

spotlight

January/February 2022 \$5.00



**AACT
NewPlayFest
World Premieres**

**CTMC
2022**

**TEAMS
2022**

**aactWORLDVEST
2022**

Mr. Sandman • Lollipop • Sugartime • Allegheny Moon • All I Have To Do Is Dream • Dreamlover • Stupid Cupid • Lipstick on Your Collar • Lucky • You Got a Feelin' • Mr. Lee • Son of a Preacher Man • Touch of Sin • I'm a Rebel • Secret Love • Mr. Lee • Don't Leave This Way • Thrill Me, Kiss Me • With This Ring

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Chris Serface
AACT President

Hello everyone-

As I'm writing this, my heart is full and I'm filled with renewed inspiration. First, *All Together Now* (designed as a fundraiser for local theatres to perform live, over the same four days in November 2021) was a huge success for many of us. Thank you, MTI for making that happen.

And second, I've just returned from the AACT 2021 National Managing Directors Conference. Thank you to Broadway Media for being an AACT media sponsor and providing audio/visual equipment for the conference. Being in the room with people that understand the challenges of bringing theatre to life is pure therapy!

Hearing the stories of so many successful re-openings showed me how resilient our industry can be. Of course, we also heard of the challenges that many have faced as they navigate the different rules and regulations that come with a return to live performances. I truly believe that we will come back stronger than ever before, but it is still a long road. I encourage you to reach out to your peers and offer help and advice when and where you can. AACT is a great resource for that, as well.

I can't recommend events like the National Managing Directors Conference enough. As one of my friends always sums it up, "These are my people." I encourage you to take part in as many AACT educational events as you can, including the CTMC (Community Theatre Management Conference) coming up in March (story on page 15), as well as the TEAMS Conference in July (story on page 18). I know that you will walk away with something that will make the trip worth it: from finding a new resource that saves you time and money, to a new skillset that revolutionizes how you approach the art.

Celebrate yourselves. You are making amazing things happen in your community.

Best,
Chris Serface

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Mark your calendars for June 20-26, 2022, and delight in performances from top-quality theatre troupes from around the globe

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AACT is offering a choice of two Community Theatre Management Conference virtual sessions, one East Coast Session (March 4-6) and one West Coast Session (March 18-20). Gain new insights and solid, practical information on a wide variety of topics important to you and your theatre

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TEAMS Conference 2022

Hosted by the Hale Centre Theatre in Salt Lake City, Utah, TEAMS is an educational conference offering tracks in **T**echnical Theatre, **E**ducational Programming, **A**rtistic Direction/Vision, **M**arketing, and **S**tage Management

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AACT NewPlayFest World Premieres

The 2020 NewPlayFest series wraps up with *The Cayuga Canal Girls* at Phoenix Stage Company in Oakville, Connecticut, and the 2022 series launches with *Escaping the Labyrinth*, by Thomas S. Hischak, at Des Moines Community Playhouse in Des Moines, Iowa

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Solving the Great Set Design Mystery

The process of creating an imaginative, budget-friendly set for *Murder on the Orient Express* at Playhouse 2000, in Kerrville Texas

On the Cover

Nick Cornelison as Bud Schliemann and Jillian Traskos as Dee explore a romantic relationship in the AACT NewPlayFest world premiere production of *Escaping the Labyrinth*, by Thomas S. Hischak, at The Des Moines Playhouse in Des Moines, Iowa
Photo: Steve Gibbons

Contacting AACT

AACT
PO Box 101476
Fort Worth, TX 76185
817-732-3177
info@aact.org

AACT welcomes *Spotlight* input and requests for advertising rates. Contact David Cockerell at david@aact.org to submit content. Contact Darlene DeLorenzo at darlene@aact.org or 512-267-4509 for advertising rates and specs.



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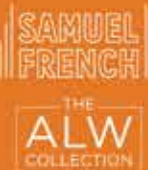
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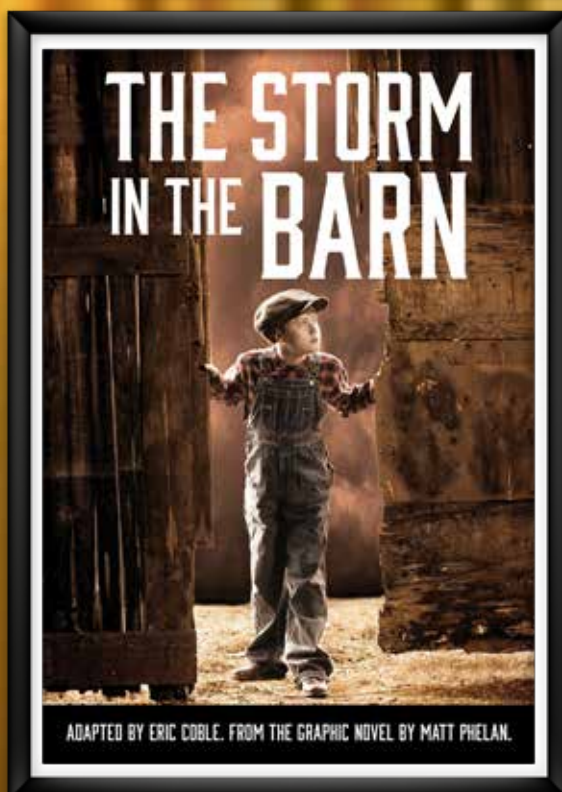
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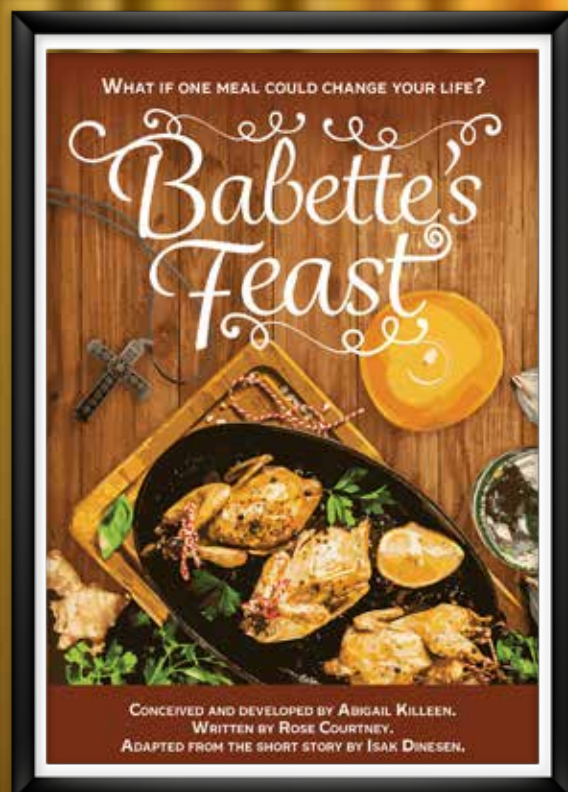


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Breezy Point, NY (2022)

III Dee Baldock
Verona, WI (2022)

IV-A Lynn Nelson
Tupelo, MS (2022)

IV-B Kristy Meanor
Wetumpka, AL (2022)

V Jamie Ulmer
Beatrice, NE (2025)

VI Sally Barnes
Broken Arrow, OK (2022)

VII Donna Fisher
Casper, WY (2022)

VIII TBD

IX Jon Douglas Rake
Tacoma, WA (2022)

X Dane Winters
Germany (US Army) (2022)

Upcoming Events

AACT NewPlayFest World Premiere
Unpacking Mother, by Karen Schaeffer
Market House Theatre
Paducah, Kentucky
February 10-22, 2022
markhousetheatre.org

AACT Winter Board Meeting
February 25-26, 2022
Drury Inn & Suites Phoenix Airport
3333 E. University Drive
Phoenix, AZ 85034
aact.org/calendar

AACT NewPlayFest World Premiere
MLM is for Murder (Or, Your Side Hustle is Killing Us), by John Bavoso
Midland Center for the Arts/Center Stage Theatre
Midland, Michigan
February 25-27, 2022
midlandcenter.org

USITT22 Conference and Stage Expo
Baltimore, Maryland
March 2-5, 2022
usitt.org/conference22

AACT Staff

Quiana Clark-Roland, Executive Director
David Cockerell, Marketing/Communications Director
Kathy Pingel, NewPlayFest Dramaturge
Karen Matheny, Membership Coordinator
Winston Daniels, Operations and Events Assistant
Jill Patchin, Corporate Partners Manager

AACT Community Theatre Management Conference (CTMC) 2022

East Coast Session – Virtual
March 4-6
West Coast Session - Virtual
March 18-20
aact.org/ctmc

World Theatre Day 2022

March 27
world-theatre-day.org

National Arts Action Summit/Arts Advocacy Day 2022

Dates TBA
americansforthearts.org/events/national-arts-action-summit

aactWORLDFFEST 2022

June 20-26
Venice Theatre
Venice, FL
aact.org/worldfest

AACT Summer 2022 Board Meeting

June 24-25
Venice Theatre
Venice, FL
aact.org/calendar

TEAMS Conference 2022

July 29-31
Hale Centre Theatre
Salt Lake City UT
aact.org/teams

Darlene DeLorenzo, Vendor Services Coordinator
Stephen Peithman, Webmaster /
Spotlight Assistant Editor
Susan Austin, NewPlayFest Coordinator
Mary Jo DeNolf, Festivals/Engagements
Coordinator

Spotlight

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Editors: David Cockerell
Stephen Peithman
Design: Jim Covault

Content and Resource contributors:
Susan Austin, Lee Ann Bakros, Amber Bielinski,
Mark Blackmon, Diane Broda, Jeffrey Brown, Lori Chase,
Quiana Clark-Roland, David Cockerell, Drew Cohen,
Laurie Colton, Patrick Cook/Expressions Photography &
Design, Jim Covault, Winston Daniels, Darlene DeLorenzo,
Dennis K Photography, Mary Jo DeNolf, Bob Frame,
Steve Gibbons, Amy Goodyear, Tim Jebsen, Colin Key,
Laura King, Karen Matheny, Paula Murphy, Liz Nance,
Lynn Niles, Jill Patchin, Stephen Peithman, Kathy Pingel,
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aactWORLDFEST 2022

June 20-26, 2022, Venice, Florida

Register today for aactWORLDFEST 2022 at venicetheatre.org/international/

After 2020 forced the postponement of our signature international community theatre festival, we are delighted to be accepting registrations for aactWORLDFEST 2022! Scheduled for the week of June 20-26, the festival is hosted again by Venice Theatre in Venice, Florida. This is the fourth consecutive time aactWORLDFEST is being held in what we like to call “paradise”—southwest Florida’s beautiful Gulf Coast. Registration is open to theatre volunteers, staff, audience members, and theatre lovers from around the globe. You are encouraged to book early at VeniceTheatre.org/international.



Caio Stolai from Brazil and one of the beautiful puppets of Circo Poeira (Dust Circus)

Poeira. A troupe from the **Central African Republic** is presenting *Les Anciens Combattants (Veterans Affairs)*, a play with a strong message

Delight in performances by top-quality theatre troupes from around the globe. Festival Coordinator Lori Chase has been busy vetting theatre troupes from several continents, and is proud to announce that 14 countries have officially accepted invitations to bring their productions to Venice, Florida. With a mix of returning troupes and new festival participants, the lineup features two shows from **Armenia**: *The Wolf*, a fairy tale told with intricate shadow puppetry, and an Armenian adaptation of a familiar American novel soon to be announced. Caio Stolai returns from **Brazil** with his puppetry-based story of a beloved circus master, *Circo*



The story of The Wolf is told by Yerevan State Puppet Theatre with intricate shadow puppetry

against bad governance inspired by the real history of Africa. Actors from the **Czech Republic** are bringing their show *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders*, while East-Voice Team for Arts from **Egypt** will present *The Seven Days*, a black comedy that explores colonialism and oppression in the Arab community. From **France** comes a beautiful tale of love and friendship using classic French comedy techniques. **Georgia** will be represented at the festival for the first time, and *The Wild Bunch* returns from **Germany** with their play *Der Kinoerzähler* or *The Movie Teller*, based on the German novel by Gert Hofmann about the end of the silent film era in the early 1930s. The Scrambled Egg Theatre Company from the **United Kingdom** returns after winning over 2018 audiences with *Bump!* This time they’ll perform *A Man of No Importance*, a spoof of classic secret agent movies. Also performing are troupes from **Italy**, **Israel**, **Poland**, **Ukraine**, and the **United States**.

Most productions will be performed in the country’s native language, but the language of theatre is universal. Manuel Ortiz from Chile and Jan Palmer Sayer from the UK will be adjudicating the entries. If you’ve been to aactWORLDFEST before, you know that in addition to a week of outstanding performances from around the globe, you will experience tremendous opportunities for education and

“We broke ticket sales records after the reviews came out.”*



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*Jeff Rane Uptown Players

networking. Workshops will cover a wide range of topics and will be announced soon. Festival goers will also have time to enjoy the historic beach-town of Venice, where shops, restaurants, art galleries, and the Gulf of Mexico are within walking distance of the theatre. Several social activities will be scheduled throughout the week to help you make life-long theatre friends, and a non-competitive awards celebration will cap off the festivities.



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- All workshops
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- Gala ticket

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- All workshops
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aactWORLD FEST 2022 registration prices listed above are for AACT members. If you are not a member, add \$75 to adult registration; \$15 to student registration.

AACT Airline Discount Codes:

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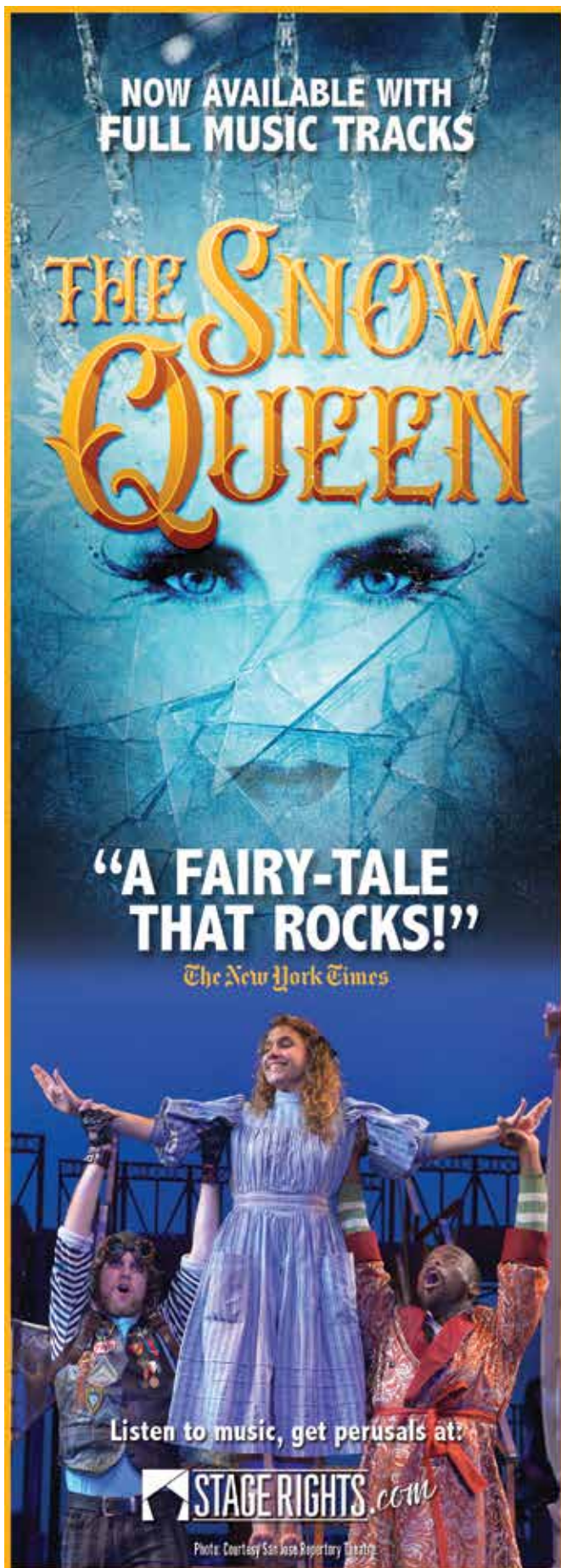
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VeniceTheatre.org/international is the best place to stay up-to-date and to learn more about all there is to do at aactWORLD FEST 2022. Visit the site today to register for this fabulous event. You'll have the time of your life at this Festival in Paradise. See you in June! ♦

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New Region Representatives

The AACT Board of Directors welcomes two new Regional Representatives.



Frances Ruoff is the new AACT Region II Representative, which includes Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania.

Frances' commitment to theatre spans 40+ years as a professional actress and director in New York City. As a member of SAG-AFTRA and Actors' Equity, she has appeared in numerous films, TV soap operas, network shows, and theatrical productions. Having received a B.A. in Speech and Theatre and an M.F.A. in Directing from Brooklyn College, she served as Artistic Director for the Diocesan Theatre Guild's Repertory Co. and The Sunshine Players. Frances has served as Vice President of Adjudication Services and Training Coordinator for the Theatre Association of New York State [TANYS] for many years and, with Joel Lord, rewrote the *TANYS Adjudication Handbook*. She has reviewed original plays for the AACT NewPlayFest for the last three cycles. Having recently retired from teaching drama and English at KCC City University of New York, Frances is looking forward to greater involvement in adjudication, community theatre, and AACT.



Dee Baldock is the new AACT Region III Representative, which includes Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin.

Dee founded Wisconsin's Verona Area Community Theater in 1992 and has continued to work with the organization for almost 30 years, serving on its Board of Directors, and as Treasurer and President. She has produced over 60 shows and directed 15 for the organization, and was active in the fundraising and construction of the first VACT building in 2004, and a new theater in 2017. In 2004, Dee was elected to the Wisconsin Association of Community Theaters and has served as its Treasurer for 16 years. She has chaired several Wisconsin AACTFests, as well as a state conference. She produced four shows entered in AACTFest, one of which advanced to regionals. She is now pleased to expand her horizons as the AACT Region III Representative.

AACT 2022 Community Theatre Management Conference (CTMC)

Find solutions virtually with fellow theatremakers

AACT is offering a choice of two virtual conferences in March 2022:

East Coast Session

Friday, March 4 – Sunday, March 6, 2022

Facilitator: Chad-Alan Carr



Chad-Alan Carr is the Founding Executive/Artistic Director for Gettysburg Community Theatre, now in its 12th season, located in the heart of historic downtown Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Chad serves on the AACT Board of Directors and was the Chair of the AACT National Youth Festival at AACTFest 2017 and AACTFest 2019. His many

accomplishments include directing the Eastern States Regional Premiere of *The Penguin Project* (theatre for youth with special needs), chartering the International Thespian Troupe for Gettysburg Area High School, and serving as a board member for Pennsylvania Association of Community Theatres, Eastern States Theatre Association, and AACT.

West Coast Session

Friday, March 18 – Sunday, March 20, 2022

Facilitator: Dorinda Toner



Dorinda Toner has been performing on stages across North America for over 35 years. She studied theatre/directing at university in her native Canada, where she is also a multi-album Canadian recording artist. A prolific director, she has won several awards for her work, and is delighted to have contributed both as a guest columnist for AACT's *Spotlight*

magazine and as a panelist for AACT's ongoing virtual roundtables. Dorinda has served on several nonprofit boards and is currently a proud board member of PATA (Portland Area Theatre Alliance). She is currently Producing Artistic Director of Twilight Theater Company in Portland, Oregon.


CTMC offers new insights and solid, practical information on a wide variety of topics important to you and your theatre, including:

- Sales and Marketing
- Other Sources of Earned Income
- Fundraising and Development
- Event Planning
- Volunteers

- Season and Play Selections
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- and more!

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Conference Schedule

Note: For the March 4-6 conference, hours below indicate Eastern Time; for the March 18-20 conference, hours indicate Pacific Time

Friday

7 pm – 9 pm: Introductions and Lightning Round Discussions

After introductory remarks and introductions, the online conference will begin with small-group Lightning Round discussions, to address lighter subject matter and let everyone get to know fellow participants. At the end of each session, the large group will reconvene to share the Best of the Best—valuable ideas unearthed in the Lightning Round.

9 pm – 9:30 pm: Wrap-Up

Saturday

11 am - 1 pm: In-Depth Topic Exploration: Parts 1 & 2

Participants choose from in-depth topic discussions that begin with a panel of conference attendees who have identified that topic as a strength. The panel will engage in a 20-minute discussion on the designated topic, after which smaller breakout sessions will allow all participants to discuss the topic from their own perspective. As with the Lightning Round, each Exploration ends with a sharing of the Best of the Best.

1 pm - 2 pm: Break

2 pm – 4 pm: In-Depth Topic Exploration Parts 3 & 4

4 pm – 4:30 pm: Wrap-Up

Sunday

1 pm – 3 pm: In-Depth Topic Explorations Parts 5 & 6

3 pm – 5 pm: Break

5 pm – 6:30 pm: Volunteer and Paid Staff-Specific Discussions

This set of discussions on relevant topics will be for two smaller groups, one for those from all-volunteer theatres, the other for those with paid staff.

6:30 pm – 7 pm: Final Thoughts

Registration

Register now at aact.org/ctmc

AACT Member	\$150
Non-Member	\$175

Each session will be limited to 50 participants, in order to facilitate brainstorming, dynamic sharing, and building idea upon idea. Enroll in the session above whose time zone best suits your ability to participate fully.

Through a pre-conference questionnaire, you will help prioritize and suggest topics for discussion, which promises a blend of traditional CTMC topics and those that have arisen with the challenge of COVID-19.

CTMC Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Scholarships

AACT will be providing two scholarships for each CTMC Virtual Conference session to support and mentor theatre makers of color. Visit aact.org/ctmc for details.

More information and registration at aact.org/ctmc ♦



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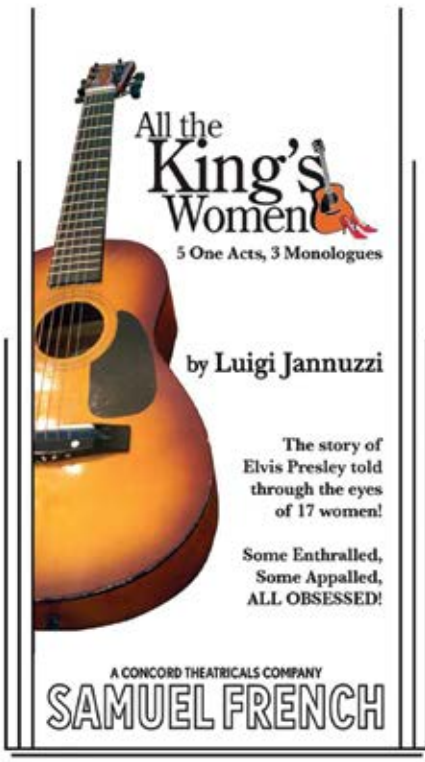
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Facilitator: Bob Frame

During his distinguished 45-year career, Bob Frame has received numerous awards for his work in technical theatre, as well as for directing and acting. He recently retired as Director of Theatre Operations at Cayuga Community College in Auburn, New York, but continues to teach theatre courses and direct original works for Harlequin Productions. Bob has served as the Technical Director for the Theatre Association of New York (TANYS) State Festival for over 20 years. He has served as technical director for over 100 productions and has designed lights for almost every genre of performance. He also has served as the Technical Liaison/Technical Director for AACTFest 2011, 2017, 2019, and Virtual AACTFest 2021. Bob has a B.A. in Technical Theatre from the State University of New York (SUNY) Oswego.

Educational Programming Track

Boost your theatre's education program by exchanging ideas and experiences, while learning new skills to better manage your programs. The Educational Programming track provides tools that will help you tackle a range of theatre education issues, send you away with a renewed enthusiasm for building your programs, and provide you with a network of colleagues from all over the country. *The Educational Programming track is for anyone, whatever their title, who is responsible for their theatre's education program.*



Facilitator: Robin Heldt Spahr

Robin Heldt Spahr is a theatre educator, singer, actor, and music director who has been on the education staff at The Des Moines Community Playhouse since 1999. She has served as education director there since 2014, and oversees year-round class programming, Friday Funday, Spotlight: Liter-

acy, Performance Academy, and The Playhouse school matinee program.

Artistic Direction/Vision Track

In this track, you'll discover and re-envision exciting ways to produce high-quality theatre as you exchange ideas and experiences with fellow producers and artistic directors. You'll get tools to help choose the right plays for your next season, plus solutions for choosing directors, recruiting actors, and solving technical problems. Plus, a look into all-important long-range planning. *The Artistic Direction/Vision track is for anyone, whatever their title, who is responsible for the overall artistic direction of their theatre.*



Facilitator: Tim Jebesen

Tim Jebesen has been the Executive Director of Midland (Texas) Community Theatre (MCT) since 1997. MCT produces 12 shows per season in three performance spaces, including musicals, dramas, comedies, mysteries, melodramas, and children's theatre. During his tenure, Tim has helped the organization increase the size of its operating budget, purchase a downtown historic theatre, and raise \$3.6 million for renovations to the Cole Theatre that enabled it to host the AACT International Theatre festival. Tim has directed 85 shows at MCT including the community theatre premiere productions of both *Shrek the Musical* and *The Producers*. Tim has adjudicated at the National AACTFest, as well as for numerous state and regional festivals. In 2015, he was elected the Vice President of the International Association of Amateur Theatres (IATA/AITA) and served on its council from 2015-2019. Tim also served as the Treasurer of AACT. He holds an M.A. in Drama from Bowling Green State University, and a B.A. from Wittenberg University.

Marketing Track

Discover strategies and tactics to increase your marketing abilities, as well as ways to create loyalty to your organization and promote its place in your community. The Marketing track will help you understand methods for small, medium, and large sized arts groups, so you can build audiences and use results-based marketing and branding tools for today's changing social media world. *The Marketing Skills track is for anyone from board members to staff who raises funds or promotes their theatre.*



Facilitator: Lee Ann Bakros

Lee Ann Bakros is in her 27th season as the Des Moines Playhouse Marketing and PR Director. But in fact, her love for The Playhouse goes back many more years. She began volunteering backstage while in high school, and saw her first live theatre, Meredith Willson's *The Music Man*, at The Playhouse when she was just seven. Prior to join-

ing The Playhouse staff, Lee Ann was Arts and Entertainment Editor at *Cityview*, a weekly alternative newspaper, and marketing director for Business Publications Corporation, Cityview's parent company. She also served as Executive Director of the Metro Arts Alliance, greater Des Moines' local arts agency. She has a B.S. in Mathematics from Iowa State University, and an M.B.A. from the University of Iowa.

Stage Management Track

Both new and experienced stage managers will gain insight and proven tools of the trade in this track—and so will directors, producers, or volunteer coordinators who want to establish or improve their theatre's stage management program.



Facilitator: Amber Bielinski

Amber K. Bielinski heads the B.F.A. Stage Management program and is Production Manager at the University of Utah. Previously, she served as Assistant Production Manager at ACT Theatre in Seattle, Washington. Amber has taught stage management courses at Seattle University and the University of Iowa, as well as giving master classes

continued on next page ►



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and lectures at Coe College and the University of Northern Iowa. She has also served as stage management mentor for the Intiman Theatre's Emerging Artist Program. Amber is a member of Actors' Equity Association, the American Guild of Musical Artists, and the Stage Managers Association. Her stage management credits include work on plays and musicals, opera, dance, Deaf theatre, theatre for young audiences, experimental and new works, and regional touring productions. Amber received her M.F.A. in Stage Management from the University of Iowa and her B.A. in Theatre Arts from Otterbein University, where she specialized in both vocal performance and stage management.

Registration

		Early Bird (Ends 6/29/2022)	Standard
Group (3+)	AACT Member	\$225/person	\$250/person
	Non-Member	\$300/person	\$325/person
Individual	AACT Member	\$250	\$300
	Non-Member	\$325	\$350

Registration includes all materials, continental breakfast, snacks, Saturday lunch.

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- *Singing in the Rain* - Considered by many as the greatest movie musical of all time, the stage version retains the film's hilarious situations, snappy dialogue, and hit-parade score of Hollywood standards.
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Tweaks and Trust

Creating an AACT NewPlayFest World Premiere



One read-through of *The Cayuga Canal Girls* was enough for Lori Poulin to realize the play's premise was strong and the characters compelling, with enough complexity in the story to challenge the actors and engage the audience.

It was also a new and unproduced script—one of several winners of the AACTFest 2020 NewPlayFest to be staged as world premieres by AACT-member theatres. And Poulin's theatre, Phoenix Stage Company in Oakville, Connecticut, would be one of them.

"As we read all the available scripts AACT sent us, this one really stood out," she recalls. "And although I was originally tapped to direct our selection, after reading *The Cayuga Canal Girls*, I immediately changed my mind. I still wanted us to do it, but I wanted to be *in* the show!"

Both wishes came true.

"An Incredible Process"

In *The Cayuga Canal Girls*, by Laura King, five women who were childhood friends reunite to lay one of their own to rest. As they struggle to come to terms with the unexpected death, they reopen old wounds, face harsh realities, and confront the compromises each has made in her life. Ending on a hopeful note, the life-changing reunion opens a path to new possibilities in the women's lives.

As part of the process of preparing the production for its premiere, AACT would provide an opportunity for the playwright to work closely with the show's director and cast in a workshop setting. It's one of the reasons for the success of NewPlayFest, since the collaborative process often tweaks and improves a play in ways the author might not otherwise have considered.

When playwright Laura King arrived in Oakville, she found that the plays' director, Ed Bassett, had assembled a cast of actresses who were both excited and nervous that she was there.

"They had been rehearsing for a few weeks by that point and were off book," she says. "They gave their all during the rehearsals I attended, and by doing so they helped me see places in the script that needed my attention. Ed and cast members also had some insightful questions that helped me develop the script even further. And throughout, AACT dramaturge Kathy Pingel was by my side, whispering helpful comments and questions in my ear. Her background as both director and dramaturge added a wealth of theatrical experience and knowledge to the *Cayuga* team. And a team is what this experience truly felt like. Everyone in the room wanted nothing but the best for the production."

Lori Poulin agrees. She had already determined that playing one



Paula Murphy

Opening Night of the final AACT NewPlayFest 2020 world premiere, The Cayuga Canal Girls, by Laura King at Phoenix Stage Company in Oakville, Connecticut

Front row (seated, left to right): Beverly Lord, AACT Region I Representative; Quiana Clark-Roland, AACT Executive Director; Laura King, The Cayuga Canal Girls playwright; Kathy Pingel, AACT NewPlayFest Dramaturge; Cathy Lee and Cliff Lee of the Jack K Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation

Second row (left to right): Lori Poulin (cast/Marta) Phoenix Stage Company Production Manager; Teresa Alexandru (cast/Eliza); Ed Bassett (director) Phoenix Stage Company Executive Director; Deb Goodman (cast/Lucy); KC Ross (cast/Jane); Cheyenne Walent (cast/Marianne)

of the *Cayuga Canal* women would be an experience to remember. And she was right.

"Being a part of this process was incredible," she says. "Workshopping the piece with the playwright was one of the most cooperative endeavors I have experienced in all my years in community theatre. Laura was generous with her talents, and flexible with our interpretations of her work. She allowed the actors to provide insight into their respective characters. And, since the five cast members are friends in real life, we were able to lean into the energy of playing friends on stage."

Watching and Listening

The workshop component was not part of the original NewPlayFest process, Pingel notes, "but we soon found that it was essential. A play begins in the mind of the playwright. They know all the characters' backstories, everything that has led up to this point. But the director, the cast, and the audience do not. All that has to be made clear in the play."

The workshop typically takes place several weeks before opening, with both playwright and dramaturge taking part.

"We get to see the piece moving," Pingel explains. "We watch and listen to their interpretations and begin to see how some changes might help. An actor may come up with a more conversational way to say a line, for example. A simple movement or gesture might be given to a

character to underscore the author's intent. Seeing the play in workshop can also flag some leaps in logic that the character would understand, but not the audience. You don't want a play to pose questions that it isn't going to answer. If you bring something up and then don't follow up on it, why say it at all?"

Pingel says that the workshop process sometimes involves negotiations between playwright and director. "It becomes a question of changing the script or helping change the director's perception of the script. Sometimes it's as simple as me saying something like, 'If you block it this way, it will work.' Because, ultimately, the author has the last word."

Even after the workshoping was over, communication continued, says the play's author.

"Kathy would check in, or our director, Ed Bassett, would call or email me with questions or comments," Laura King recalls. "Ed might suggest revisions, but never made changes without my input."

Most important, she says is that Bassett never gave up on the play, "even after we had an 18-month hiatus because of Covid-19. The show was scheduled to open in March 2020, but was pushed to October 2021, so it was with a sense of relief and gratitude that I returned to Connecticut for the premiere."

The Show Opens, the Work Continues

Seeing her play performed for an audience was a final, important step in the process, she says. Listening for their laughter in comic moments, and their rapt attention during dramatic scenes, was key to shaping the script for future productions.

"Opening night is exciting, of course, but the flurry and festivities make it difficult to focus on what revisions the play might require. It was at the matinee performance where I could really see where changes were needed. And, as usual, Ed Bassett and Kathy Pingel were there, so I could bounce my ideas off them."

Bassett, a founding member of the Phoenix Stage Company, believes that the strength of the long-standing relationships among the cast members, as well as their close contact with the playwright, illuminated the performances in important ways. He is grateful to King for trusting them with her work.

continued on next page ►

Paula Murphy



Marta (Lori Poulin), Jane (KC Ross), Lucy (Deb Goodman), and Eliza (Teresa Alexandru) begin a food fight with funeral sandwiches in the Phoenix Stage Company production of *The Cayuga Canal Girls*

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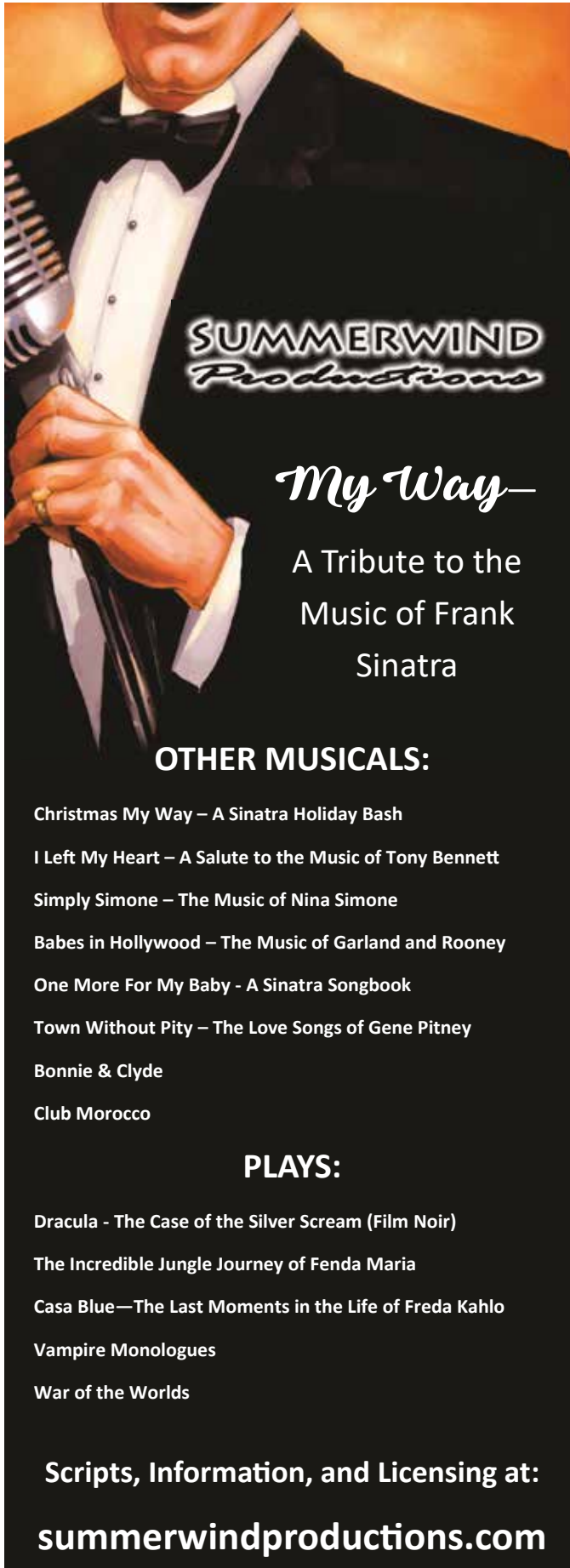
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AACT NewPlayFest 2020 continued from page 23

It's clear that in workshopping a NewPlayFest production, both director and actors become invested in it, because they have helped shape it. It's a process that the playwright appreciates, as well.

"Having my play in the AACT NewPlayFest was both productive and joyful," says Laura King. "It was collaboration at its best. I now want to submit a play to the contest every two years, just for the chance to experience it all over again."

The AACT NewPlayFest 2020 world premiere of *The Cayuga Canal Girls*, by Laura King, opened on October 2, 2021, at Phoenix Stage Company in Oakville, Connecticut. The play received an outstanding production and was well received, running through October 16.

AACT NewPlayFest 2020 was sponsored in part by **The Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation**. The foundation provided a grant that supported each Producing Theatre in all aspects of producing and marketing a world premiere production.



Dramatic Publishing Company publishes AACT NewPlayFest's winning plays in anthologies, and also licenses production rights for the winning plays. Visit aact.org/dpc for direct links to Dramatic Publishing Company's NewPlayFest anthologies and plays, plus information about discounts and special offers for AACT members. ♦



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Looking Back: NewPlayFest 2020

The 2020 AACT NewPlayFest cycle began with the world premiere production of **Casserole**, by Pamela Harbaugh, at **Boise Little Theater** in Boise, Idaho, October 18 – November 2, 2019.

Steve Strickland/Strickly Photography



Clair Wilson (Jeanna Vickery) presents her masterpiece mayonnaise casserole creation to husband Leonard Wilson (Brad Wm Ooley) and daughter Erica Wilson (Lindsay Eng) in the world premiere production of Casserole, by Pamela Harbaugh, at Boise Little Theatre

The 2020 cycle continued with:

Shattering, by Pat Montley, at **Tacoma Little Theatre** in Tacoma, Washington, January 24 – February 9, 2020

Dennis K Photography



LaBelle (Cynthia Kinyanjui) revels to Jonah (Donovan Mahannah) that she is pregnant and they are starting a family together in the world premiere production of Shattering, by Pat Montley, at Tacoma Little Theatre

Goat Song Revel, by Dan Borengasser, at **Manatee Performing Arts Center** in Bradenton, Florida, February 6 – 23, 2020

Satan (Joseph Smith) and God (Carolyn Zaput) engage Dionysus (Daniel Pelissier) to test the faith of Job in the world premiere production of Goat Song Revel, by Dan Borengasser, at Manatee Performing Arts Center



Diane Broda

continued on next page ►

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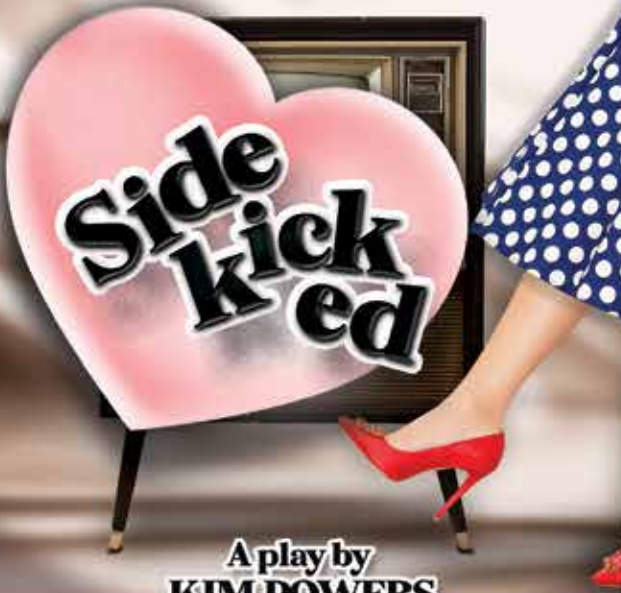
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Photo: Sally Mayes-Uribe at Cape May Stage. Courtesy of Aleksey Photography

Looking Back: AACT NewPlayFest 2020 continued from page 25

On Pine Knoll Street,
 by Mark Cornell, at
The Sauk in Jonesville,
 Michigan,
 February 6 – 16, 2020

Thelma (Anne Connors) struggles with realities as her daughter Marilyn (MJ Dulmage) begins to realize the complexities of their situation in the world premiere production of On Pine Knoll Street, by Mark Cornell, at the Sauk



Patrick Cook/Expressions Photography & Design

The final two production for the 2020 cycle were delayed due to the pandemic. The 2020 AACT NewPlayFest cycle continued and concluded with:

Proprioception, by Marilyn Millstone, at **Rover Dramawerks** in Plano, Texas September 10 – 18, 2021



Stacy Winsett

Esther Abramson (Sue Doty-Goodner) shares details of escaping the Holocaust and the loss of contact with her family to Kylie Jasper (Jill Lightfoot) and Randy Ayers (Bennett Frobock) in the world premiere production of Proprioception, by Marilyn Millstone, at Rover Dramawerks

The Cayuga Canal Girls, by Laura King at **Phoenix Stage Company** in Oakville, Connecticut, October 2 – 16, 2021



Paula Murphy

Lucy (Deb Goodman), Jane (KC Ross), Marta (Lori Poulin), and Marianne (Cheyenne Walent) remember their high school friend whose funeral has brought them back together in the world premiere production of The Cayuga Canal Girls, by Laura King at Phoenix Stage Company ♦

A New Chapter

Celebrating NewPlayFest 2022 and Its First World Premiere

Des Moines, Iowa, celebrated the first world premiere of AACT NewPlayFest 2022 when *Escaping the Labyrinth*, by Thomas S. Hischak, opened October 15, 2021, at Des Moines Community Playhouse. The outstanding production included an opening night pre-show discussion with the director, as well as an audience talk-back with the playwright and cast following the performance. The production ran through October 24.

A romantic comedy that travels through time, *Escaping the Labyrinth* follows Bud Schliemann as he encounters Greek gods living in disguise in the modern world. Most important is the goddess Artemis, with whom he falls in love. However, the never-aging goddess eludes him for decades, until they are finally reunited in Delphi, where the play begins.

One reason for choosing this show, according to its director, Katy Merriman, was that “it felt like a script with such potential to stage, and to be creative with. There are seven changes in location—to completely different parts of the world—in 90 minutes. It’s an intriguing mix of the real world with the mythological, as characters who are thousands

of years old try to blend in with modern society. It also allowed for a cast ranging anywhere from 4 to 9 performers of any type. The flexible nature of the script was especially appealing because it would be one of our first productions when we returned to full operations after the pandemic.”

This was The Playhouse’s first experience as an AACT NewPlayFest Producing Theatre. On the other hand, Hischak was a returning NewPlayFest playwright, who notes that the experience with his two plays has been “thrilling, but different.”

In 2015, the Silver Spring Stage in Maryland produced his comedy *The Emperor of North America*. Hischak was in communication with director Scott Bloom while he prepared for the production, and during the rehearsal process.

“In a series of phone calls and emails we worked out some details about the script. I was able to answer questions he had, and we agreed on some minor changes. I then went to Silver Spring for the first weekend

continued on next page ►



Lee Ann Bakros

Opening Night of the world premiere of Escaping the Labyrinth, by Thomas S. Hischak, at Des Moines Community Playhouse in Des Moines, Iowa

Front row (kneeling/sitting, left to right): Katy McCaull, The Playhouse Ticket Office Marketing; Jada Smith, The Playhouse Office Manager/Volunteer Coordinator; Thomas S. Hischak, playwright; Katy Merriman, director/The Playhouse Artistic Director

Second row (left to right): David R. Kilpatrick, The Playhouse Executive Director; George Sparks, crew; Don Rothweiler, cast/Manos; Ken Reams, cast/Dr. Valency; Dottie Flener, cast/Hester; Jim Meade, cast/Old Bud; Jillian Traskos, cast/Dee; Nick Cornelison, cast/Bud Schliemann; Shelby Dale, cast/Paula; Toni K. Farris, assistant director; Darlene Pullen and Mark Pullen, show sponsors

Back row (left to right): Samuel Amadeo, assistant stage manager; Linda M. Lee, Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation; Madison Ray, cast/Sarge; Tyler Robinson, cast/Herman; Clifton Antoine, cast/Julian; Jessica Van Essen, costume design; Jenna Darsee, stage manager; David Cockerell, AACT representative

of performances. It was a wonderful production and I enjoyed seeing it as an audience member, as well as a playwright.”

Six years later, with *Escaping the Labyrinth* in Des Moines, AACT had begun providing playwrights the opportunity to attend rehearsals several weeks before opening, and work with the director and cast, as well as a dramaturge. (More on this dynamic process in “Tweaks and Trust,” on page 22.)

By that point, Hischak, Director Katy Merriman, and AACT Dramaturge Kathy Pingel had already had several Zoom chats about the script, and Hischak met the cast by way of FaceTime at the first rehearsal.

These first steps were important, Merriman says, because “it’s such a quick and easy process to ask a playwright to clarify or offer insight about their work directly, and I felt very spoiled having such access. Tom was always open to discussing changes, and suggested I get a group together to do a reading, so I could hear it before another round of edits. I took his advice, and we came away with at least one big ‘audience’ question that we worked through soon after.”

Midway through rehearsals, Hischak traveled to Des Moines and spent three days there for a weekend of workshoping sessions. It was extremely satisfying, he says, to be directly involved in shaping the script for production, and Merriman agrees.

“When Tom and NewPlayFest Dramaturge Kathy Pingel attended our workshop weekend, we made significant strides,” says Merriman. “I appreciated that AACT required dedicated workshop time to allow a



Steve Gibbons

Bud Schliemann, seated, (Nick Cornelison) begins his journey when he meets Herman (Tyler Robinson) at a café in Delphi, Greece, in 1951. Herman shares the myth that Greek deities are continuing to live among citizens throughout the world in the Des Moines Playhouse production of Escaping the Labyrinth

playwright to see their play on its feet. Watching a run together clarified what worked and what didn’t, and Kathy was excellent about facilitating productive conversation between playwright and director.”

"We had an overwhelmingly positive response from patrons who took a chance on a new work, and the cast and crew had a blast."

Hischak says he particularly enjoyed, “being able to discuss details with the cast, as well as the director. Plus, the changes we made were done right away, so we could see how well they worked.”

Merriman says the process was thrilling, “but I also have to mention that our volunteers and audiences loved the show, too. We had an overwhelmingly positive response from patrons who took a chance on a new work, and the cast and crew had a blast.”

Since it was the script’s design possibilities that drew Merriman to the play in the first place, she cites a few highlights in the Des Moines production. One was the projection design by Nicholas Amundson, who built and photographed model versions of locations used for the projection images. Adding greatly to the show were the original sound design and music composed by Mark Toebben. She loved the costuming details by Jessica Van Essen, including bow-and-arrow earrings for the goddess of the hunt, Artemis, when disguised as a diner waitress. The production also owed much to the work of Assistant Director Toni Farris, Lighting Designer Chris Hanian, and Props Designer Allyson Braun.

As with his first NewPlayFest production in 2015, Hischak says he was “happy to see a play of mine given a superb production when I returned for the first weekend of performances. This entire process is an effective and rewarding way for new plays to be launched. The AACT NewPlayFest is a playwright’s and a community theatre’s golden opportunity.”

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Paula (Shelby Dale), a flight attendant, meets the Greek Deity Zeus living as airline pilot Julian (Clifton Antoine) in the Des Moines Playhouse production of 'Escaping the Labyrinth'

Katy Merriman, Des Moines Playhouse Artistic Director, directed Des Moines Playhouse's world premiere production. The cast featured Nick Cornelison as Bud Schliemann, Tyler Robinson as Herman, Jillian Traskos, Don Rothweiler as Manos, Clifton Antoine as Julian, Shelby Dale as Paula, Ken Reames as Dr. Valency, Dottie Flener as Hester, Madison Ray as Sarge, and Jim Meade as Old Bud. The production staff included Assistant Director Toni K Farris, Stage Manager Jeanna Darse, Assistant Stage Manager Samuel Amadeo, Scenic Designer Nicholas Amundson, Costume Designer Jessica Van Essen, Lighting Designer Chris Hanian, Composer/Sound Designer Mark Tobben, Properties Designer Allyson Braun, Assistant Properties Designer Eileen M. Diaz, and Dramaturge Kathy Pingel.



Des Moines Playhouse Executive Director David Kilpatrick receives a check from Linda M. Lee, from the Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation in support of the AACT NewPlayFest world premiere of 'Escaping the Labyrinth', and presents Linda with a signed poster from the production

continued on next page ►

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The Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation provides a grant that helps make AACT NewPlayFest possible. The Foundation was created by the children of Frank Ayre Lee as a tribute to their father, and a legacy for the creative endeavors of his cousin and friend, Jack. The family is pleased to honor both men through AACT NewPlayFest, presenting and promoting new theatre works.



Dramatic Publishing Company publishes AACT NewPlayFest's winning plays in anthologies, and also licenses production rights for the winning plays. Visit aact.org/dpc for direct links to Dramatic Publishing Company's NewPlayFest anthologies and plays, plus information about discounts and special offers for AACT members.



Upcoming World Premieres

AACT NewPlayFest continues its success in selecting and promoting original plays, produced as world premieres across the country. The 2022 NewPlayFest cycle began with the world premiere of *Escaping the Labyrinth* at Des Moines Playhouse, and continues with the productions listed below. For more information about each play, visit: aact.org/aact-newplayfest-2022. Winning plays will be available for production through Dramatic Publishing Company, following each play's NewPlayFest world premiere.

Unpacking Mother, by Karen Schaeffer
Market House Theatre, Paducah, Kentucky
 Opening February 10, 2022
markethousetheatre.org
 270-444-6828, info@mhtplay.org



MLM is for Murder (Or, Your Side Hustle is Killing Us),
by John Bavoso

Midland Center for the Arts/Center Stage Theatre, Midland
Michigan

Opening February 25, 2022

midlandcenter.org

989-631-5930, info@midlandcenter.org

The Cafe Mocha Murders, by Deanna Strasse

Golden Chain Theatre, Oakhurst, California

Opening March 25, 2022

goldenchaintheatre.org

559-683-7112, office@goldenchaintheatre.org

Of Men and Cars, by Jim Geoghan

Midland Community Theatre, Midland, Texas

Opening October 21, 2022

mctmidland.org

432-570-4111

Launch Days (Love Stories from the year 2108), by Michael Higgins

Theatre Tuscaloosa, Tuscaloosa, Alabama

Opening October, 2022

theatretusc.com

205-391-2329



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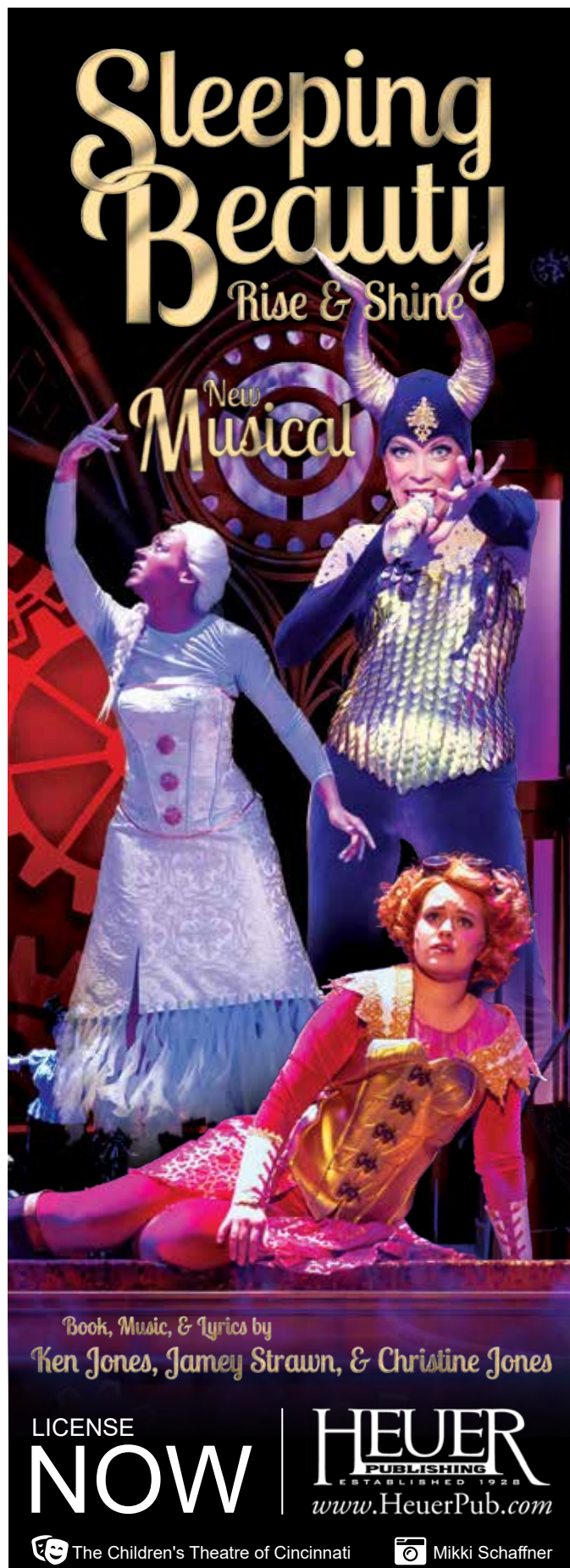
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Take the Leap: Be an AACT NewPlayFest 2024 Producing Theatre

Presenting the world premiere of an AACT NewPlayFest-winning play is a feather in any theatre's cap. Why not yours?

It's an exciting process and an artistic adventure that will energize both your company and your patrons, as our stories on *The Cayuga Canal Girls* (page 22) and *Escaping the Labyrinth* (page 27) make clear.

AACT is now accepting applications for Producing Theatres for AACT NewPlayFest 2024, with a deadline of **February 1, 2022**. You'll find the application form online at aact.org/newplay24. You may also contact the AACT office at 817-732-3177 or info@aact.org.

How It Works

AACT will choose six AACT-member theatres to produce the winning plays selected by a team of AACT reviewers. Producing Theatres will read the scripts that make it to the final round and select the winning shows they will produce.

NewPlayFest 2024 productions will take place between June 2023 and December 2024. Producing Theatres will be chosen well in advance, to allow you time to schedule the world premiere production as part of your regular season.

As part of AACT NewPlayFest, your theatre plays a vital role in many ways. By producing a world premiere, you contribute to the future development of that piece by helping the playwright determine what works or doesn't work on stage. The interpretations of your director and cast can reveal insights into the work that even the playwright didn't know were there, allowing the author to make the play even more effective.

To improve the production process, the end product, and the playwriting experience for both theatre and playwright, AACT includes a workshopping component with a NewPlayFest dramaturge.

In keeping with AACT's commitment to advancing the artistic quality and creative process for community theatres and artists, winning plays are published in an anthology by Dramatic Publishing Company, with the name of each Producing Theatre, director, and cast prominently displayed. (See aact.org/books for a list of current anthologies.)

It's an exciting, rewarding experience—and your theatre can be part of it.

Playwrights and Reviewers

Submit a Script

Playwrights may submit scripts for AACT NewPlayFest 2024 during May and June, 2022. Details for script submission will be available soon at aact.org/newplay24. Only non-musical, full-length plays will be accepted. In addition, scripts must be unpublished and must not have received a full production. (If selected, the AACT theatre's production is to be a world premiere.) Only one script per playwright will be accepted. There are no fees for AACT-member playwrights; nonmembers pay a \$10 script processing fee. For more information and script formatting guidelines, visit aact.org/newplay24.

Be a Reviewer

Volunteer Reviewers play an important role in AACT NewPlayFest 2024, reading and scoring submitted scripts in several rounds of evaluations. If you'd like to be a part of this exciting AACT festival as a Reviewer, you'll find an application form and more information at aact.org/newplay24.



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Solving the Great Set Design Mystery

Creating an imaginative, budget-friendly set for *Murder on the Orient Express*

Lynn Niles



The show's opening, with passengers seated inside Istanbul's Tokatlian Hotel, waiting to board the Orient Express just outside

Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*, as adapted by Ken Ludwig, opens with the legendary passenger train at the platform in Istanbul, awaiting departure for Calais, in November 1934.

For the 2021 production at Playhouse 2000, in Kerrville Texas, the train's impressive exterior quickly establishes a stylish setting for Christie's detective, Hercule Poirot, who will soon face a multi-layered murder mystery.

But it's what comes next that prompts gasps and applause from the audience. With all passengers on board, the train lurches as if pulling out of the station, then reveals that it's just one of four settings on a massive turntable, which also includes the dining/club car, sleeping compartments, and corridor.

So well executed are the transitions throughout the show that few in the audience would understand the challenge in creating this enormous revolving set.

That challenge is built into the fluid nature of Ludwig's script, which dictates 16 changes in location, with actors able to move quickly from one to the next. But it was something that Playhouse 2000 was eager to take on.

First, to simplify the stage design and running of the show, Director Amy Goodyear reduced Ludwig's seven settings to five (four on the turntable, plus one on

the stage floor). From there, Scenic Designer Judd Vermillion began work on possible designs that would address the demands of the script, as well as physical and financial limitations. Not only did the play's multiple settings have to fit both the stage and budget, but

continued on next page ►



This stationary framework, with its upward-facing casters, helps support the rotating deck that will sit on top. Placed slightly in front of the proscenium, the set brings the action closer to the audience, seated to the right

another production would open immediately after *Murder* closed, so the set would need to be dismantled quickly.

It was a puzzle worthy of Hercule Poirot—who, it turns out, would be played onstage by Vermillion himself.

One Good Turn Deserves Another

The solution lay in an ingenious double-layer, 32-foot turntable. On top, in full view of the audience, was a rotating deck that held both sets and actors. Hidden below it was a stationary weblike framework, with up-facing casters that provided support from below, ensuring an even rotation. The upper deck revolved on its own down-facing casters, affixed at key points—again to help bear weight and facilitate rotation (see photo on page 33).

‘Stress skins’—layers of plywood on the top and bottom of the deck’s ribs—helped support the set’s weight of approximately 4000 lbs., plus total actor weight of 2000 lbs. In addition, the turntable’s underside was covered with Masonite to provide a smoother, quieter surface for the up-facing casters below. In all, 74 five-inch casters were used (both up- and down-facing).

The turntable was centered on a 1-1/2” schedule 40 metal-pipe hub, with a sleeve to keep it in place during rotation. To change scenes, six to eight stagehands used handholds to rotate the turntable from behind—and out of sight of the audience.

Set construction was accomplished over a period of approximately six weeks, using a volunteer crew of four, plus two special work calls that brought in up to 20 volunteers.



Amy Goodyear

An in-progress view of the dining/club car one section of the four-sided set. Below can be seen one of the lower framework's up-facing casters (center), and one of the turntable's down-facing casters (right)

Using SketchUp 3D-modeling software, Vermillion designed his turntable to display four different settings, plus a center area, hidden from the eyes of the audience. This space allowed the actors to come and go from one setting to another—or wait, out of view, for their next entrance. Like the hub of a wheel, this internal “backstage” was masked via panels behind each of the set’s 14 doors.

The rotating upper deck was constructed from 2x4 ribs, covered with 3/4-inch plywood. When finished, the deck took the shape of a square with its corners removed (visible in the photo above). The plywood decking was then overlayed with Luan plywood, to allow for more even painting of those areas visible to the audience.

The initial budget for the set was \$5,000, but due to price increases of various materials, the final cost was closer to \$6,000.

“Over-the-Top Theatricality”

While the set’s mechanical underpinnings would be invisible to the audience, the train interiors needed to reflect the period elegance of the famous train.

To accomplish this, Vermillion added hand-painted, faux-finish wood paneling and doors, creating a full Art Deco effect. Theatrical gold tape was used for the trim, accenting the warmth of the wood

grain. The beauty of the 14 door faces was achieved by two volunteers with expertise in creating a woodgrain look. Ingeniously designed wall sconces were made from plastic drink bottles and clear plastic pipes, with small LED flashlights as the light source. These added a realistic detail that contributed to the overall ambience of the 1930s.



Nearly complete, three adjoining bedroom compartments display the wood-graining and Art Deco décor

“Of course, we wanted a set that met the demands of the production,” explains Jeffrey Brown, Executive Director of Playhouse 2000, “but we also wanted over-the-top theatricality to let everyone know that, after a long pandemic-related shutdown, we were back. Judd Vermillion, Technical Director Nick Boland, and our crew gave us a set that became another character in the show, and it worked perfectly.” ♦

The production crew of Playhouse 2000's August 2021 production of Murder on the Orient Express included Jeffrey Brown, Executive Director, Producer; Amy Goodyear, Director, Sound Design, Photographer; Nicholas Boland, Technical Direction, Lighting Design; Judd Vermillion, Scenic Design, Charge Artist, (and on stage in the role of Hercule Poirot); Diane Royce Smith and Kevin Nixon, Costume Design; Nancy Stuart, Properties Design; Katie Bishop, Stage Manager; and Sarah Shodrock, Assistant Stage Manager. Playhouse 2000 is Kerrville's community theatre, and manages, on behalf of the City of Kerrville, the Kathleen C. Cailloux City Center for the Performing Arts, including the Cailloux Theater and the VK Garage Theater. For more information visit playhouse2000.com

Lynn Niles serves on the Board of Directors at Playhouse 2000 in Kerrville, Texas. A Broker Associate at CENTURY 21 The Hills Realty, she received her B.A. in Economics from the University of St. Thomas in Houston, followed by an M.B.A. in Finance.

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Visit aact.org/discounts for a listing of all AACT Member discounts

2022 National Awards Nominations Open

AACT National Awards are presented each year in recognition of outstanding contributions to community theatre. Nominations for 2022 National Awards are being accepted for persons of all ages. The submission deadline is **January 20, 2022** and the awards will be presented in June at aactWORLDfest 2022 in Venice, Florida.

AACT bestows national recognitions in 10 categories, each focused on a different area of service, to honor those who have contributed significantly to community theatre nationwide:

- Art Cole Lifetime of Leadership Award
- David C. Bryant Outstanding Service Award
- Diamond Crown Organization Award
- Distinguished Merit Award
- Robert E. Gard Superior Volunteer Award
- Mort Clark International Achievement Award
- Shining Star Award
- Special Recognition Award
- Twink Lynch Organizational Achievement Award
- Corporate Award

Visit aact.org/national-awards to submit a nomination. The page lists all AACT National Awards with descriptions and criteria, plus links to view those who have received each award in the past.

Anyone may nominate a candidate for a National Award. The AACT Awards committee encourages nominating individuals of any age for those awards whose criteria are based on merit, rather than age or length of service.

Spotlight Award

Nominations are welcome throughout the year for the AACT Spotlight Award, which is presented locally by AACT and an AACT-member theatre, in recognition of long or special service that has had a significant impact on the quality of local theatre. Nominations are accepted for persons of all ages. For more details and the Spotlight Award nomination form, visit aact.org/spotlight-award. ♦



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Take Part in World Theatre Day 2022

Since 1962, World Theatre Day has been celebrated on the 27th of March by theatre organizations and theatre lovers all over the world.

“We gather to weep and to remember; to laugh and to contemplate; to learn and to affirm and to imagine”

Brett Bailey, Stage Director from South Africa, World Theatre Day Message Author 2014

Created by the International Theatre Institute (ITI), the international non-governmental organization for the performing arts, World Theatre Day is a day to underscore the value and importance of theatre as an art form, and its positive impact on individuals and communities.

National and international theatre events are organized to mark the occasion, but many activities are local. To find out how you can participate in the celebration of World Theatre Day, visit world-theatre-day.org



World Theatre Day

International Theatre Institute ITI - World Organization for the Performing Arts

Each year, a World Theatre Day International Message is circulated, in which a figure of world stature shares his or her reflections on the theme of Theatre and a Culture of Peace. The first message was written in 1962 by Jean Cocteau, French playwright, designer, filmmaker, visual artist, and critic. You can read it, and messages in the years since, online at the link above.

An international non-governmental organization for the performing arts, ITI was founded in 1948 by UNESCO and the international theatre community. ♦

AACT Web Power

What's in a word? You'll find out quickly and easily in two of the AACT website's most popular pages: Theatre Terms and Theatre Quotes.

Theatre Terms provides over 1000 definitions of words used both on and offstage. Fully searchable, our glossary is helpful for anyone wanting to better understand the inner workings of theatre—from “actor-proof” to “lash,” from “mise en scene” to “xfade.” On the drop-down menu, go to Making Theatre, then Production—or go directly to aact.org/terms.

Theatre Quotes helps you find memorable comments on all aspects of theatre, including acting, directing, backstage, critics, fundraising, lighting, playwriting, set design, and more. It's a great place to find just the right quote for a newsletter, fundraising piece, or program. You'll find it on the drop-down menu under Networking—or directly at aact.org/quotes.

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



USITT Conference and Stage Expo Coming to Baltimore

USITT's **62nd Annual Conference & Stage Expo** will be held this year in Baltimore, Maryland, March 2-5. Historically, this is the most anticipated gathering of the entertainment design and technology industry each year. The 2022 event will be the first in-person occurrence since 2019, when the COVID-19 pandemic began.

Having developed and implemented a highly successful virtual event in 2021, organizers wanted to make sure that the 2022 Conference would focus on one of the aspects that the organization does best, and that is not available anywhere else—hands-on learning.

This time around, emphasis is being placed on learning laboratories, where attendees can experiment, learn, and engage with technology—and each other. Additionally, they can learn safe practices, be introduced to new ideas, and get a first-hand look at how the industry is returning from the pandemic shutdown.

Attendees will be able to engage in applied educational activities across the Institute's 11 interest-based tracks: Architecture, Costume Design & Technology, Digital Media, Education, Engineering, Lighting Design & Technology, Management, Safety & Health, Scene Design & Technology, Sound Design & Technology, and Technical Production.

The USITT Stage Expo is considered the heart of excitement and activity at the event. Showcasing vendors from across the country and around the world, it provides attendees with an opportunity to view the very latest products and services across the production arts, and to discover new and better ways of working in their own backstage environments. Stage Expo is the only complete production trade show in the U.S. and is not to be missed by any theatre technician—or for those exploring theatre production for their theatre, or who are interested in expanding their career paths.

Expo attendees include a wide range of professionals across the theatre and entertainment industry, from venue managers, designers, and business owners to students and educators. The diversity of experts and academics, combined with new and seasoned professionals from a broad variety of disciplines, cannot be found at any other event, organizers say.

USITT encourages those who are interested in the latest entertainment technology to explore these options at the 62nd Annual Conference & Stage Expo. Registration is now open. Please check usitt.org/conference22 for additional details.

USITT (the United States Institute for Theatre Technology) was founded in 1960 to promote dialogue, research, and learning among practitioners of theatre design and technology. Today, its far-reaching membership includes those across the career spectrum, and it has fully embraced the new technologies being used in producing today's entertainment. The Institute is the leader in life-long learning opportunities for the entertainment design and technology industry. It connects performing arts design and technology communities, and ensures a vibrant dialog among practitioners, educators, and students, while adhering to core values of inclusion, excellence, and responsibility. ♦



Artie's Advocacy Tip

The **National Arts Action Summit** is an annual multi-day event giving grassroots advocates crucial advocacy training from experts in the field and then put that training into practice during **Arts Advocacy Week** in meetings with elected officials. Hosted by **Americans for the Arts** in collaboration with dozens of national, state, and local organizational Partners, the National Arts Action Summit and Arts Advocacy Week is the largest gathering of its kind, bringing together a broad cross section of America's cultural and civic organizations.

AACT is a National Partner of the National Arts Action Summit and Arts Advocacy Week. Join Us!

Americans for the Arts will announce plans and registration details for the 2022 National Arts Action Summit soon. Visit: americansforthearts.org/events/national-arts-action-summit



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Virginia Repertory Theatre, a regional professional company headquartered in Richmond, has named **Desirée Roots** as the first of three Co-Artistic Directors, in a new leadership model that will steer all artistic aspects of the theatre, according to Phil Whiteway, Managing Director and co-founder of Virginia Rep.

Roots began her association with Virginia Rep at 16, when she served as a high school intern with Theatre IV, which later merged with Barksdale Theatre to form Virginia Rep. Her first professional engagement was Theatre IV's production of *Ain't Misbehavin'* in 1988. Since then, she has starred in numerous Theatre IV, Barksdale Theatre, and Virginia Rep productions, most recently *The Color Purple*, *Dreamgirls*, *Caroline or Change*, and *Ella and Her Fella Frank*.

Roots will serve as Co-Artistic Director-Community. The theatre will hire two other Co-Artistic Directors, with responsibilities for Education and Adult Audience Programming.

Roots has vast experience in the Richmond area, working with schools and businesses to build community awareness and appreciation for the arts. She was Program Coordinator for Richmond Jazz Society and Booking Manager for Downtown Presents (now Venture Richmond). Roots studied Musicology at the University of Michigan and has a B.A. in Art Education/Performance from Virginia Union University.

Roots says she is "deeply honored to be appointed to this leadership position with Virginia Rep, which, along with the Richmond Jazz Society, has been my artistic home for 30 years. I look forward to continuing the work that I love, in the community I love."



Benny Sato Ambush has been named Artistic Director for Florida's Venice Theatre. He will continue through aactWorldFest, the international theatre festival hosted by the theatre in June.

"Benny is a superb director," says Murray Chase, Producing Executive Director of Venice Theatre. "While here, he will direct two of our shows, as well as work to

secure artistic quality and consistency across the board. He will be instrumental in helping us select our 2022-2023 season, and in finding the next Artistic Director. We know that the community will welcome him as he helps us prepare for the next level of our journey."

Previously, Ambush served as Associate Artistic Director of San Francisco's American Conservatory Theater; Acting Artistic Director of Providence, RI's Rites and Reason Theatre Company; Co-Artistic Director of San Francisco Bay Area Playwrights Festival; PEW Charitable Trust/TCG Director-In-Residence for Manalapan, Florida's Florida Stage; and Associate Artistic Director of Anna Deavere Smith's Institute on the Arts & Civic Dialogue at Harvard University.

He is a seasoned director with numerous professional regional

theatres, including Old Globe Theatre, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, South Coast Rep, Alabama Shakespeare Festival; American Conservatory Theater, Playwrights Horizon, Ford's Theatre, Lincoln Center Theater Institute, International Theatre Festival of Chicago, National Black Theatre Festival, Lyric Stage Company of Boston, Underground Railway Theater, Tennessee Williams Theatre Festival, and the Asolo Conservatory for Actor Training.

Ambush first became acquainted with Venice Theatre when he served as an adjudicator for the 2014 and 2018 AACT WorldFest international festivals.

"I am blessed to artistically helm a theatre for the fourth time in my career," Ambush says. "I have personally witnessed the special bond that community members have with the Venice Theatre."

As an educator, Ambush has taught acting and directing to M.F.A., B.F.A. and B.A. students at colleges and universities in the U.S. and abroad, and has been a panelist and peer site evaluator for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), several State Arts Councils, and the Philadelphia Theatre Initiative. He is a Board Member of The National Theatre Conference, a founding Steering Committee Member of The National Alliance of Acting Teachers, and an AACT Adjudicator who has served in Germany, Italy, Turkey, Belgium, and throughout the U.S.

Ambush has a B.A. in Theatre Arts and Dramatic Literature from Brown University and an M.F.A. in Directing from the University of California, San Diego. In 2020, he was inducted into the College of Fellows of the American Theatre. ♦

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AACT is truly grateful for MTI's support of the theatre community.

For more details about this special event, and to read comments from participants, visit mtishows.com/mtis-all-together-now

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AACT on the Road



Des Moines Playhouse Executive Director David R. Kilpatrick welcomes AACT Marketing Director David Cockerell and Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation representative and AACT Past President Linda M. Lee to the John Viars (AACT Past President) Theatre for the AACT NewPlayFest world premiere of Escaping the Labyrinth in Des Moines, Iowa on October 15, 2021

New Play Contests

Charles M. Getchell New Play Contest Southeastern Theatre Conference

SETC's Charles M. Getchell New Play Contest is dedicated to the discovery, development, and publicizing of worthy new plays and playwrights. One winning playwright receives a \$1,000 cash award and an all-expense paid trip to the annual SETC Convention, where both a critique and staged reading of the winning play are held. The winning play is also considered for online publication and a feature in *Southern Theatre* magazine.

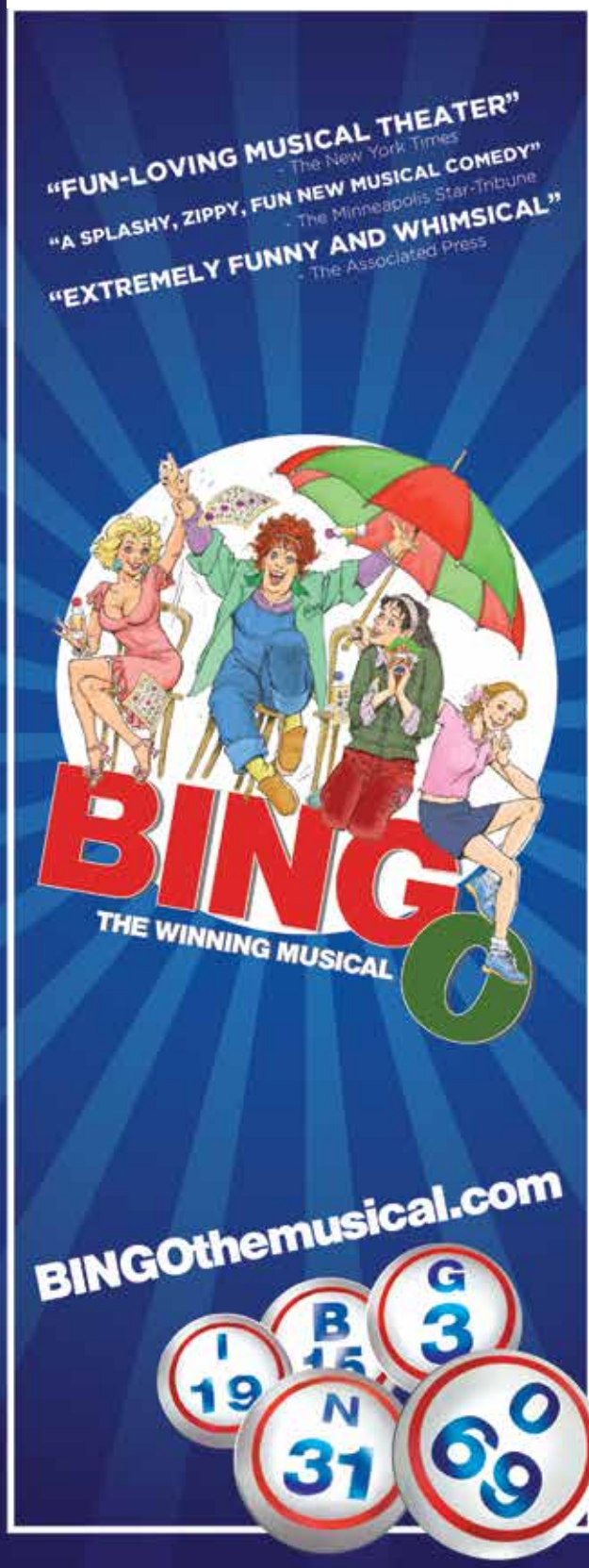
A submitting playwright must be a current member of SETC, reside in the SETC region, OR attend a college or university within the SETC region. The SETC region includes Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.

Submissions must be either a full-length play or thematically related one acts. No musicals or children's plays.

Plays must be unproduced (no professional productions) and unpublished.

Details and application: setc.org/getchell

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Mouse River Players (Minot, ND)
Theatrikos Theatre Company (Flagstaff, AZ)
Muskogee Little Theatre (Muskogee, OK)
Washington State Community Theatre Association (Richland, WA)
Stage Crafters Community Theatre (Fort Walton Beach, FL)
Theatre Guild of Simsbury (Simsbury, CT)
Reston Community Players (Reston, VA)
Crested Butte Mountain Theatre (Crested Butte, CO)
Fenton Village Players (Fenton, MI)
Alabama Conference of Theatre (Birmingham, AL)
Delta Arts (West Memphis, AR)
Coaster Theatre Productions (Cannon Beach, OR)

Silver (celebrating 25 years)

Theatre Huntsville (Huntsville, AL)
The Wiesbaden Amelia Earhart Playhouse (Army Theatre/Germany)
Our Town Theatre (Oakland, MD)
Theater Ensemble Arts (Farmington, NM)
The Grafenwoehr Performing Arts Center (Army Theatre/Germany)
Class Act Productions (The Woodlands, TX)
Fredericksburg Theater Company (Fredericksburg, TX)
The Ocoee Theatre Guild (Cleveland, TN)
MASC-Monroe Actors Stage Company (Waterloo, IL)
The Music Theatre of Idaho (Nampa, ID)
PA Theatre of Performing Arts (Hazleton, PA)
Bellevue Society for the Arts (Bellevue, OH)

Congratulations to you all for your dedication and hard work in reaching these milestones in your theatre's history!



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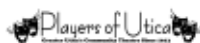
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Feb 17-20	*TEXFest Cailloux Theatre	TX	Kerrville	817-731-2238 texas theatres.org
Feb 25-26	AACT Winter Board Meeting	AZ	Phoenix	817-732-3177 aact.org/calendar
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