the name of his band?

CATHERINE. How should I know?

CLAIRE. "Harold Dobbs" didn't tell you the name of his rock band?

CATHERINE. No. I don't know. Look in the paper. They were playing last night. They do a song called "Imaginary Number" that doesn't exist. *(Beat.)*

CLAIRE. I'm sorry, I'm just trying to understand: Is "Harold Dobbs" —

CATHERINE. Stop saying "Harold Dobbs."

CLAIRE. Is this ... person ...

CATHERINE. HAROLD DOBBS EXISTS.

CLAIRE. I'm sure he does.

CATHERINE. He's a mathematician at the University of Chicago. Call the fucking math department.

CLAIRE. Don't get upset. I'm just trying to understand! I mean if you found out some creepy grad student was trying to take some of Dad's papers and you called the police I'd understand, and if you were out here partying, drinking with your boyfriend, I'd understand. But the two stories don't go together.

CATHERINE. Because you made up the "boyfriend" story. I was here ALONE —

CLAIRE. Harold Dobbs wasn't here?

CATHERINE. No, he — YES, he was here, but we weren't "partying"!

CLAIRE. You weren't drinking with him?

CATHERINE. No!

CLAIRE. (*She holds up the champagne bottle.*) This was sitting right here. Who were you drinking champagne with? (*Catherine hesitates.*)

CATHERINE. With no one.

CLAIRE. Are you sure?

CATHERINE. Yes. (*Beat.*)

CLAIRE. The police said you were abusive. They said you're lucky they didn't haul you in.

CATHERINE. These guys were assholes, Claire. They wouldn't go away. They wanted me to fill out a report ...

CLAIRE. Were you abusive?

CATHERINE. This one cop kept spitting on me when he talked. It was disgusting.

CLAIRE. Did you use the word "dickhead"?

CATHERINE. Oh I don't remember.

CLAIRE. Did you tell one cop ... to go fuck the other cop's mother?

CATHERINE. NO.

CLAIRE. That's what they said.

CATHERINE. Not with that phrasing.

CLAIRE. Did you strike one of them?

CATHERINE. They were trying to come in the house!

CLAIRE. Oh my God.

CATHERINE. I might have pushed him a little.

CLAIRE. They said you were either drunk or disturbed.

CATHERINE. They wanted to come in here and SEARCH MY HOUSE —

CLAIRE. YOU called THEM.

CATHERINE. Yes but I didn't actually WANT them to come. But they did come and then they started acting like they owned the place — pushing me around, calling me "girly," smirking at me, laughing. They were assholes.

CLAIRE. These guys seemed perfectly nice. They were off-duty and they took the trouble to come back here at the end of their shift to check up on you. They were very polite.

CATHERINE. Well people are nicer to you. (*Beat.*)

CLAIRE. Katie. Would you like to come to New York?

CATHERINE. Yes, I told you, I'll come in January.

CLAIRE. You could come sooner. We'd love to have you. You could stay with us. It'd be fun.

CATHERINE. I don't want to.

CLAIRE. Mitch has become an excellent cook. It's like his hobby now. He buys all these gadgets. Garlic press, olive oil sprayer ... Every night there's something new. Delicious, wonderful meals. The other day he made vegetarian chili!

CATHERINE. What the fuck are you talking about?

CLAIRE. Stay with us for a while. We would have so much fun.

CATHERINE. Thanks, I'm okay here.

CLAIRE. Chicago is dead. New York is so much more fun, you can't believe it.

CATHERINE. The "fun" thing is really not where my focus is at the moment.

CLAIRE. I think New York would be a really fun and ... safe ... place for you to —

CATHERINE. I don't need a safe place and I don't want to have any fun! I'm perfectly fine here.

CLAIRE. You look tired. I think you could use some downtime.

CATHERINE. Downtime?

CLAIRE. Katie, please. You've had a very hard time.

CATHERINE. I'm PERFECTLY OKAY.

CLAIRE. I think you're upset and exhausted.

CATHERINE. I was FINE till you got here.