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Chris Serface
AACT President

Hello my fellow AACT Members-

I am still reeling from the excitement of Virtual AACTFest21! We all came together and pulled off a festival that will always be remembered as the best virtual festival ever! (And hopefully our only one.)

Every element of the festival was a success: the shows; the keynotes; the workshops; the meetups; the virtual happy hours; the awards; and most importantly the sense of community. If you had told me two years ago that AACT could pull off a virtual festival, I wouldn't have believed you. But thanks to our members, volunteers, board members, sponsors, corporate partners, and staff, it all came together perfectly.

Now it's time to dust off our old festival skills and look forward to what the future holds. Many of you are already planning your state and regional festivals, and selecting the shows that you want to share with the world. AACT will be here, as always, to help that process. Make sure you are keeping up to date by checking out our website's Calendar section for the latest news.

Before our next AACTFest, we also have aactWORLDFEST! Make sure you block out June 20-26, 2022, to travel to Venice, Florida, so

you can experience life-changing theatre. I don't say that often or lightly, but it truly has changed how I look at the Performing Arts.

I look forward to seeing some of you during November in San Antonio at the National Managing Director's Conference. I'm already guessing that the conference this year is going to be HUGE, with all of us catching up and sharing everything we've learned over the past 18 months, and how excited we are to return to in-person events better than before.

Until then, please stay healthy and stay safe!

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This three-day, biennial conference will be held November 19-21 in San Antonio, Texas. It's designed for individuals who are employed full-time in an administrative or artistic position in a community theatre organization

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Jes Washington as Camae and Dominic Carter as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in the AACTFest 2021 award-winning production *The Mountaintop*, by Katori Hall, produced by The Lexington Players of Lexington, Massachusetts Photo: Colvin Theatrical (colvintheatrical.com/)

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Broken Arrow, OK (2021)

VII Donna Fisher
Casper, WY (2021)

VIII TBD

IX Jon Douglas Rake
Tacoma, WA (2021)

X Dane Winters
Germany (US Army) (2021)

Upcoming Events

AACT Industry Connections

September 1–October 27

aact.org/industry-connections

AACT NewPlayFest World Premiere

Proprioception, by Marilyn Millstone

Rover Dramawerks, at the Cox Playhouse, Plano, Texas

September 10–18, 2021

roverdramawerks.com

AACT Fall 2021 Webinar Series

September 16 – December 9 (6 sessions)

aact.org/webinars

AACT NewPlayFest World Premiere

The Cayuga Canal Girls, by Laura King

Phoenix Stage Company, Oakville, Connecticut

October 2–16, 2021

phoenixstagecompany.org

AACT Executive Committee Meeting

Thursday, November 18, 2021, 4 pm - 6 pm (central).

Drury Plaza Hotel San Antonio Riverwalk

105 S. St. Mary's Street

San Antonio, TX 78205

aact.org/calendar

AACT 2021 National Directors Conference

November 19–21, 2021

Drury Plaza Hotel San Antonio Riverwalk

105 S. St. Mary's Street

San Antonio, TX 78205

aact.org/mdc

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Spotlight

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Virtual AACTFest 2021

Festival Magic at Home

Dorinda Toner

If anyone had doubts about a virtual festival, they vanished in the opening moments of AACTFest 2021, when the AACT National Choir (cast by Ron Zeigler and directed by Chris Powell) sang “One Day More” from *Les Misérables*.



The AACTFest Choir broadcast performance during Virtual AACTFest 2021 includes
Top row (l-r): Cody Colvin, Meredith Toebeen, Sara Ziegler, Fowler Black, Winston Daniels (monitoring the broadcast)
Middle Row (l-r): Brett Spahr, Winston Daniels, Liz Hammons, Kristof Geddie, DaNiesha Carr, Jill Ziegler, Mason Rice
Bottom Row (l-r): Charlie Reese, Katy Merriman, Joya Richmond, Emily Black, Dorinda Toner

Recorded on iPhones and tablets across the nation, it was precisely, lovingly, edited together by Chris Powell, ensuring that the magic of live performance, resilience, and community shone through. It reminded us that, despite what the world had thrown at us these past two years, the power of theatre is here to stay. As the clip ended, the beaming face of AACT staff member Winston Daniels appeared, speaking the words all of us were thinking: “Yes! Yes, yes, yes!” What a wonderful way to start AACT Fest 2021!

I couldn’t agree more. It was a magical moment, but even greater magic was yet to come.

I must admit that I had been one of the doubters. When I heard that we would move to a virtual festival this year, my first reaction was disappointment. After all, I wondered, how would I have the incredible experience of festivals past? The social aspect has always been my favorite part of AACT festivals, so how could I make new connections, like the ones I now treasure, over my home computer screen?

However, to my delight, I found new ways to connect and network. Even better, the virtual platform offered advantages I had not considered before—virtual meetups, intimate chat features

during workshops and presentations, a vibrant online community where virtual topics were discussed, and best of all, the ability to view workshops and presentations after they had streamed live. Add to all that an incredibly high caliber of instructors, adjudicators, guests, and keynote speakers, and the virtual experience far exceeded my expectations.

One of the highlights for me was engaging in a thoughtful discussion during a workshop Q&A—which led folks to create separate meet-ups, in order to keep the conversation going afterward.

Another highlight was Broadway legend Rob McClure explaining how community theatre gave him his start—and how to this day some of the finest work and best artists he has ever seen and worked with are in community theatre. I literally cheered at my computer screen. He even ended his session with an invitation, that anyone who wanted to continue to chat with him could join another room. Amazing.

And who could forget hearing Jeff Calhoun tell us about sitting on the floor, sifting through a lifetime of theatre memories in preparation for sharing his triumphs and failures with us?



Jeff Calhoun shares selected photos from the many productions he participated in at the North Star Players

Or the tremendously brave and courageous Chris Serface, receiving real-time vocal coaching from the amazing Phillip Hernandez?

Magical moments, indeed.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention the fine performances from the 12 national companies. With high-energy performances and often fascinating set designs, they were as varied as they were excellent. It was exciting (and confirming) to see what we all already know to be true—community theatre is quality work by those passionate enough to create it. Superb work was done by Colvin Theatrical, a professional video production company, and each streamed video was terrific in quality. If we couldn't all be together in person to see theatre, this was definitely the next best thing. Bravo, all!

AACT staff put it all together, led by Executive Director Quiana Clark-Roland. Her leadership in directing staff and volunteers to create a new virtual version of AACTFest was amazing. It was reflected in the energetic Winston Daniels, as he opened each session with charm and a welcoming smile.

Finally, I must touch on the part of the festival that was the most compelling to me: our national ongoing conversation regarding



Winston Daniels greets participants and introduces each festival session

issues of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI). AACTFest was graced with an amazing group of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color) leaders, who gave so generously of their time, talents, and grace that facilitated these important and timely discussions about inequity and racism in our own towns, cities, country, and yes, even in our own theatres. These conversations aren't always comfortable, but they are so important. Like great theatre, we see ourselves reflected back to us, and we recognize ourselves (in both positive and negative ways). Personally, I felt encouraged and lifted up by the collective spirit I encountered in these virtual rooms and discussions, and I hope all festival attendees did as well. (If you haven't already done so, I encourage you all to read the *We See You White American Theatre* document, available on AACT's amazing EDI Resources page at aact.org/edi-resources.)

In short, AACTFest 2021 was truly a memorable and enjoyable experience. As always, I come away impressed and amazed by what I've seen and heard, and the people I've met. You probably agree with me when I say that theatre people are always the most talented, smartest, funniest, and most thoughtful people in any room. Put us all together and there is no limit to what we can achieve.

See you in Kentucky in 2023! ♦

Dorinda Toner is the Producing Artistic Director at Twilight Theater Company in Portland, Oregon.

The collage features several elements related to the musical 'The Pin-Up Girls':

- A large central image of a Priority Mail envelope for 'The Pin-Up Girls' by James Hindman and Jeffrey Lordin, featuring a stamp and a 'RECEIVED' postmark.
- A red sign on the left that reads 'SOLD OUT the ENTIRE run!' - Casa Manana Theatre.
- A yellow envelope containing text: 'From George Gershwin to Beyoncé! From World War One to Afghanistan. THE PIN-UP GIRLS sing a cavalcade of hits inspired by real letters home from our troops overseas!'
- A small photo of a woman singing into a microphone.
- A small photo of a woman holding a sign that says 'KAREN AND CATHY DANCE'.
- A small photo of a woman with a red lip print on the envelope.
- A small photo of two women singing.
- A dog tag that says 'A MUSICAL LOVE LETTER B.S. PFC SPECIAL'.
- A small photo of a woman in a hat.
- A small photo of a woman in a green dress.
- A small photo of a woman in a blue dress.
- A small photo of a woman in a white dress.

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AACTFest 2021 National Companies



Ordinary Days

music and lyrics by Adam Gwon

INNOVAtheatre

Cincinnati, Ohio



Lonely Planet

by Steven Dietz

Stage Left Theater Association

Spokane, Washington



Love and Cheese Toast

by Cooper Shattuck

Theatre Tuscaloosa

Tuscaloosa, Alabama



Blood Song, The Story of the Hatfields and the McCoys

by Chelsea Marcantel

Artists Collaborative Theatre

Elkhorn City, Kentucky



Holy Days

by Sally Nemeth

SHAPE Players

Mons, Belgium



Jerry's Brain

by J.R. Spaulding, Jr.; Score by Christopher Powell

Players de Noc

Escanaba, Michigan



How to be a Good Son

by Julia Cho
Windham Actors Guild
Windham, New Hampshire



Hillary and Clinton

by Lucas Hnath
The Studio Theatre
Little Rock, Arkansas



A Doll's House, Part 2

by Lucas Hnath
Shawnee Little Theatre
Shawnee, Oklahoma

continued on next page ►

THE GREAT GATSBY

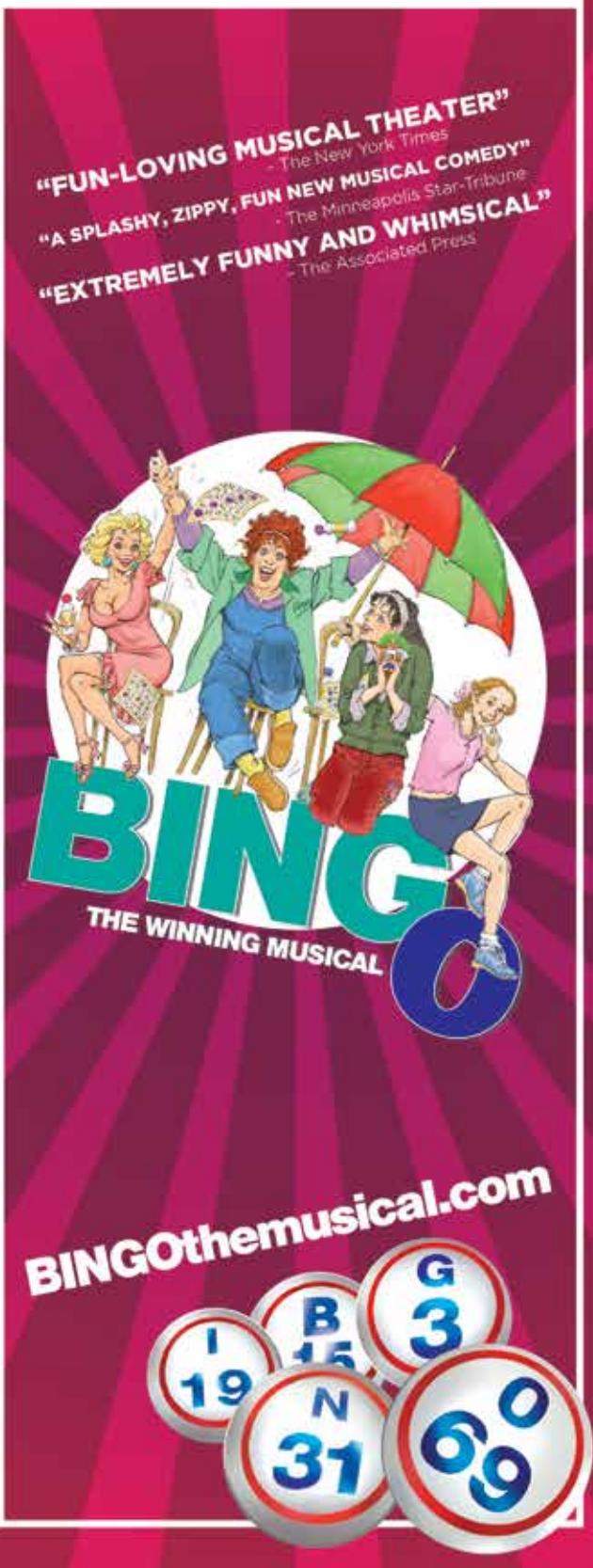
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Community Theatre Changed My Life

Rob McClure

Selections from his AACTFest 2021 Keynote Address

When I first agreed to write this, I couldn't imagine how difficult it would be. And not because I have any particular problem with speeches, but nothing makes me feel less like an authority than my two-year-old daughter, who proves to me hourly that I know nothing about anything.

That said, I've done my best to mine the walls of my memory for moments of personal growth, and here are moments that led me to right here and right now.

It's a particular privilege to be talking to you all, because community theatre changed my life. I can say that confidently. Community theatre is the reason why I do what I do—and how and when and why I do it.

I grew up in North Jersey, in a little town called New Milford. As a six-year-old kid, I had four close friends (Frank Spalding, Brett Miller, Jonathan Ross and Jonathan Tassello), and during brief windows between baseball, football, and hockey season, I could convince them to play. Not baseball, not football, not hockey, just play. *Ninja Turtles* and *Ghostbusters* were my go-to's. Frank was undoubtedly Leonardo, and before I could claim a different role in the Ninja Turtles, I was always assigned Splinter, the rat. And there are four Ghostbusters, I was Rick Moranis, every time. And that, my friends, is where I learned that I was a character man who would spend the rest of my life trying to convince people that I could be an unconventional leading man.

And you better believe that I made the best out of those assignments back then, and while they would run off in the neighborhood and fight ghosts and foot soldiers, I would stay back at base, on my porch, yes-anding the hell out of that opportunity and improvising phone calls from terrified citizens in need of help, and relaying to them over actual walkie-talkies. And I realize now, and looking back at these moments, that that's actually when I was learning that it was more important to serve story than try to be something that I wasn't. After all, without me on the porch telling them who needed help, they could rarely muster their own inciting incidents.

In eighth grade, I heard my high school was putting on *Bye-Bye Birdie* and I figured I would go see what the fuss was about. I sat in the balcony and watched my friends—my friends who were *playing*. They had found a place where they could pretend together, with other people who wanted to play, and in front of others cheering for them. Not for touchdowns or for home runs, but for a landed punchline by a kid who none of us thought of as funny. I wanted in.

That same year, my French teacher decided the best way to teach us the language was to expose us to the entire original score of *Les Misérables*—in French. And as obnoxious as I thought that was at the time, I still remember the words. If you passed all the tests, the reward at the end of the year was a field trip to New York to see the show (in English) on Broadway. I didn't know what "Broadway" meant, exactly, but I did pass all of the tests—barely. Unfortunately, my parents



thought I was a tad young for Times Square, and didn't sign the permission slip. No big deal. I wasn't even particularly into it. But the night that they went, I was sitting at home and flicking through the channels, and what was on PBS that night but the 10th anniversary concert of *Les Misérables*. Three hours and 20 minutes later, I was sobbing in my bedroom, begging my mom to pledge her financial support to public television so I could relive that concert on VHS and the double-CD set. And as thrilling as it was to see Colm Wilkinson tear up that yellow piece of paper while belting "Let It Be" on television, I had a profound feeling that it must have been so much better in person. It hit me in that moment that these things are meant to be seen and heard live,

with my own eyes and ears. Art like this was going to require me to participate, to seek it out actively.

This is when community theatre entered my life. A friend of mine, Lauren Roth, who played Kim MacAfee in my high school's *Bye Bye Birdie* production, caught wind of my new obsession, and told me that a local community theatre, The Bergen County Players, was holding auditions for a musical about a barber who slits people's throats and puts them in meat pies that other people eat. Well, my 14-year-old brain exploded, and I rode my bike 12 minutes to that little red abandoned firehouse-turned-community-theatre, which is still there.

**This was the theatre,
a real theatre, spelled
with an “-re” in letters
over the door.**

I walked in, and saw the pictures in the lobby of hundreds of other plays they had done. Clearly, this was a building that served a sole purpose—*play*. It wasn't a gym or cafeteria. This was the theatre, a real theatre, spelled with an “-re” in letters over the door.

During those auditions, I turned to a woman beside me, and whispered, “I don't know the show, who should I audition for?” She said, “Probably Toby.”

So, I went up there and I said, “Hi, I'm Rob McClure and I'm auditioning for Toby,” and I proceeded to sing “Stars,” from *Le Miz*. I didn't get a part, but two months later I rode my bike 12 minutes to see opening night, and was bowled over by the huge Alfred Hitchcock surprise ending. I consider that moment the defining moment of my life.

I ran across the street to a pay phone and I called my mom and I told her the entire story of that show through my tears: “There's a guy, and the judge kicks him out, starving.” And I remember thinking, in the moment, tomorrow there's going to be another audience here who doesn't know what's coming. I have to be there. And so every Friday, Saturday, Sunday for three months, I saw every single performance of *Sweeney Todd* at the Bergen County Players, at \$12 a pop. At the time, I was 15 and working in a bagel store. I was making bagels at 4 AM, supposedly to save money for college, but it was really just supplementing my *Sweeney Todd* addiction.

And on closing night, the cast and creative team all chipped in and got me—who wasn't even in the show—a cast jacket for the Bergen County Players production of *Sweeney Todd, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, which I still have and wear proudly. Needless to say, it was a huge moment for me. I had learned the power of play. And I didn't care in what capacity, I just knew I wanted to be around where things like this were happening. So I quickly and proudly joined that community theatre, and found

myself running sound cues, working costumes and makeup, ushering, doing box office—wherever they needed help, I wanted in.

The first thing I did was run sound for the next production, which was *Arsenic and Old Lace*, and they used this old gigantic reel-to-reel sound machine. I remember I was up in the attic looking down and the phone would ring. And I would have these giant reels, and I would line up this little piece of tape to where it changed color, because that's where the sound started. And I'd get my cue line and I'd push this huge white button – ker-chunk!, and the phone would ring – ring, ring. And then, I would take those reels off, and put the next reels on. And in my mind, I would think all of those people down there think that phone just rang. I was part of the magic trick. And to this day that's where I want to be. I don't care if I'm standing on zero hitting a high

continued on next page ►

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note or in the attic pushing a giant green button, I just want to be part of the magic trick, and I still feel that way.

I recently re-visited that community theatre to celebrate its 75th anniversary, and found that they had put a plaque on the seat where I sat the first time I saw *Sweeney Todd*, saying that it was the moment that changed my life. And to this day, the volunteers involved in that production remain in my mind, in my life. I truly believe that they're some of the finest and most influential artists I'll ever know. So, do not let anyone tell you that Broadway is the definition of success in the theatre. It is not.

There's something about directing a musical at a high school that taught me more about what it takes to put on a play than I had learned anywhere else.

Armed with my new passion for theatre, at New Milford High School I did my first production, *Anything Goes*. The next year I was in *Hello Dolly!*, and was nominated for the Paper Mill Playhouse Rising Star Award. I got nominated again, and won when I was a senior in high school for *Where's Charley?*—actually I tied with a kid named Mathew Scott, from Northern Valley Regional High School. We have remained inseparable

best friends. We had our professional debut in the ensemble of *Carousel* at The Papermill Playhouse, and he played my brother in the original *Chaplin* production at the La Jolla Playhouse in California.

I owe the Papermill Playhouse my start. I'll tell you a quick story because I know you're all theatre aficionados. The first show I did was *Carousel*, when I was 19. It was my professional debut, and I was non-Equity, making 200 dollars a week. I got to temporarily share a dressing room during a quick change with Hollywood and stage star Eddie Bracken. "I'm so sorry that they have me in here for this change," I said. He said, "When I was little-little, I shared a dressing room with a man who was in his 90s at the time, Harry Hoch. He was the actor speaking in *Our American Cousin* when Lincoln got shot." So now, of course, I like to say I worked with a guy who worked with a guy who was onstage when Lincoln got shot.

Paper Mill Playhouse is directly responsible for my Broadway debut. They asked me if I would understudy in a production that they were doing called *I'm Not Rappaport*, with Judd Hirsch and Ben Vereen. So, I'm understudying in this play and also working in the box office. Two weeks into that run, the executive producer said the show was transferring to Broadway, and "We're bringing everyone, including you, and here's your Equity card." That was my Broadway debut. And I remember at the time thinking I'd made it. But after *I'm Not Rappaport*, I didn't work again for four years.

But what I *did* do was truly the most valuable education in my life. I went back and I directed a musical at my old high school every year for four years. And there's something about directing a musical at a high school that taught me more about what it takes to put on a play than I had learned anywhere else. Because suddenly I was faced with problem-solving in a way that I could never have imagined.

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The whole time I was directing at the high school, I was also auditioning in New York, but not getting anything. I was wasting a lot of time emulating the performers that I admired, because I hadn't figured out who I was. And I very distinctly remember the moment I went in to an audition for a musical that had just won the Tony Award—*Avenue Q*. I went to an open call, and there were 500 people there, and I was getting ready to sing my purpose-ish pop-song, which is what I thought they wanted. (I was trying to sound like John Tartaglia.) I was setting up, and had my book ready, when Cindy T, the casting director, opens the door and says, "I don't know if the rest of you have seen *Avenue Q*, but it's a comedy," and she slams the door.

Everyone that day had been singing the pop-iest, riff-iest thing they could find to try and sound like Johnny. Well now I panicked, and thought what do I have that's funny. I started flipping through my music and found "It's Delovely," the old Cole Porter tune from *Anything Goes*, the first show I ever did in high school. In that moment, I listened to the voice of that six-year-old on the porch pretending to be Rick Moranis, and thought, "I'm gonna do 'Delovely' as a duet between Ernie and Cookie Monster." When they called my name, I walked in the room, and I went, "[Ernie] 'The night is young, the skies are clear, and if you want to go walking dear,' [Cookie Monster] 'It's delightful, it's delicious....'" They all looked at me like I was insane. Or so I thought at the time, because that audition got me a part in a huge Tony award-winning smash hit that I'd go on to do for three years.

By this time, I'd learned there's something about embracing your sense of play, because my six-year-old me didn't have a filter clogged with expectation. But as you get older, the filter in your brain is clogged with untruths about what, and how, and who you are supposed to be. At that moment, I not only cleaned out the filter, I took it out and burned it.

I had learned that *you* get to decide what makes you happy. Where and when and how. Your life is yours. It's about chasing joy.

I then had another little dry spell after *Avenue Q*, and then I got a call that the La Jolla Playhouse was doing a show about the life of Charlie Chaplin, and they thought my headshot kind of looked like Chaplin. I didn't know much about Charlie Chaplin; when I was growing up, my aunt Marion said I looked like him, and that was about it. I knew the silhouette.

continued on next page ►



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I had six call-backs over three months. At the final call-back, they said, "Come back tomorrow morning at 10, and have a two-minute Chaplin-y thing ready." I went home and tried to figure out what that meant. And at two o'clock in the morning, I was in bed and my wife said, "You know what you should do? You should bring music to play, so you're not completely hung out to dry with a silent room." And I thought, that's good.



PLAYS

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I looked through the music on my phone, and found the *Flight of the Bumblebee*, and I thought, "I'm gonna bring a flyswatter and *Flight of the Bumblebee*, and I'm going to fight an invisible fly—and lose. The fly is going to beat me up. That's it." And I fell asleep.

I woke up, got on the Amtrack train with my earbuds and a flyswatter. I'm sure everyone on the train thought I was crazy, as I was rehearsing my bit on the train. But in the audition, I was once again not conforming to expectations. I was embracing my child-like sense of play. It led to the lead role and a Tony nomination. Tapping into my inner child changed my life. And it's never let me down.

But what's so interesting about a Tony nomination, is that there's an illusion of success that goes along with it. Because there's no cash prize with the Tony awards. I remember, *Chaplin* had closed. And I was going to the Tony Awards. And they were saying, "you have to go to 25 events and wear something different at all of them." And I said, "I don't have income." So, I had 25 different ties.

The longer you do theatre, the more you realize that unless you love the doing, nothing else matters. I was just as happy in the attic of the Bergen County Players, doing sound for *Arsenic and Old Lace*, as I am doing *Honeymoon in Vegas*, or any of the shows that I've been lucky enough to do. The joy comes in being part of it and in the make-believe. It really does.

But I never knew that embracing the make-believe would also lead me back to Stephen Sondheim. Because when I was doing *Honeymoon in Vegas* one night, there's Stephen Sondheim, seated third row center. The 15-year-old in me immediately goes, "Oh my god, that's the guy whose *Sweeney Todd* changed your life!" When he didn't come back stage afterwards, I was heartbroken. Then, about an hour later we all received an email: "Hey, sorry, had to run. I just wanted you to know that after that opening number, I wanted to live in your theatre forever. Steve." I still have it.

I emailed him back and thanked him, and said as someone that has dabbled in writing, I cannot fathom living in his brain for two minutes. To which he wrote back, "You write? What do you write? Come over, let's have dinner." I was freaking out, but I went over and had dinner. And Stephen Sondheim made me realize that play, a sense of play, is great. But *craft* takes *work*, hard, hard work. And *then* we can inhabit it with play.

I told him how *Sweeney Todd* changed my life, and said I had just done *Into the Woods* at the Saint Louis Muni. I said my favorite lyric of all time is from a song called "Moments in the Woods," when the baker's wife asks, "Must it all be either less or more, either plain or grand? Is it always 'or'? Is it never 'and'?

That's what woods are for: for those moments in the woods."

And Sondheim said, "Oh I like that one too, because of the implied double meaning." I said, "What?" And he said, "Is it 'always,' or is it 'never?' and that's what 'oulds' are for." I said, "but I just did the show and its spelled "woods," and he said, "That's because that's what the Baker's wife means." So, he's writing one lyric to mean one thing to the character, and hopefully be heard as another thing. So, I started to think about that show as *Into the Woulds*.

The stories I've related have one thing in common. What sticks out to me is not the accomplishments, not the moments where I prove how much I know. They're the moments I was slapped in the face by what I *didn't* know. Whether it was meeting Sondheim, or studying Charlie Chaplin, or puppet camp for *Avenue Q*, or hanging upside down from the ceiling of my high school auditorium while wiring moving lights into an antiquated electrical grid and having to rent a dimmer pack and figure what the hell that means. They all made me grow. And here I am now, not an expert on anything, but a student of everything, a professional make-believer. Jumping from body to body, and from brain to brain, asked to temporarily exist inside other characters by imagining what it must be like to be them. It is a sublime privilege to have a career in empathy—imagining what it's like to be someone else, and then re-creating it on stage.

continued on next page ►

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Rob McClure Keynote continued from page 19

I'm an imagination professional. But with that comes huge responsibility. Because, there's two parts of it imagining what it's like to be someone else, and there's re-creating it on stage. Well, re-creating it on stage has been taken away from us during the pandemic. But if you're really good at this, the part of you that imagines what it's like to be other people doesn't turn off. And that's a large part of why what you've seen across the theatrical landscape of the world has been activism. Because in these moments where we're not able to do the thing we want to do, we're confronted with what it must be like to be others in

Our brains keep churning because we are imagination professionals. What we do is put ourselves in other people's shoes.

this time. Whether it's someone who's just lost a loved one to covid, or whether it's Black Live Matter, or whether it's our own theatrical landscape—how we're going to change it for the better.

Our brains keep churning because we are imagination professionals. What we do is put ourselves in other people's shoes. And I hope that we can maintain the lessons that we've learned in this time, where we can't re-create it on stage, and apply it to when we can. Because I think it's only going to make the theatrical landscape richer and stronger. And I'm excited to see where it takes us. Super excited. I'm just going to take a second to use that imagination that we're all gifted with in this industry and step back into a time machine. You can come with me if you want to.

I imagine myself in a time machine, shooting me back in a beam of blue light 30 years, and stepping out onto a lawn and walking up to six-year-old me, alone on the porch with a walkie-talkie, being Rick Moranis. And I'm telling that kid that what he's doing right now is going to feed his future child: "Just keep playing. ♦

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AACTFest 2021 Awards

Congratulations to companies and individuals honored at Virtual AACTFest 2021. We salute all who participated in productions for the festival.

AACTFest 2021 National Company Awards

Outstanding Festival Production



The Mountaintop
by Katori Hall
The Lexington Players
Lexington, Massachusetts
Region I

Outstanding Festival Production Nominees



Hilary and Clinton
by Lucas Hnath
The Studio Players
Little Rock, Arkansas
Region VI



The Harry and Sam Dialogues
by Karen Ellison
Bellingham Theatre Guild
Bellingham, Washington
Region IX

Outstanding Achievement in Directing



Sal Jones
The Mountaintop
by Katori Hall
The Lexington Players
Lexington, Massachusetts
Region I

Outstanding Achievement in Acting, Leading Role



Dominic Carter
as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr
The Mountaintop
by Katori Hall
The Lexington Players
Lexington, Massachusetts
Region I



Jes Washington
as Camae
The Mountaintop
by Katori Hall
The Lexington Players
Lexington, Massachusetts
Region I



Heather Dupree
as Hilary
Hilary and Clinton
by Lucas Hnath
The Studio Players
Little Rock, Arkansas
Region VI

Outstanding Achievement in Acting, Supporting Role



Duane Jackson
as Bill
Hilary and Clinton
by Lucas Hnath
The Studio Theatre
Little Rock, Arkansas
Region VI



Bonnie Emmer
as Deb
Ordinary Days
by Adam Gwon
INNOVAtheatre
Cincinnati, Ohio
Region III

**Outstanding Achievement in Acting,
Featured Role**



Evan Tanner
as Mark
Hilary and Clinton
by Lucas Hnath
The Studio Players
Little Rock, Arkansas
Region VI



Norquina Rieves
as Annie Mae
Love and Cheese Toast
by Cooper Shattuck
Theatre Tuscaloosa
Tuscaloosa, Alabama
Region IVB



Layla Kahn-Hickman
as Young Judy
Love and Cheese Toast
by Cooper Shattuck
Theatre Tuscaloosa
Tuscaloosa, Alabama
Region IVB

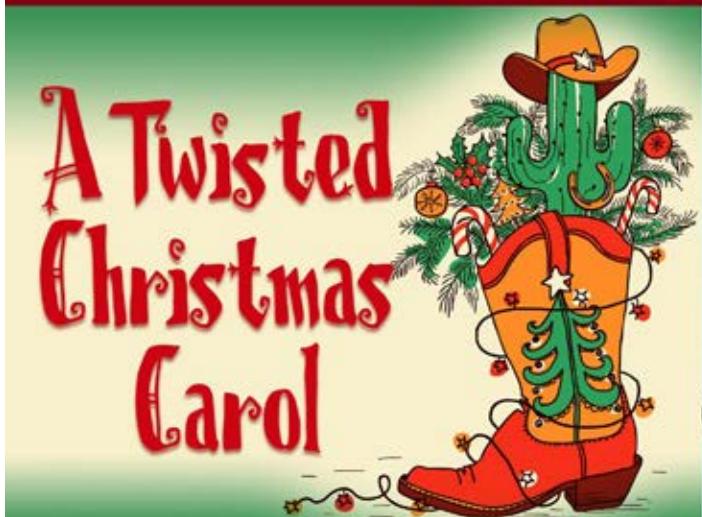
**Outstanding Achievement in
Ensemble Performance**



Jeff Braswell and Kevin Six
The Harry and Sam Dialogues
by Karen Ellison
Bellingham Theatre Guild
Bellingham, Washington
Region IX

continued on next page ►

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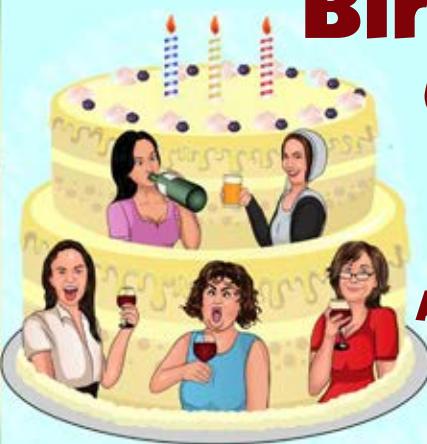
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INNOVAtheatre
Cincinnati, Ohio
Region III

Outstanding Achievement in Stage Combat



Samantha Johnson

Blood Song: The Story of the Hatfields and the McCoys
by Chelsea Marcantel
Artists Collaborative Theatre
Elkhorn City, Kentucky
Region IVA

Outstanding Achievement in Original Music



Richard Pearson Thomas

Holy Days, by Sally Nemeth
SHAPE Players
Mons, Belgium
Region X

Outstanding Achievement in Costume Design



Michelle Aguillon

The Mountaintop, by Katori Hall
The Lexington Players
Lexington, Massachusetts
Region I

Harris Cashes Out!

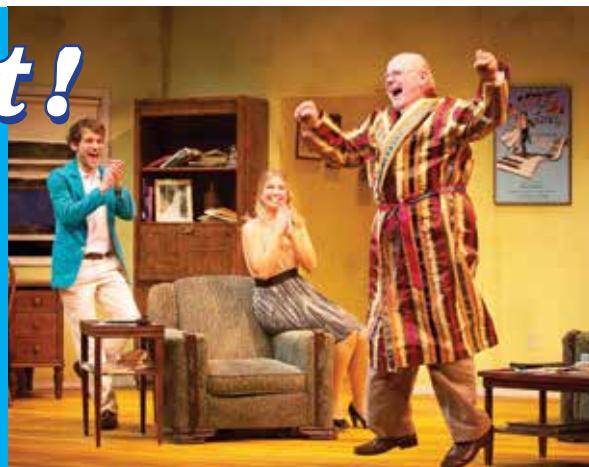
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Outstanding Achievement in Costume Design
continued



Tami Lawson & Rebecca Fry
A Doll's House, Part 2, by Lucas Hnath
Shawnee Little Theatre, Shawnee, Oklahoma
Region VI

Outstanding Achievement in Scenic Design



Dan LaMorte
Holy Days, by Sally Nemeth
SHAPE Players, Mons, Belgium
Region X



Daniel Strickland
Collected Stories, by Donald Margulies
South City Theatre, Pelham, Alabama
Region IVB

Outstanding Achievement in Lighting Design



Jackie Fitzgerald-Boyd
How to be a Good Son, by Julia Cho
Windham Actors Guild, Windham, New Hampshire
Region I

Outstanding Achievement in Sound Design



Keith Strang
How to be a Good Son, by Julia Cho
Windham Actors Guild
Windham, New Hampshire
Region I

Outstanding Achievement in Technical Direction



Jamie Peterson
Jerry's Brain, by J.R. Spaulding, Jr.; Score by Christopher Powell
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Virtual AACTFest 2021 Special Thanks

AACT Board of Directors, AACT President Chris Serface

And as in the past, the talents of many volunteers were utilized – the AACT Board and committee structure contributed to the success of the festival in many ways.

The 2021 AACT Festival Committee

Jim Walker – Chair and Vice President of Festivals

Kay Armstrong – Festival Commission Chair

Chad-Alan Carr – AACT YouthFest Liaison

Kristofer Geddie – aactWorldFest Liaison

Kristi Quinn – AACT NewPlayFest Chair

Lori Chase – aactWorldFest Liaison

Bob Frame – AACTFest Technical and
AACT Design Competition

–Chris Serface – AACT President

Eugene Irby – AACTFest Technical

Rich Gannon – AACT Design Competition

Ron Ziegler – AACT staff – Festival Coordinator

National Adjudicators

Allen Ebert, Amy Wratchford, Jeff Calhoun,
Alternate – Richard St. Peter

The National Adjudication Team

The adjudicators who reviewed and selected the 12 National Companies from the 40+ theaters who applied to AACT, with 30-minute videos, for the national virtual festival:

Kay Armstrong – Adjudication Coordinator

Kathy Pingel – Adjudicator Orientation

Emily Anderson, Paul Elliot, Morrie Enders, Steve Krempasky,
Sara Phoenix, Jennifer York, Dennis Yslas

National Company Video Production



National Company Broadcasts



Keynote Speakers



AACTFest National Choir

Ron Ziegler, Coordinator; Christopher Powell, Conductor and Engineer; Music Theatre International, performance rights and orchestral tracks. Special thanks to the company members.

Workshops/Events Coordinators

Allen Ebert – Education Committee Chair

Kathy Pingel – AACT Education Coordinator

Jamie Ulmer – AACTFest Workshop Team

Nancy Eppert – AACTFest Workshop Team

Sharon Burum – AACTChat Coordinator

Kris Geddie – Keynotes

Sharon Burham – AACTChats

Exhibitors – Darlene DeLorenzo

Kristi Quinn and Mary Jo DeNolf – AACT Silent Auction
Coordinators

Bob Frame and Rich Gannon – AACT Design Competition
Coordinators

AACT Staff



AACT Staff

AACT Executive Director Quiana Clark-Roland solicited keynotes and led staff in the logistical planning, organization, and execution of the virtual festival.

AACTFest Production Manager Mary Jo DeNolf worked with the entire AACT staff to create and administer the festival. Ron Zigeler coordinated all the National Company productions, attending the recordings of the productions with Colvin Theatrical. Kathy Pingel assembled the roster of workshops, panels, and sessions that were so enlightening. Jill Patchin assembled the festival sponsors, and coordinated the sponsored social hours, and assisted with the fabulous roster of keynote speakers. Darlene DeLorenzo assembled and coordinated the exhibitors. Registrar Karen Matheny administered all participants' registrations and answered all questions. David Cockerell marketed the festival with great assistance from Social Media Coordinator Keith Tomasek. Webmaster Stephen Peithman kept the website updated and worked to keep events in order on the Whova app.

Technical Staff

Tech staff leaders, Mary Jo DeNolf and Winston Daniels, worked behind the scenes as the "stage managers" of the festival. They were assisted by the incredible crew of Intern Marcus Chapman (Grand Rapids, Michigan), and tech staff members JR Bornemann (Midland Michigan), Chuck Goddeeris (Royal Oak, Michigan), Geoffrey Baker (Hanover, Pennsylvania), Ashley Parks (Charlotte, North Carolina).

Festival Sponsors

A vibrant poster for the musical "Buddy - The Buddy Holly Story". It features a large, stylized title "Buddy" in white script, with "THE BUDDY HOLLY STORY" in a smaller, bold font underneath. To the left, a man with glasses and a mustache, dressed in a suit, is laughing joyfully. A circular badge to his right contains text: "APPROPRIATE FOR ALL AGES FROM 8-80!", "CAST SIZE: 11+ (incl. musicians)", and "REDUCED & CAST VERSION ALSO AVAILABLE". The background shows a band performing on stage. At the bottom, the text reads "'THE WORLD'S MOST SUCCESSFUL ROCK & ROLL MUSICAL'".

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"Our production of *Buddy - The Buddy Holly Story* was the second production of the work within a five-year span. Both productions were huge hits for our theatre, but the second one shattered all records, gained new patrons, and created a fantastic buzz for our theatre in the community. It's a fabulous work that audiences just love!"

Jared Sakren, Producing Artistic Director
6th Street Playhouse, Santa Rosa, California

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2021 Virtual Design Competition

In conjunction with Virtual AACTFest 2021

The AACT 2021 National Design Competition showcased the best of community theatre in this country. It was an opportunity for your theatre and designers to shine, sponsored by USITT.

AACT member theatres and their designers entered designs, which must have been for projects occurring between July 1, 2011 and May 1, 2021. There were five design categories: Scenic, Lighting, Properties, Costume, and Special Design.

The competition's adjudicators awarded honors to the following entries:

Outstanding Achievement in Overall Design



Madeline Ahston (Hale Centre Theatre, Sandy, Utah) for *Daddy Long Legs*. Adjudicators: "This is visually stunning work and a very clever compression of multiple spaces into a single unit setting that enhances the flow of the show while creating a space that adds meaning to and throughout the progress of the show."

Outstanding Achievement in Scenic Design



Jack Yates (Theatre Memphis, Memphis, Tennessee) for *The Drowsy Chaperone*. Adjudicators: "There is very careful attention to detail and finish in this work that sets a high standard for how a scene designer can create an environment with an atmosphere, and creatively solve challenging technical requirements."

Outstanding Achievement in Lighting Design



Robert Frame (Auburn Public Theatre, Auburn, New York) for *Betrayal*. Adjudicators: "The concept statement clearly defines the design approach and intent and the production photos document the accomplishment of that intent. Supporting documentation is very complete. Lighting for shadow is difficult to do, and this work preserves visibility while creating mood."

Outstanding Achievement in Special Design Project



Jack Yates (Theatre Memphis, Memphis, Tennessee) for *Shrek Dragon Head*. Adjudicators: "Three-dimensional work on this scale is difficult to do. The attention to careful sculpting, overall appearance and management of the scale of the illusion show a high level of design and technical skills."

Honorable Mention in Costume Design



Rhonda Turnquist (Cottage Theatre, Cottage Grove, Oregon) for *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Adjudicators: "Of special note for this recognition would be the spectacular work in the tailoring and fitting of the men's suits for this period play."

Honorable Mention in Lighting Design



Mandy Heath (Theatre Memphis, Memphis Tennessee) for *Cats*. Adjudicators: "Merging theatrical and dance lighting techniques allowed the accomplishment for memorable visual moments in this production. Work was supported with a clear concept and required documentation."

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AACT Design Competition Delivers “Wow!”

Bob Frame, Rich Gannon

AACT 2021 Design Competition Coordinators

AACT’s Design Competition took center-stage during 2021 Virtual AACTFest, and delivered a rich, rewarding online experience for designers and festival attendees.

The 48 design entries in Scenic, Lighting, Costume, Properties, and Special Design once again exemplified the high quality of design work by community theatre designers across the United States. Designs covered a broad range of genres, from musicals to Shakespeare, from comedies to drama. The result was an online tour of the design exhibits that simply left viewers in awe. Bravo to all who entered the 2021 AACT Design Competition!

Design Competition adjudicators Ann Emo and Bill Wallace provided valuable, in-depth feedback to each designer individually, then shared their thoughts during a final talk-back session. While prompted by pandemic restrictions on travel and in-person events, many elements of the online adjudication process were so successful that they will continue to be part of future Design Competitions (see below).

Feedback from design entrants showed they were universally exuberant about their participation in this competition.

Please pass my thanks along to the judges. I appreciate their time and the thoughtful comments that they made in their adjudications, and also in the virtual meeting last week. It is always a great thing to see designers gathered together to share their work.

Kacey Udy, Hale Centre Theatre,
Sandy, Utah

Thank you! What a great experience!

Mandy Heath, Theatre Memphis,
Memphis, Tennessee

Very impressed (and humbled) with the talent displayed, and I think the staff is doing a great job. Virtual allowed me to attend, so thanks.

Gwen Adams, Poulsbo Players,
Kingston, Washington

AACT congratulates the winners of this year’s Design Competition, listed on page 28

We want to thank AACT staff members David Cockrell and Winston Daniels, as well as AACT intern Marcus Chapman. Without their yeoman efforts behind the scenes, this competition would never have achieved the success it did. AACT also acknowledges and applauds the United States Institute for Theatre Technology (USITT) for its continued support of AACT’s Design Competition.

There is a saying: As one door closes, another opens. Shortly after the conclusion of this year’s competition, we began planning for the 2023 AACT Design Competition.

Over the past few years, competition organizers have learned a great deal about what makes this AACT program so appealing to community theatre designers. For the 2023 Design Competition in Louisville, Kentucky, current plans call for a hybrid format, combining virtual and in-person elements. Though little can compare with the visual and tactile sensation of a physical design exhibit, it is understandable that a virtual component offers more designers a chance to present their work. It is our goal to find the happy medium.

In the meantime, mark your calendar for June, 2023, and the next AACT Design Competition. Eligibility will be open to all designs created for an AACT member organization, or by an AACT individual member, for productions staged between July 1, 2021 and June 9, 2023. With that in mind, we urge you to collect examples of your design work, including research, sketches, models, construction drawings, lighting plots. Especially make sure you take photos that show off your work to best advantage. As we have seen, production photographs often focus on the actors in an onstage moment, rather than providing the best view of your work.

In the meantime, keep yourself safe as we slowly emerge from the pandemic and return to the theatres we love. We hope to see you in Louisville! ♦

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Welcome This Newly-Minted Member of AACT

One of AACT's newest members is a major figure in American theatre. And he's not only a new member, he's now a lifetime member.

During the Festival Awards program, AACT President Chris Serface presented Jeff Calhoun with an AACT Lifetime Membership—only the second time that AACT has honored someone in this way.

The honor is well deserved, since Jeff presented the first keynote address of Virtual AACTFest 2021, inspiring attendees with tales of a career that began in community theatre at the North Star Players in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. He also provided festival workshops, and served as a National Festival Adjudicator.

"His generous spirit, passion, and commitment to supporting community theatre was inspirational and memorable for all festival attendees," says AACT Executive Director Quiana Clark-Roland. "From Main Street to Broadway, Jeff understands the important role that community theatre plays at every level. We are so honored to have him involved in AACTFest, and now as a proud Lifetime Member."

The new honoree has an impressive list of accomplishments. On Broadway these include *Disney's Newsies* (Tony Award Nomination for Best Director), *Bonnie & Clyde*, *Jekyll & Hyde*, *Grey Gardens*, Deaf West's *Big River* (Tony Award Nomination for Best Revival of a Musical), *Brooklyn*, *Annie Get Your Gun*, *Grease* (Tony Award



Nomination for Best Choreography), *Tommy Tune Tonite*, and *The Will Rogers Follies*. He recently directed *Cyndi Lauper & Friends: Home for The Holidays* and *A Night of Covenant House Stars* for Amazon Prime.

Jeff is an associate artist at Ford's Theater in Washington D.C., and also serves on the Board of Directors for Covenant House International, a not-for-profit helping homeless youth in 30 cities across six countries. ♦

Anything But Silent AACTFest 2021 Silent Auction

The response to the recent Silent Auction, sponsored by the AACT Endowment, was anything but silent. It spoke loud and clear to the support for the Endowment and its projects, and raised more than \$9,000.

"Thank you to all who bid, donated, and supported the Silent Auction, and to all those who have supported and continue to support the Endowment," says Kristi Quinn, Silent Auction Coordinator. "The Endowment brings so much to the financial stability of AACT, and to its mission of fostering the highest standards of excellence in community theatre."

The Endowment Festival Fund has long been an important source of support for community theatre participation in AACT's national festivals. Those theatres who progress to the National AACTFest receive grants to assist them in covering traveling and associated festival costs.

In addition, the Legacy Society, established by the AACT Endowment Board of Trustees, is designed to sustain AACT's mission into the future, as well as supporting the health of national theatre participation. You'll find more information on this and other Endowment programs at aact.org/endowment.

"The Endowment does not want anyone in the theatre world to be silent," Kristi Quinn says. "Anyone can take part in theatre, and the rewards are immeasurable. But quality live theatre in your community has benefits far beyond the realm of the physical theater space. Your community's economic and quality of life is reflected

in the well-being of your community theatre. That's also why AACT works tirelessly with youth, outreach, diversity, and virtual programming to create and cultivate exciting theatre in communities across the country."

Plans are already set for another Silent Auction, as part of AACTFest 2023.

The honor would be entirely mine
if you would attend my little party tonight.
Jay Gatsby

A NIGHT AT GATSBY'S
Adapted by Richard Vigilante
anightatgatsby.com

AACT Fall 2021 Webinar Series

Unleash Your Creativity

AACT will again offer its Fall Webinar Series, beginning in September. Over the past year, members have expressed both excitement and gratitude for the expansion of our educational programming, providing members and non-members with access to expert training in theatre.

The AACT Fall 2021 Webinar Series provides enrichment courses for actors, directors, theatre educators, and administrators, with an emphasis on enhancing skills and expanding perspectives. These affordable sessions are designed to deliver superior professional/vocational development with no travel costs. As an attendee, you can enhance your expertise and knowledge in all aspects of theatre-making, by interacting directly with artists, practitioners, educators, and consultants.

The full series of six sessions begins in September and ends in December. Each session offers 1 to 1.5 hours of streaming webcast that includes a live discussion with the presenter, video demonstrations, and presentation materials.

- Enjoy a user-friendly, convenient format and the opportunity to gather safely as a group, or to participate individually from home.
- AACTEd hours are awarded for the completion of these online courses
- All sessions are recorded, and you will have access to the presentation for 30 days afterward.

Full series (all six sessions) registration: AACT members, \$75; non-members, \$100.

Per-session registration: AACT members, \$15; non-members, \$20. Visit aact.org/webinars to learn more and register.

Viewpoints

Presenter: Marina J. Bergenstock

September 16, 2021, 2:00 pm (Eastern)

Viewpoints is an improvisational directing technique, created by Mary Overlie and developed and popularized by Anne Bogart, that provides a new way to think about movement, gesture, and how the body is used to create meaning.



Marina J. Bergenstock is a Ph.D. student in Theatre and Performance Studies at Stanford University, also pursuing Ph.D. minors in Feminist, Gender, Sexuality Studies, and Critical Studies in Race and Ethnicity. She has a B.A. and a B.S. from Penn State University, and received her M.F.A. in Directing from the University of Iowa.

Theatre-Based Programming in Senior Care

Presenter: Emma Shafer

September 30, 2021, 2:00 pm (Eastern)

Emma Shafer is using her theatre background to work with senior citizens in an assisted living retirement home. The programming she has put together is rooted in improv, storytelling, and other skills gathered as a professional actress. While this demographic's abilities may differ from others, that doesn't stop the possibility of wonder through play, imagination, and saying "Yes, and." Emma is certainly learning as much as she is teaching.



Emma Shafer is an actor currently based in Seattle. She received her B.A. in Theatre from Butler University, as well as additional training with SITI Company and the Moscow Art Theatre School. She enjoys collaborative projects that explore stories through new lenses. Her newest endeavor is developing and facilitating theatre-based programming for senior citizens, which forms the basis of this presentation.

Kamishibai: A Dynamic Approach to Creative Dramatics

Presenter: April Cochran

October 28, 2021, 3:00 pm (Eastern)

Kamishibai (Japanese paper theatre) is a street-performance art that originated in Japan. It has since grown in popularity all over the world, and has been adapted to a variety of exciting uses. This workshop explores how using Kamishibai's illustrated cards, which are revealed card by card with narration, can be a dynamic way to engage pre-readers and serve as a jumping off point for creative dramatics.



April Cochran is a theatre teaching-artist, specializing in early childhood, who recently retired from Market House Theatre (MHT) after a 35-year career, including 10 years as Artistic Director, and the last 21 years as Education Director. She is the founder of Playtime, Footlights, and Story Theatre programs for MHT, and has worked as a creative drama specialist and director of children's theatre productions for over 45

years for school systems, parks and recreation programs, professional theatre, and community theatres throughout the Midwest.

New Play Festival: How to Begin

Presenter: Trinity Bird

November 11, 2021, 2:00 pm (Eastern)

The Sauk, located in Jonesville, Michigan, established their annual Plays-in-Development series in 2015. Trinity Bird explains how each season, three-four unpublished plays are workshopped with the help of local actors, who collaborate with a director and the playwright. The process ends with a public, staged reading, followed by an audience talkback session. Playwrights leave the process with feedback from a director, actors, and audience.



Trinity Bird serves as Executive Director at The Sauk in Jonesville, Michigan. Trinity studied theatre at Grand Valley State University, where he was a four-year Shakespeare Scholar, and received the University's highest artistic honor, The Alexander Calder Scholarship. He created, directed, and produced the company's Living Room Monologues during the 2020 stay-at-home mandate. The series can be found at thesauk.org/monologues.html.

Using Artistic Collaboration to Enhance Cultural Understanding

Presenters: Katy Merriman and Tiffany Johnson

December 2, 2:00 pm (Eastern)

Katy Merriman and Tiffany Johnson recently collaborated by pooling talent and resources for their first coproduction, *A Love Offering*, by Jonathan Norton. This webinar recounts their experience, and offers insight and advice for creating new bridges to diversity, equity, and inclusion.



Katy Merriman is the Artistic Director at Des Moines Playhouse in Des Moines, Iowa. She has been an active member of the local theatre community since moving to Des Moines in 2013. Prior to her time in Des Moines, Katy worked with numerous theatres as a performer, director, and administrator. She has a Bachelor's of Music from Butler University, in Indianapolis, Indiana.



Tiffany Johnson is the Artistic Director at Pyramid Theatre Company in Des Moines, Iowa. In August 2015, she was a founding member of Pyramid Theatre Company, which was established to serve as a gateway to the arts and to enhance the experience by illuminating the presence of Black artists, and providing opportunity for more diverse artistic expression.

Psychological Dramaturgy

Presenters: Kathy Pingel and Dr. Caitlin A. J. Powell

December 9, 2021, 2:00 pm (Eastern)

Traditional dramaturgy in community theatre involves research to reveal the historical context of a play. What are the manners and dress of the time? Do words have a different meaning in the play's timeframe? What is the political climate? However, Dr. Powell, Psychology Department Head at St. Thomas More in Covington, Kentucky, has developed a method of research that assists actors in understanding why and how they may make decisions based on psychological principles.



Kathy Pingel was the Director of Education and Youth Programming at the Des Moines Community Playhouse for 10 years, until her retirement in 2015. She also served as Artistic Director of the Kate Goldman Children's Theatre. She holds a B.A. in Theatre from Eastern Michigan University, an M.A. from Northwestern University in Performance Studies, and an M.A.T. from Northwestern, as well. Since leaving the Des Moines Playhouse, Kathy has directed and taught in Kentucky, Oregon, Michigan, Iowa, Florida, Oklahoma, and Ansbach, Germany. Kathy's newest role is Dramaturge for AACT's New-PlayFest.



Dr. Caitlin A. J. Powell received her doctorate in experimental psychology from the University of Kentucky in 2010. She has taught at Georgia College and State University, St. Mary's College of California, and, most recently, Thomas More University, where she is Chair of the Psychology Department. Caitlin has a lifelong love of theater, and has had extensive experience as a volunteer at the Des Moines Playhouse.

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The book cover features three small images of actors in stage settings. The top image shows three people in a room, one in a yellow shirt. The middle image shows three women in a kitchen-like setting. The bottom image shows two women in a room, one wearing a red hat.

COVID Safety Webinars

Always on the lookout for resources to share with our members, AACT is pleased to collaborate with Arts & Science, which provides COVID safety training and CCO Certificates for Theatre Production and Patron Safety. The curriculum for its two webinars was created with productions of varying size, scale, and budget in mind.

Theatre Production – CCO Certificate & COVID Safety Training

This webinar is intended for stage managers, production managers, company managers, performers, general managers, directors, choreographers, designers, technicians, and others who work “upstage of the proscenium.” Topics include issues relating to auditions, rehearsal rooms, load-in, tech, backstage, and dressing rooms, as well as on stage.



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Patron Safety – CCO Certificate & COVID Safety Training

This webinar focuses on COVID safety for anyone interacting with patrons, guests, and attendees. This includes venue operators, theatre and house managers, ushers, ticket takers, box office, production managers/coordinates, among others. Topics include prepping for the guest experience, protocols for staff, audience arrival, ticket retrieval, concessions, coat check, seating, intermission, and exiting the theatre.

Webinars moderated and co-taught by Lauren Class Schneider and Dr. Larry Kaskel. In addition, guests share their practical experience of working during the pandemic. The Theatre Production class features Bonnie Panson (*Six*), Cody Renard Richard (*Hamilton*), and Molly Meg Legal (*Ain't Too Proud*). The Patron & Guest Safety class features Valerie Simmons (The Public Theatre) and Jill Hurwitz (Grant Park Music Festival).



Each of the two-hour webinars are meant for those who want to be knowledgeable during the pandemic, or who aim to be COVID Compliance Officers. A quiz is administered for participants to prove competency in the subject. In addition, individuals who show command of the material are eligible for a certificate of completion as a COVID Compliance Officer for Theatre Production or Patron Safety. All attendees have access to the Arts & Science resource page, filled with helpful, relevant information. (For AACT members who may be hosting a guest Equity member, AEA accepts Arts & Science for Covid Compliance Officer certificates.)

Always finding valuable resources to share with our members, AACT is pleased to collaborate with Arts & Science. The classes are regularly \$45, but current AACT Members receive a 10% discount to attend these online classes. Make sure to use the discount code AACT upon checkout. This discount is applicable through October 31, 2021. Register for your class at: artsnscience.com/classes. ♦



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AACT National Directors Conference 2021

Personalized to meet your needs

November 19-21, 2021

San Antonio, Texas

The National Directors Conference is back!

Community theatre directors will gather November 19-21, 2021, at the Drury Plaza Hotel in San Antonio, Texas, located on the city's famous River Walk. There, they'll share stories of challenges and solutions, learn about other theatres' operations, and network with colleagues from across the country.

This three-day, biennial conference (previously held in Madison, Wisconsin), is designed exclusively for individuals who are employed full-time in an administrative or artistic position in a community theatre organization.

Katie Hallman, Executive Director of Theatre Cedar Rapids says, "The AACT National Directors Conference is a powerful reminder of where we have been in the world of community theatre, and a fire starter for where we want to go. It is a gift to be surrounded by individuals with varying years of experience and tenure; to be reminded that there is rarely a problem that someone else hasn't faced; and to participate in challenging conversations that are essential to the vitality of theatre making in each of our communities."

"What I enjoyed most about this conference was the comradery of the other managing directors," says Steve Carver of Kalamazoo Civic Theatre. "Producing sustainable community theatre is a challenge, but we need to remember we're not alone. The relationships I've enjoyed through these conferences have been invaluable. Everyone is so positive and supportive. I feel I can call any of the managing directors and ask for advice on or request help with costumes or props. It's a very special conference in relationship building."



Conference Moderator Michael D. Fox

Michael D. Fox will soon celebrate his 19th anniversary with Utah's Hale Centre Theatre. He currently serves as its Chief Operations Officer, but over the years has played on stage, worked as box office manager, accounting specialist, director of operations, stage manager, and sound board engineer. He attended Southern Utah University,

home of the Tony Award-winning Utah Shakespeare Festival, on a performance scholarship after an injury derailed a pitching career in the major leagues. He is a student of human thought and loves to extrapolate meaning from all forms of dialogue; in person, on the page, and in music.



The biennial National Community Theatre Directors Conference was last held at the University of Wisconsin in Madison in November 2019. Community theatre professionals from across the country assembled to share and gain knowledge from their peers. Join us for the 2021 conference in San Antonio

Registration

Early-Bird Rates: (Before September 1)

Member Rate \$300

Non-Member rate \$360

On-site Rates: (After September 1)

Member Rate \$350

Non-Member rate \$400

Registration includes all conference materials, lunches, and social events.

For more information and registration, visit aact.org/mdc.

CDC Procedures and Mandates

Due to the recent developments in the Delta Variant and increased infection rates in certain areas of the country, AACT is requiring all conference attendees to be fully vaccinated and may also be required to wear masks during the event.

Under this policy, Conference attendees will need to be fully vaccinated with an FDA or WHO authorized vaccine in order to attend a conference and must show proof of vaccination at their time of entry into the event or at time of registration. Fully vaccinated" means the conference date must be at least 14 days after the second dose of a two-dose COVID-19 vaccine, or at least 14 days after a single-dose COVID-19 vaccine.

Exceptions can be made for people with a medical condition or closely held religious belief that prevents vaccination. These registrants must provide proof of a negative COVID-19 PCR test taken within 72 hours of the conference start time, or

a negative COVID-19 antigen test taken within 6 hours of the conference start time. Proof of negative test and/or vaccination can be sent to info@act.org.



Hotel:

Drury Plaza Hotel
San Antonio Riverwalk
105 S. St. Mary's Street
San Antonio, TX 78205

Room Rates:

\$139 Standard per night + tax

To reserve your room, visit aact.org/drury.

The Drury Plaza Hotel is located on the San Antonio River, in walking distance from shops, restaurants, and entertainment. Relax in the sun on the deck of the rooftop pool, which also has two whirlpools. (San Antonio's average daytime temperature in November is a pleasant 72°.) Formerly the Alamo National Bank, the hotel in this 24-story renovated skyscraper features 50-foot ceilings, travertine flooring, and stained-glass windows.

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For more information on the San Antonio River Walk's shops, restaurants and sights, visit thesanantonioriverwalk.com/.

Schedule:

Thursday - 11/18/2021

5:30–7:00pm Cocktails in Lobby (optional)

Friday - 11/19/2021

9:00am	Morning Session
12:30pm	Lunch buffet – provided by AACT
1:30pm	Afternoon Session
5:30pm	Dinner on your own – Explore the River Walk!
7:30pm	Evening Session
10:00pm	Adjourn for the day

Saturday - 11/20/2021

9:00am	Morning Session
12:30pm	Lunch buffet - provided by AACT
1:30pm	Afternoon Session
5:30pm	Dinner on your own – Explore the River Walk!
7:30pm	Evening Session with MTI Music Theatre International
10:00pm	Adjourn for the day

Sunday - 11/21/2021

9:00am	Morning Session
11:30am	Conference adjourns ♦

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NewPlayFest 2020

World Premiere Productions Open

In March of 2020, AACT NewPlayFest was four shows into its six-show performance cycle, with successful productions at Boise Little Theatre in Idaho (*Casserole*, by Pam Harbaugh), TacomaLittle Theatre in Washington (*Shattering*, by Pat Montley), the Sauk Theatre in Michigan (*On Pine Knoll Street*, by Mark Cornell), and the Manatee Performing Arts Center in Florida (*Goat Song Revel*, by Dan Borengasser). Then, COVID-19 halted everything.

AACT is pleased to announce the two postponed productions are being produced after a lengthy postponement.

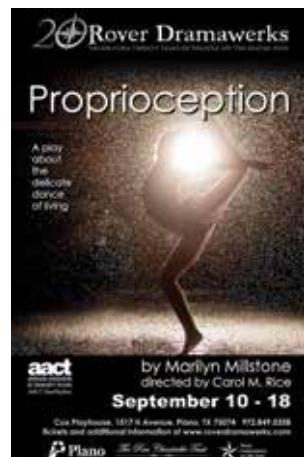
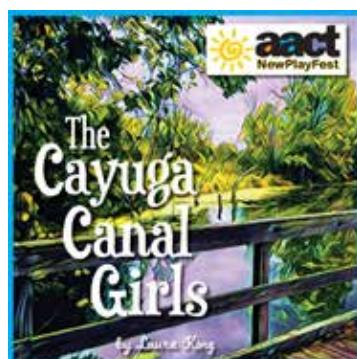
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Publisher: ConcordTheatricals.com
Playwright: LuigiJannuzzi.com



The world premiere of *Proprioception*, by Marilyn Millstone will be produced by Rover Dramawerks. Performances will be held September 10–18, 2021, at the Cox Playhouse in Plano, Texas.



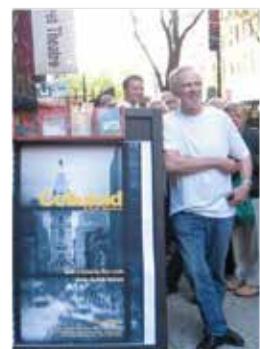
The world premiere of *The Cayuga Canal Girls*, by Laura King, will be produced at Phoenix Theatre, in Oakville, Connecticut, October 2–16, 2021.

For more information, visit aact.org/newplayfest-2020-playwrights-premieres.

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New Roles

The **Kalamazoo Civic Theatre**, in Kalamazoo, Michigan, has selected **Laura Zervic** as Executive Director, following an executive search process led by Arts Consulting Group (ACG). She began her tenure on July 1, 2021.



Ms. Zervic has practiced marketing and advertising law for more than 20 years for such companies as Chobani, Kellogg Company, two prestigious law firms in Chicago, and BISSELL Homecare, Inc.. In addition, she has remained highly engaged with and dedicated to her community and to the arts, serving as a Trustee and Treasurer of the Gull Lake Community Schools Board of Education and President of the Gull

Lake Community Schools Fine Arts Foundation. Over the course of her career, she has appeared in dozens of productions, including *West Side Story*, *Company*, *Brighton Beach Memoirs*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Noises Off*, and *Lend Me a Tenor*. She first appeared onstage at the Civic in the 2009 production of *The Affections of May*. She also has experience on the production side as a director, stage manager, and producer. Ms. Zervic joined the board of directors of the Civic in June 2020, at a time when the board was navigating the impact of the pandemic, responding to the justified demand for action around Black Lives Matter and other social justice issues, and managing an internal leadership void. Ms. Zervic earned a bachelor of arts degree in political science from Cincinnati University and a Juris Doctor from The John Marshall Law School in Chicago.

Congratulations to everyone on their new roles! If your theatre has a new role, email info@act.org with their name, position, short bio or information on their involvement, and photo to have them recognized in future issues of *Spotlight*!

The **Academy of Children's Theatre** (ACT) in Richland, Washington, is excited to be opening back up in person, and with that comes some new staffing updates!



Adrienne Fletcher has accepted the role as the theatre's Music Director and Office Specialist. With Master Degrees in Orchestral Conducting & Vocal Performance/Pedagogy from Central Washington University and an undergrad degree in Harp Performance from Pacific Lutheran University, Adrienne delivers exceptionally effective music training to our ACT

students along with her dedicated work ethic, engaging presence, and passion for arts education.



Brandon Harbo is the theatre's new Marketing Coordinator! An ACT Alumni and recent Washington State University Business/Marketing graduate, Brandon combines his passion for the ACT mission with new, creative marketing ideas.



Lisa Howell has stepped into the role as the Productions Manager for ACT. Lisa and her family have been key volunteers and participants ACT for over 10 years. With this new position, Lisa coordinates and executes all MainStage productions at ACT.



Spreading It Around

by Londos D'Arrigo

writer for JOAN RIVERS, PHYLLIS DILLER and LILY TOMLIN

A LAUGH-OUT-LOUD COMEDY THAT GARNERS RAVE REVIEWS

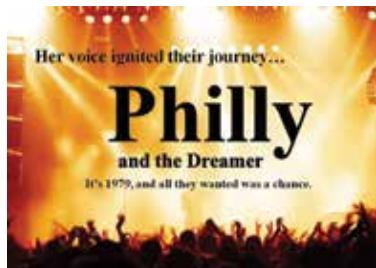
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Spotlight on Discounter

Philly Developmental



FREE live performance licenses for select AACT members:

Producers of *Philly and the Dreamer*, an all-original big stage, fun-filled musical, are offering selected AACT members a FREE live performance license. No fees or miscellaneous charges. Nine live performance licenses are available for productions beginning fall of 2021 through 2023.

Information, music and videos along with a link to the AACT application can be found at: phillyandthedreamer.com. The producers reserve the right to make the final selections based on submitted information, timing, and geographic location. ♦

AACT Web Power

The AACT website provides three ways to search for plays and musicals available for production, all on one page: <https://aact.org/sources>

1. Know the title you want, but not who offers it? Use the AACT PlayFinder, a specialized Google search engine that quickly locates who has it.
2. Interested in new works by up-and-coming authors? Explore the "AACT-Member Playwrights" listings for comedies, dramas, and musicals. These playwrights are part of the AACT family, and are very responsive to your questions.
3. Looking for publishers who offer children's plays, musicals, or other specialized productions? Use the "Browse publishers by category" feature.

Watch for Web Power in every issue of Spotlight—and learn how to get the most from the AACT website.

Make A Legacy Gift

Please consider including the American Association of Community Theatre in your legacy plans through a will, trust, life insurance gift, or other legacy gift. Through these special gifts, friends like you are able to sustain AACT's mission and provide learning experiences for AACT-member companies participating in AACTFest national festivals.

To learn more about
AACT's Legacy Society,
visit aact.org/legacy

or contact the AACT office
at info@aact.org



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Much of the work of the American Association of Community Theatre would not be possible without the generous support of our Corporate Partners, who are listed below. We thank each of them for their commitment to AACT—and to the work of community theatres everywhere.

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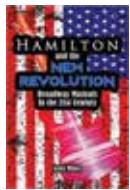
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Hamilton and the New Revolution: Broadway Musicals in the 21st Century

by Scott Miller

With *Hamilton and the New Revolution*, musical theatre scholar, director, and fanboy Scott Miller takes readers on a phantasmagorical journey through the second decade of the millennium, every stop along the way a Broadway musical truly like no other, all of them brilliant, original, and unique, all pointing toward an even brighter future for the art form and all the young artists creating amazing new work for us every day.

Miller's eighth book of in-depth exploration takes another deep dive into some of the most fascinating Broadway musicals of our time, including *Hamilton*, *Dear Evan Hansen*, *A Strange Loop*, *Hadestown*, *The Color Purple*, *Bonnie & Clyde*, *Hands on a Hardbody*, and *The Scottsboro Boys*, all shows that broke the rules in smart, fearless, and surprising ways.

Together with Miller's last book, *Idiots, Heathers, and Squips*, this new book paints an inspiring, hopeful picture of the pres-

ent and future of the American musical theatre, as it continually changes and evolves to meet the cultural moment once again.

Scott Miller is the founder and artistic director of New Line Theatre, an alternative musical theatre company he established in 1991 in St. Louis, at the vanguard of a new wave of non-profit musical theatre being born across the country during the early 1990s, offering an alternative to the commercial musical theatre of New York and Broadway tours. He has been working in musical theatre since 1978 and has been directing musicals since 1981. He has written more than a dozen books about musical theatre, and holds a degree in music and musical theatre from Harvard University.

Published July, 2021

Available from Amazon: \$19.95 paperback,
\$5.99 Kindle edition

Dayton Playhouse FutureFest 2022

Festival dates: July 15 – 17, 2022. The Dayton Playhouse does intend to hold the 2022 festival in person.

Entry must be an original work (no musicals or plays for children) that has not been published or produced where admission was charged prior to FutureFest 2022. Staged readings/workshop productions are not necessarily disqualifying factors.

During FutureFest weekend, six finalists are staged and publicly adjudicated by a panel of five theatre professionals (New York-based and regional). Following the final production of the weekend, the adjudicators vote and select the winner.

Should your script be selected and produced as one of the six finalists, you must be available to attend, in person, the weekend festival (July 15-17, 2022) in Dayton, Ohio and participate in all events. Finalists must acknowledge the Dayton Playhouse when script is published. The winning playwright awards the Dayton Playhouse the option to produce the winning play as part of its main stage season royalty-free.

AWARDS

A \$1000 honorarium will be awarded to the winning playwright; runners-up each receive \$100. The Dayton Playhouse provides the six finalists travel (within the continental U.S.) to Dayton and housing for FutureFest weekend.

Electronic submissions (PDF format) are preferred, but not required. Email to futurefest@daytonplayhouse.com

\$20 Submission fee (waived for members of the Dramatists Guild)

Submission deadline: October 31, 2021

Questions: Fran Pesch, FutureFest Program Director
937-424-8477
or email futurefest@daytonplayhouse.com

Website: wordpress.thedaytonplayhouse.com



(left, clockwise): AACT Region I Representative Bevie Lord (Foxborough, Massachusetts), AACT Festivals Committee Chair Kay Armstrong (Dallas, Texas), AACT Past President Carole Ries (Topeka, Kansas), AACT Region VII Representative Donna Fisher (Casper Theatre Company, Casper, Wyoming), AACT Past President and Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation representative Linda M. Lee (Fort Worth, Texas), Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation representative Janet Salter (Brookhaven, Georgia), AACT Region I Representative Bevie Lord (Foxborough, Massachusetts) at the Hale Centre Theatre in Sandy, Utah, June 14, 2021, to the success of Virtual AACTFest 2021

photos by Beverley Lord



(l-r): AACT Festivals Committee Chair Kay Armstrong (Dallas, Texas), AACT Past President Carole Ries (Topeka, Kansas), AACT Region VII Representative Donna Fisher (Casper Theatre Company, Casper, Wyoming), AACT Past President and Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation representative Linda M. Lee (Fort Worth, Texas), Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation representative Janet Salter (Brookhaven, Georgia), AACT Region I Representative Bevie Lord (Foxborough, Massachusetts) at the Hale Centre Theatre in Sandy, Utah, June 16, 2021



Waiting to enjoy a performance of Les Misérables at the Hale Centre Theatre in Sandy, Utah on June 18, 2021 (front row): AACT Festivals Committee Chair Kay Armstrong (Dallas, Texas), AACT Region I Representative Bevie Lord (Foxborough, Massachusetts), Jon Douglas Rake (Tacoma Musical Playhouse, Tacoma Washington), Jeffrey Sturtecky (Tacoma Musical Playhouse, Tacoma Washington), AACT Past President and Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation representative Linda M. Lee (Fort Worth, Texas), Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation representative Janet Salter (Brookhaven, Georgia), (second row): AACT Past President Carole Ries (Topeka, Kansas), Barbara Fox (Hale Centre Theatre, Sandy, Utah), AACT President Chris Serface (Tacoma Little Theatre, Tacoma, Washington), AACT Board Member at Large Chad-Alan Carr (Gettysburg Community Theatre, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania), David R. Kilpatrick (Des Moines Community Playhouse, Des Moines, Iowa), AACT Board Member at Large Sharon Burum (Oklahoma Community Theatre Association, Duncan, Oklahoma), AACT Region IV-A Representative Lynn Nelson (Tupelo Community Theatre, Tupelo, Mississippi)

Artie's Advocacy Tip

Americans for the Arts has been tracking the human and financial impacts of COVID-19 since the pandemic began. Its latest effort is a survey regarding the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 on arts and cultural organizations.

AACT encourages you to participate in this important online survey, which will help continue gathering the impact data that is critical to our collective advocacy efforts.

In addition to the economic and cultural impact of the pandemic, the survey gathers information about the challenges facing the arts sector in the relief/recovery and re-opening processes.



Access "The Ongoing Impacts of COVID-19: Survey of Arts and Cultural Organizations and Creative Businesses" at aact.org/covid-survey.

There is a "Save and Continue Later" button at the bottom of each page, which allows you to fill out the survey in more than one visit, if you choose.

Americans for the Arts serves, advances, and leads the network of organizations and individuals who cultivate, promote, sustain, and support the arts in America. Founded in 1960, Americans for the Arts is the nation's leading nonprofit organization for advancing the arts and arts education.

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When	What/Who	Where		Information
Sept 1 - Oct 27	Industry Connections	Virtual		817-732-3177x1 aact.org/webinars
Sept 10 -18	AACT NewPlayFest World Premiere <i>Proprioception</i> by Marilyn Millstone	TX	Plano	972-849-0358 roverdramawerks.com
Sept 16	Fall Webinar Series: <i>Viewpoints</i>	Virtual		817-732-3177x1 aact.org/webinars
Sept 30	Fall Webinar Series: <i>Theatre-Based Programming in Senior Care</i>	Virtual		817-732-3177x1 aact.org/webinars
Oct 15 - 29	AACT NewPlayFest World Premiere <i>The Cayuga Canal Girls</i> by Laura King	CT	Oakville	203-632-8546 phoenixstagecompany.org
Oct 28	Fall Webinar Series: <i>Kamishibai</i>	Virtual		817-732-3177x1 aact.org/webinars

For dates further ahead, check the website: aact.org/calendar

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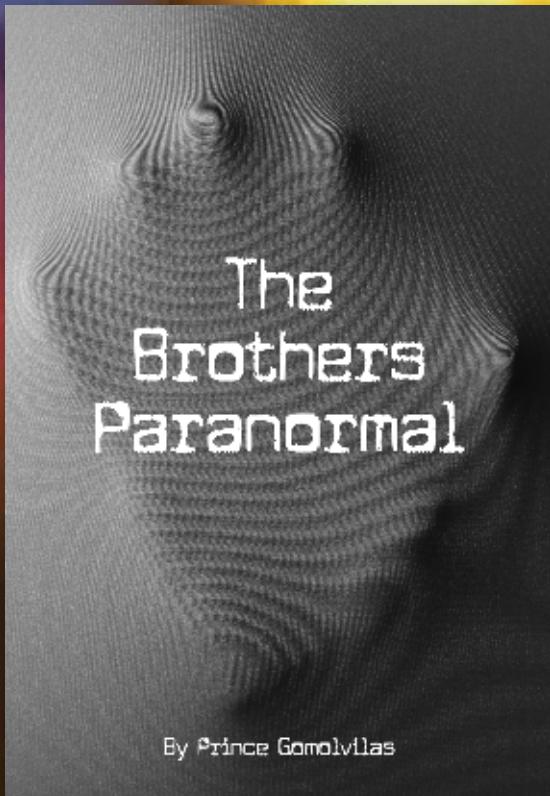
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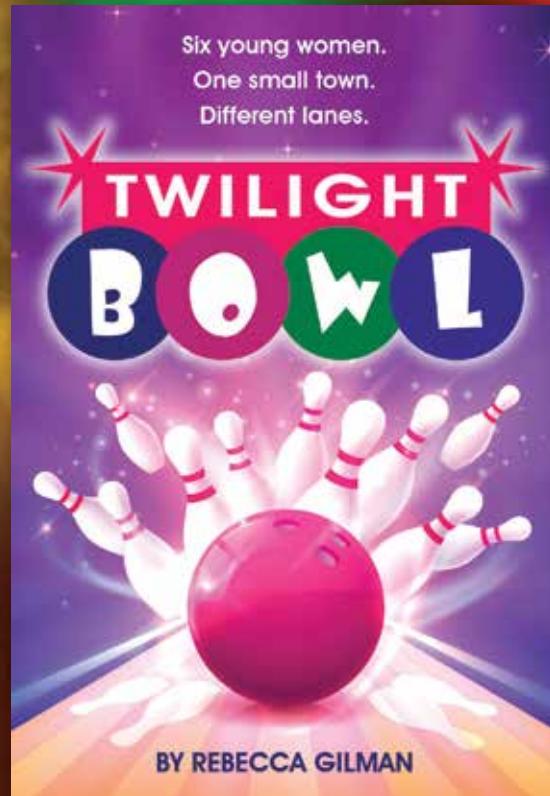
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Full Series Registration (all six sessions):

**AACT members - \$75
non-members - \$100**

Per-session Registration:

**AACT members - \$15
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The full series of six sessions begins in September and ends in December. Each session offers 1 to 1.5 hours of streaming webcast that includes a live discussion with the presenter, video demonstrations, and presentation materials.

aact.org/webinars for information and registration