

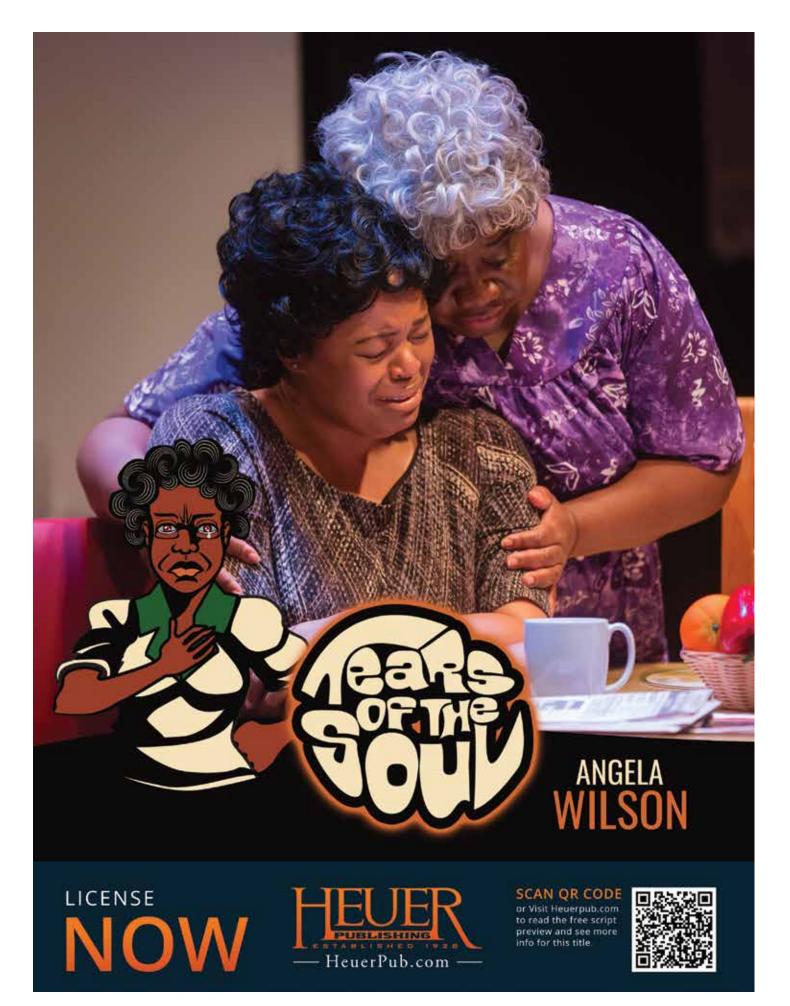


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NewPlayFest 2026 Winning Plays and Playwrights
Making Dreams Come True: The Ayre Theatre Foundation

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President's Letter

Kristofer Geddie AACT President

AACTFest 2025 is upon us!

As we gather in Des Moines, Iowa, for AACTFest 2025, I am reminded of my first AACTFest ex-

perience in 2011. It was truly transformative. Being surrounded by such powerful storytelling and such passionate, talented individuals exceeded every expectation I had. Many of the friends I made that year in Rochester, New York, remain some of my closest companions today.

At that festival, I first heard mention of a dream: the creation of YouthFest. At the time, it seemed an ambitious idea—how could AACT host a youth-focused festival alongside its national festival? Yet a group of visionary leaders (including many of those same friends) committed themselves to making that dream a reality.

Their efforts led to the creation of the Youth Summit, an initiative aimed at involving more young people in the AACT community and fostering their leadership skills. Over time, the Summit evolved into the Youth Leadership Conference, welcoming students from across the country to participate, learn, and lead.

In addition, youth theatre companies were invited to perform at each AACTFest, representing their communities with grace, professionalism, and remarkable artistry. The value of theatre in the lives of young people is beyond measure, and these performances only reaffirmed the importance of nurturing the next generation.

Now, I am thrilled that the Des Moines Community Playhouse is hosting the inaugural standalone YouthFest. What was once a

dream has now become a reality. I am deeply grateful to all those whose vision, dedication, and perseverance brought this dream to life. Your commitment has already had a lasting impact on AACT.

If you are unable to attend this year's YouthFest, I encourage you to make plans to join us in 2027 for the next national festival.

It is an honor to be part of an organization so firmly dedicated to including, educating, and uplifting youth voices.

On behalf of AACT, I extend my heartfelt thanks to our volunteers, organizers, adjudicators, and sponsors. Your unwavering support makes AACTFest and YouthFest possible.

"If you become a teacher, by your pupils you'll be taught." --Oscar Hammerstein II

Thank you for being a part of this extraordinary journey.

Wishing you an inspiring AACTFest 2025!

Kris



In This Issue

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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 Andy Snyder at **advertising@aact.org** to submit articles for publishing consideration, and visit **aact.org/advertise** for advertising rates and specs. By L. Frank Baum With Music and Lyrics by Harold Arlen and E. Y. Harburg THE

Background Music by Herbert Stothart

Dance and Vocal Arrangements by Peter Howard

> Orchestration by Larry Wilcox

Based upon the Classic Motion Picture owned by Turner Entertainment Co. and distributed in all media by Warner Bros.

Adapted by John Kane for the Royal Shakespeare Company

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DREAMWORKS

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OF

THE MUSICAL

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Music and Lyrics by Stephen Schwartz

Book by Philip LaZebnik

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Jereme Raickett Jackson Beach, FL (2027)

Angela Wilson Glen Burnie, MD (2027)

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Beverley Lord

Beverley Lord	
Foxborough, MA (ex officio)	
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Breezy Point, NY (2025)	
Jamie Peterson	111
Escanaba, MI (2025)	
Lynn Nelson	IVA
Tupelo, MS (ex officio)	
Kristy Meanor	IVE
Wetumpka, AL (2024)	
Jamie Ulmer	V
Lawrence, KS (2025)	
Justin Pike	VI
Little Rock, AR (2026)	
John Lyttle	VII
Cheyenne, WY (2025)	
Marc Edson	VII
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Susan Austin NewPlayFest Coordinator

Upcoming Events

AACT YouthFest June 22 – 24, 2025
Des Moines, Iowa aact.org/youthfest
Community Theatre Management Conference
(CTMC) June 22 – 24, 2025
Des Moines, Iowa aact.org/ctmc25
AACTEest 8 AACT Summer Deerd (Committee
AACTFest & AACT Summer Board/Committee
Meetings
June 23 – 28, 2025
Des Moines, Iowa
aact.org/25
National Directors Conference November 13 – 15, 2025 San Antonio, Texas aact.org/ndc

Watch for new online programming this Fall:

Member Roundtables Peer-to peer discussion and networking aact.org/roundtables

Virtual Masterclasses

In-depth 75- to 90-minute explorations of specific skills or topics aact.org/masterclass

Industry Connections

Industry providers showcase their services in 30-minute presentations **aact.org/ic**

Spotlight

Spotlight is published quarterly by the American Association of Community Theatre for its members, and is annually distributed to an expanded list of known community theatre organizations and interested individuals.

Spotlight Editor: Andy Snyder Assistant Editor: Stephen Peithman

Spotlight Editorial Team: Quiana Clark-Roland, Michael Cochran, Jim Covault, Winston Daniels, Mary Doveton, Kristofer Geddie, Karen Matheny, Jon Montgomery, Stephen Peithman, Katrina Ploof, Michelle Swink, Dorinda Toner, Lou Ursone, David A. VanCleave

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Design and Layout: Jim Covault

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Countdown to AACTFest 2025!



Time is running out! AACTFest 2025 is coming to Des Moines, Iowa, June 25-28—and now is your final opportunity to secure your spot at this premier event, celebrating the best of community theatre. Whether you join for one day or the whole week, this is where connections are made, creativity ignites, and the future of theatre takes shape.

The stage is set. The community is gathering. Will you be there?

Don't wait-register now before it's too late!

Your festival registration includes:

- Tickets to all 12 AACTFest performances
- Access to sought-after workshops
- · Keynote presentations
- · Exhibitors and giveaways
- One free entry in the design competition
- Access to both virtual and onsite design competition displays
- Awards show and social events

Festival offerings have limited capacity, so we encourage early registration to ensure you don't miss any of the fun, excitement, and stellar theatre that only AACTFest can provide. Significant hotel and travel discounts are available for attendees. Find all registration details at **aact.org/25**.



Onsite Full Registration

Available June 1 - June 29, 2025

- Member Rate: \$500
- Non-Member Rate: \$595

Show Passes

Cannot stay the whole week? Get your show-only passes for AACTFest & YouthFest! Don't miss a single moment of the excitement—block show passes are available to the public, friends, and family! Whether you can only catch one show or want to experience a few, this is your chance to be part of the magic.

Limited availability—secure yours before they're gone. Scan the QR code on page 9 to get your passes today and join the celebration!

AACTFest Add-ons

• Adult Monologue Competition \$25

Participants must register for the competition when registering for AACTFest. A youth and adult division are available, with limited spots. Early registration is encouraged.

• Saturday Awards Tickets \$60

For any changes to your registration or to add an option, contact Registrar Karen Matheny at **karen@aact.org** or 817-732-3177 x2.

Silent Auction

Join the fun and support the AACT Endowment Fund. Whether or not you can attend the festival in person, you can still participate in the excitement by donating to, or bidding in, the Silent Auction, which will take place during AACTFest 2025 June 25-29, 2025. Bid online or in person. Endowment funds help provide funds for performing groups to travel.

Items include memorabilia, travel packages, expert services, rentals, and more! To peruse and bid online visit **32auctions. com/AACTAuction25** or scan the QR code below. Bidding ends Friday, June 27, 2025, at midnight.



Accessibility

AACT is committed to ensuring accessibility for all attendees. To learn more about our accessibility policies and offerings visit - **aact.org/festival-accessibility**

Festival Code of Conduct

We are committed to creating a safe, inclusive, and enjoyable experience for all attendees, staff, performers, and vendors. To ensure a positive experience for everyone, we ask that you adhere to the AACTFest/YouthFest Code of Conduct: **aact.org/festival-policy**.

Refund Policy

A 20% cancellation fee applies to all refunds. Transfer/ substitution requests are welcome through June 7, 2025. Refund requests must have been submitted in writing by May 31, 2025. Contact Festival Registrar Karen Matheny for any inquiries regarding transfers or refunds at **karen@aact.org**.

PLAN YOUR FESTIVAL EXPERIENCE - DATES, SHOWS & PRICES!

YOUTHFEST 2025 DAY PASSES

SUNDAY, JUNE 22, 2025	6:30PM	\$40	Opening Ceremony
			(VIDEO) Terrace Playhouse Youth Theatre Troupe (US Army Garrison, Ansbach, Germany) <i>In The Tank</i> by Rosemary Frisino Toohey
			Ebong Theatrix (Bethesda, MD) <i>Avinash</i> by Arindam Ghosh
MONDAY, JUNE 23, 2025	6:00PM	\$40	Landmark Community Theatre (Thomaston, CT) Disney's The Little Mermaid JR. by Alan Menken, Howard Ashman, Glenn Slater, and Doug Wright
			Northern Starz Center for Performing Arts (Ramsey, MN) Dark Road by Laura Lundgren Smith
			Clark Youth Theatre (Tulsa, OK) Lost Girl by Kimberly Belflower
TUESDAY, JUNE 24, 2025	1:30PM	\$40	Central Park Players (Grand Haven, MI) Runaway Princess by Kate Reinders and Paul Gordon
			Civic Theatre of Greater Lafayette (Lafayette, IN) Mac Beth by Erica Schmidt
TUESDAY, JUNE 24, 2025	7:30PM	\$60	YouthFest Awards/Closing Ceremony
SUNDAY - TUESDAY		\$155	All Shows, Opening, Closing & Awards
AACTFEST 2025 DAY PA	SSES		
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 25, 2025	1:00PM	\$60	Tupelo Community Theatre (Tupelo , MS) Tone Clusters by Joyce Carol Oates
			Ebong Theatrix (Bethesda, MD) <i>Avinash</i> by Arindam Ghosh
	7:30PM	\$60	Verona Area Community Theatre (Verona, WA) Love, Loss and What I Wore by Delia Ephron, Ilene Beckerman, and Nora Ephron
			Absolute Theatre (Rochester, MN) Forever Plaid by Stuart Ross and James Raitt
THURSDAY, JUNE 26, 2025	1:00PM	\$60	Quannapowitt Players (Reading, MA) Time Stands Still by Donald Margulies
			Highlands Lakeside Theatre (Sebring, FL) Happy Hour at Pink Palace by Laura Byron Wad
FRIDAY, JUNE 27, 2025	1:00PM	\$60	Stagecrafters (Auburn Hills, MI) Silent Sky by Lauren Gunderson
			Baytown Little Theatre (Baytown, TX) Tuesdays with Morrie by Mitch Albom and Jeffrey Hatcher
	7:30PM	\$60	Des Moines Playhouse (Des Moines, IA)

Men on Boats Play by Jaclyn Backhaus

Natural Shocks by Lauren Gunderson

The Way of All Fish by Elaine May

Theatre33 (Bellevue, WA) Constellations by Nick Payne

Awards Presentation

Sopris Theatre Company (Glenwood Springs, CO)

Sandy Spring Theatre Group (Gaithersburg, MD)

Full Show Package PLUS Opening & Closing Events

NON-PERFORMANCE ADD-ON *

SATURDAY, JUNE 28, 2025

SATURDAY, JUNE 28, 2025

WEDNESDAY - SATURDAY

8:30AM	\$50
8:30AM	\$50
8:30AM	\$50
	8:30AM

*Workshops, keynotes, exhibits, design/monologue competitions

1:00PM

8:00PM

\$60

\$60

\$360

ORDER YOUR PASSES ONLINE: www.aactfest25.ludus.com



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National Companies Performing at AACTFest 2025

Congratulations to all state and regional festival participants! Your commitment and dedication to the arts and community theatre across America are a testament to the enduring value and importance of live performance. The American Association of Community Theatre celebrates your creativity, passion, and hard work.

From this extraordinary group, 12 outstanding productions have been chosen to perform at AACTFest 2025, exemplifying the excellence and diversity of community theatre nationwide.

AACTFest Companies and Productions

- Region 1 Quannapowitt Players (Reading, MA): *Time Stands Still*, by Donald Margulies
- Region 2 Ebong Theatrix (Bethesda, MD): Avinash, by Arindam Ghosh
- Region 2 Sandy Spring Theatre Group (Gaithersburg, MD): *The Way of All Fish*, by Elaine May
- Region 3 Verona Area Community Theatre (Verona, WI): *Love, Loss and What I Wore*, by Delia Ephron, Ilene Beckerman, and Nora Ephron

- Region 3 Stagecrafters (Auburn Hills, MI): Silent Sky, by Lauren Gunderson
- Region 4a Tupelo Community Theatre (Tupelo, MS): *Tone Clusters*, by Joyce Carol Oates
- Region 4b Highlands Lakeside Theatre (Sebring, FL): Happy Hour at Pink Palace, by Laura Byron Wade
- Region 5 Absolute Theatre (Rochester, MN): *Forever Plaid*, by Stuart Ross and James Raitt
- Region 5 Des Moines Playhouse (Des Moines, IA): Men on Boats, by Jaclyn Backhaus
- Region 6 Baytown Little Theatre (Baytown, TX): *Tuesdays with Morrie*, by Mitch Albom and Jeffrey Hatcher
- Region 7 Sopris Theatre Company (Glenwood Springs, CO): *Natural Shocks*, by Lauren Gunderson
- Region 9 Theatre33 (Bellevue, WA): *Constellations*, by Nick Payne

YouthFest Performances

- Region 1 Landmark Community Theatre (Thomaston, CT): Disney's The Little Mermaid JR., by Alan Menken, Howard Ashman, Glenn Slater, and Doug Wright
- Region 2 Ebong Theatrix (Bethesda, MD): *Avinash*, by Arindam Ghosh
- Region 3 Central Park Players (Grand Haven, MI): *Runaway Princess*, by Kate Reinders and Paul Gordon





- Region 3 Civic Theatre of Greater Lafayette (Lafayette, IN): *Mac Beth*, by Erica Schmidt
- Region 5 Northern Starz Center for Performing Arts (Ramsey, MN): Dark Road, by Laura Lundgren Smith
- Region 6 Clark Youth Theatre (Tulsa, OK): Lost Girl, by Kimberly Belflower
- Region 10 (Video) Terrace Playhouse Youth Theatre Troupe (United States Army Garrison, Ansbach, Germany): In the Tank, by Rosemary Frisino Toohey

National Directors Conference: A Game-Changer

Quiana Clark-Roland and David A. VanCleave

The National Directors Conference, November 13–15, 2025, in San Antonio, Texas, is more than just a professional gathering—it's a game-changer for theatre leaders across the country.

Designed exclusively for full-time artistic, managing, and administrative directors, this biennial event offers transformative insights, powerful networking, and a fresh perspective on selfcare in leadership. Attendees will dive into cutting-edge strategies for audience development, community engagement, financial resilience, and production innovation—all shaped by real challenges and successes shared in pre-conference surveys.

What sets this conference apart is its focus on actionable solutions. Directors won't just leave inspired; they'll take home practical tools to implement immediately at their theatres. The connections made here are invaluable—this is the only event made and crafted for community and civic theatre leaders.

Whether you're navigating financial pressures, seeking fresh approaches to engagement, or simply craving the camaraderie of peers who truly understand the role, this three-day experience promises to equip, connect, and renew you.

To build a trusting and empowering environment, we put a limit on enrollment. Don't miss the chance to lead stronger—register today!

Jarrod Kopp, Executive Director of Theatre Tulsa, agrees: "From best practices for self-care to discussing the latest business tools and innovative fundraising ideas, those conversations provided me with fresh perspectives and a ton of practical advice. They have saved me time, stress, and money while helping me solve common challenges that we all share."

While the National Directors Conference provides important new perspectives and vital insights, for many, the experience is much bigger. Noah Taylor, Executive Artistic Director at Market Theatre in South Carolina, said "We need each other. Because we're so physically spread apart in our work, there are so few opportunities to collaborate and sharpen each other. The AACT National Directors Conference is not only a place to meet and rejuvenate... it's now an event I can't afford to miss!"

Conference Facilitator Michael D. Fox



Much of the success of the conference lies with conference facilitator Michael D. Fox, who has been praised for "being so attentive to the room's needs" and his ability to "steer the conversations with great skill."

Fox attended Southern Utah University on a performance scholarship and received a B.S. in Business Finance from the University

of Phoenix. After several years of managing medical facilities, he returned to theatre, performing in *The Music Man* at Hale Centre Theatre (HCT) in 2002. By the end of the run, he was working there as Box Office Manager. He then helped to create the consolidated role of Director of Operations, taking responsibility for all customer service, financial control and reporting, and general operational management with roles in programming and marketing. He's been HCT's Chief Operating Officer since 2016. Michael is also a burgeoning playwright with a new work, *The Time Machine*, that premiered at HCT in May 2024. He is the President of the newly formed Fox Den Arts, offering "great, saleable scripts at low rates and consulting services for the artistic community." foxdenarts.com

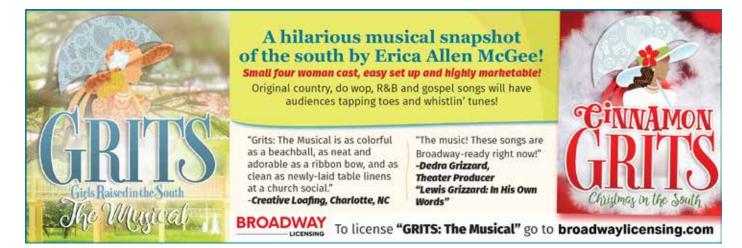
AACT National Directors Conference 2025 San Antonio, Texas • November 13-15, 2025

Drury Plaza Hotel San Antonio Riverwalk

Rates

AACT Members: \$400 Non-Members: \$450 Deadline to Register November 5, 2025

aact.org/ndc



LOOK on CLASSICS



An

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CENTERSTAGEGRAPHICS.COM

Network, Educate, and Save with Your AACT Membership!

As we move through the 2025 membership year and plan ahead for 2026, we know your theatre is doing the same—from selecting your season and programming to setting financial and strategic goals.

For over 35 years, AACT has been committed to providing timely, relevant resources to help you thrive in your theatre journey. With our new and improved website, it's now easier than ever to access everything you need and make the most of your AACT membership.

To our current members, thank you for being part of the AACT family—we hope you'll renew for 2026.

New to AACT? Welcome-we're excited to support your work.

Annual memberships run from September 1 to August 31. Monthly memberships are also available.

For more information, see below and visit **aact.org/member-ship-fees.**

Here are just a few of the perks of AACT membership:

Discount on AACT Events:

- Member Exclusive Roundtables: Free member only webinars
- National Directors Conference November 13-15, 2025
- Virtual Masterclasses

Individual members receive

- Discounted or free professional development programs, events, and conferences
- Access to members-only online library and resources
- A digital and/or printed copy of *Spotlight* magazine, plus weekly digital communications
- Peer-to-peer networking with theatre professionals nationwide

Organizational members receive

- 20% off of rental packages with MTI (Music Theatre International). Many members cover the cost of their membership (and more) with these savings alone!
- Discounted or free professional development programs, events, and conferences
- Access to member-only online resources and library
- Member-only discounts on scripts, rentals, and theatre services
- 30% discount on ASCAP License (available for purchase May-September).
- 5% discount on BMI License (available for purchase May-September; combine with ASCAP for even more savings!).
- Access to the Church Mutual Insurance Program
- A digital and/or printed copy of *Spotlight* magazine, plus weekly digital communications
- Peer-to-peer networking with other organizational members, and with theatre professionals nationwide
- Use of AACT membership logo and decal

Learn more about the many benefits of AACT membership: aact.org/benefits

How to Join or Renew

To join or renew your membership, go to **aact.org/join** or scan the QR code below.



If you or your theatre are having financial difficulties, reach out to AACT Membership Coordinator Karen Matheny to discuss a payment plan that is right for you. She can also provide paper invoicing on request. Send an email to **karen@aact.org** or call 817-732-3177.

Special Offers for First-Time Members!

- First-time organizations can receive a 50% discount on a second year when joining.
- Join *before* September 1, 2025, and receive the remainder of the 2024-2025 membership year for free.
- New Individual Members can join for only \$50.

2024-2025 Membership Fees

Individual Annual Fees	Individual Monthly Fees	
Individual: \$85	Individual: \$10	
Senior/Retired Military: \$70	Senior/Retired Military: \$8	
First Time Individual: \$50		
Youth: \$15		
Couple: \$135		
Military/ Wounded Warrior: Complimentary		

Organization Annual Fees	Organization Monthly Fees
Under \$10,000: \$100	Under \$10,000: \$11
\$10,000-\$24,999: \$140	\$10,000-\$24,999: \$15
\$25,000-\$99,999: \$210	\$25,000-\$99,999: \$25
\$100,000-\$249,999: \$340	\$100,000-\$249,999: \$37
\$250,000-\$499,999: \$455	\$250,000-\$499,999: \$50
\$500,000-\$999,999: \$645	\$500,000-\$999,999: \$70
\$1 Million and Over: \$1,070	\$1 Million and Over: \$120
State Associations: \$100	

We hope you're enjoying our new CATALOGUE OF

Each letter above comes from the logo of a different TRW musical in our catalogue. Can you find each one? Answer correctly and receive a certificate for

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Make your guess and email your answer to licensing@theatricalrights.com by September 1, 2025.



Winning Plays and Playwrights Announced for NewPlayFest 2026

David A. VanCleave

After a record-breaking 450-plus script submissions, AACT has named the six winning plays and playwrights of AACT NewPlayFest 2026, presented with support from the Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation. Following their world premieres, all six plays will be published and available for licensing through Dramatic Publishing. Visit **aact.org/newplayfest-2026** for up-to-date information.

Listen, by Brigid Amos

Presented by Theatre Salina (Salina, Kansas), October 10-19, 2025

Stag Light, by Emily Turner

Presented by Players de Noc (Escanaba, Michigan), May 1-9, 2026

Bloody Murder at the Black Dog Tavern, by Christopher Hencke Presented by Kenai Performers (Soldonta, Alaska), August 2026

Unabashedly, by Mike Teverbaugh

Presented by Waterville Opera House (Waterville, Maine), August 2026

The Thomas Hardy Project, by Becca Blackmore

Presented by Westchester Collaborative (Ossining, New York), 2026 TBD

They Must Be Women Now, by Nedra Pezold Roberts Presented by Vortex Theatre (Albuquerque, New Mexico), 2026 TBD

Listen by Brigid Amos

Presented by Theatre Salina (Salina, Kansas), October 10-19, 2025

Brilliant but unstable artist Dale Digman escapes his sister Carson's watchful eye to bring one of his Bob Ross-inspired paintings to a Brooklyn gallery. Determined to protect her brother's artistic reputation, Carson pursues him and struggles to retrieve the painting from gallery owner Kelly Anker, who is preparing a show of paintings by Jay Turnbull, a former classmate of Dale and ex-boyfriend of Carson. Jay's early arrival at the gallery forces a showdown between Dale and Carson. Will Dale finally free himself from his domineering sister to pursue his unorthodox artistic vision?



Brigid Amos has had plays produced, read, or podcast in 10 states and the UK. She is the winner of the 2022 Goshen Peace Play Contest and the 2024 Tiger's Heart Players Literary Competition, and a finalist for The Woodward/Newman Drama Award, The Todd McNerney Playwriting Award, and the 2020 Kitchen Dog Theater New Play Festival. Amos is the recipient of a 2025 Individual Artist Finalist award from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, and a 2025 Paterson Performing Arts Development Council residency program. In 2022, she developed her full-length *Dove* with A Stage of Their Own (ASOTO) in New Jersey, where she is based, with a regional premiere at Angels Theatre Company in Lincoln, Nebraska. She is a member of The Theater Project's Playwrights Workshop and the Dramatists Guild.

Stag Light by Emily Turner

Presented by Players de Noc (Escanaba, Michigan), 2026 TBA

George Frenel has one final wish: to have his ashes scattered from the top of his favorite lighthouse. Yet despite residing in Maine (known as The Lighthouse State), his last will and testament bewilderingly instructs the family to drive to Michigan, seven states away. With that, the enigmatic patriarch has found a way to drag his estranged wife and children on one last family road trip together.



Emily Turner is an Ohio playwright and performer whose work includes her debut full-length, *Girl*, *in Progress*, which was produced by Red Herring Theater Company. She served as playwright-inresidence for Curtain Players Theatre's New Works Initiative, writing *Stag Light* and *Little Boxes*. Her short scripts have been staged in NYC and

Ohio. She loves working with young people as a mentor playwright (MadLab's Young Writers Program) and speaking at Columbus Academy. Emily's a guest artist at Mouth of the Wolf Productions, which commissioned her family-friendly comedies *A Krampus Story*, *Home Sweet Home*, and *A Totally Killer Show*. She's performed improv with #Hashtag Comedy and is a member of Wild Women Writing. Emily shares a love of theater with her brilliant husband and orange guard-cat. Special thanks to fellow healthcare workers everywhere and to Brookville Community Theatre, where it all began.

Bloody Murder at the Black Dog Tavern by Christopher Hencke Presented by Kenai Performers (Soldonta, Alaska), August 2026

Seven years ago, a man was murdered at a stagecoach inn. Now, on the anniversary of the murder, the local patrons inform a group of overnight guests that everyone is waiting for the annual visit of the murdered man's ghost. Can this be true? A ghost is coming in



A Pride and Prejudice prequel Mr Bennet's Bride

by Emma Wood emmawoodplays.au/plays "Rapturously elegant... delightfully Austentatious" Atlanta Theatre Buzz

"Sophisticated, stylish and clever." Sydney Arts Guide search of a murderer? And if the murderer can be identified, how will the ghost wreak vengeance?



Christopher Hencke is a native of Washington, D.C. and resident of Alexandria, Virginia. He has written a dozen stage plays and screenplays. His plays include *The Emperor's New Clothes: The Rest of the Story*, winner of a playwriting contest sponsored by the Little Theatre of Alexandria in 2019, and performed by Dean Productions on the Premiere

the Play Podcast in 2024; *Grandpa's Christmas Story*, performed by West Virginia Theater East in 2023; and *Who Killed Mr. Boddy?* co-written with his brother Tom and performed by West Virginia Theater East in 2019. Before retiring, Chris was an attorney with the federal government.

Unabashedly by Mike Teverbaugh

Presented by Waterville Opera House (Waterville, Maine), August 2026

Henry Adams wrote that "friends are born, not made." A Chinese legend suggests that we are each connected by an unbreakable red thread to our most important other – what if they're right? In *Unabashedly*, two people, with a past they had no idea they shared, meet in the newsroom of a major American newspaper and are drawn inexorably together.



Mike Teverbaugh began writing plays at the dawn of the pandemic after 30-plus years writing for television. His plays have been produced or read in London, New York and Los Angeles, as well as other cities throughout the country. *Delta Princes* is his second play to be selected to the Waterworks Festival, following a staged reading of *Unabashedly* in 2023. He lives in Los Angeles with his wife and

TV-writing partner, Linda Teverbaugh.

The Thomas Hardy Project by Becca Blackmore

Presented by Westchester Collaborative (Ossining, New York), 2026 TBA

Jada and Abigail, two very different high school senior girls, become friends as they complete a project about Thomas Hardy and his works. When a scandal about one of the girls explodes, the two rage at the parallels in the school's response and the cruelty aimed at women in the novels they're studying, bonding even as they compete for academic acclaim.



Becca Blackmore wrote or co-wrote the musicals Quiz Bowl, Snow Way Out, The Peculiar Tale of the Prince of Bohemia and the Society of Desperate Victorians, and Hatter, and plays President Mom (with Dan Marshall), Bedtime, Dead Behind the Eyes, and Peaceful Warrior. Her works have been finalists for the Dramatists Guild National Fellowship, the Kleban Prize, the Princess Grace

Awards, and the Jane Chambers Award. *The Thomas Hardy Project* was part of Clamour Theater Company's Clay and Water Playwright Residency. Her play *President Mom* won the Ronald M. Ruble Prize. Her pilot *Republic of California* won the Vancouver International Women's Film Festival Best Pilot Award, and her pilot *Happy Medium* won the Cinequest Best Pilot Award. She holds both a B.F.A. and M.F.A. from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts.

They Must Be Women Now by Nedra Pezold Roberts Presented by Vortex Theatre (Albuquerque, New Mexico), 2026 TBA

Charleen (alias Sweet Tea), like her ancient precursor

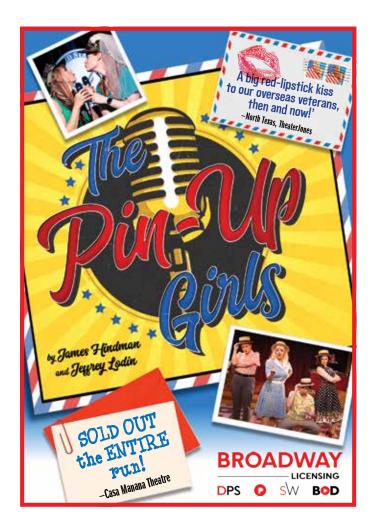
Antigone, has a big mouth that gets her into trouble—specifically, fired from her job in Atlanta where she feels demeaned by men. Unemployment sends her home to Half Way, Georgia and to her mother, the feisty owner of Miss Althea's Bridal Boutique and Bail Bonds; Althea's black business partner, Olivia; and imperious Lurleen and her daughter Betsy, customers preparing for an upcoming wedding. It seems that everyone is coping with diverse prisons forged by their individual journeys. And it is their task to discover themselves—and become women now.



Nedra Pezold Roberts taught English and drama in college and high school, published two textbooks, and then took early retirement to write plays. She has had plays produced in the U.S., Canada, and the UK. Her dramas have won competitions, including AACT NewPlayFest: 2013's *The Vanishing Point* premiered at California Stage Company in Sacramento, California, and

2015's *Wash, Dry, Fold* premiered at Chicago Street Theatre in Valparaiso, Indiana. *They Must Be Women Now* was developed at the Appalachian Festival of Plays and Playwrights, Barter Theatre in Abingdon, Virginia, and at Pegasus PlayLab, University of Central Florida, Orlando. Roberts is a lifetime member of the Dramatists Guild.

AACT NewPlayFest 2026 Finalists include The Curse of the McClures by Kristin Hanratty, Sock Drawer by Pam Harbaugh, The Docent by Donna Kaz, Brigid of Ireland by Pat Montley, Prolog by Karen Schaeffer, Nothing Big by Sean Sweeney, imp.res.sion by Avigayle Young, and Cubicles by Nicholas Zebrun.



Making Dreams Come True The Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation

Julie Crawford

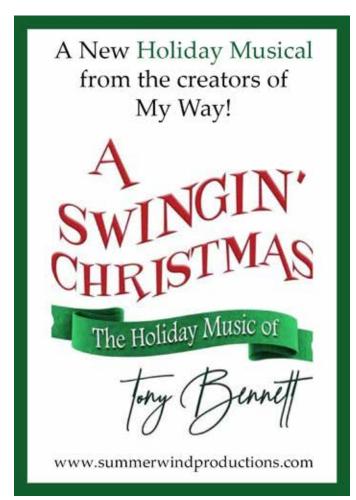
Have you ever wished to win the lottery or inherit a ton of money, so you could build a theatre, endow an exciting program, or bring young theatre companies together to make their dreams come true?

That actually happened with Linda Lee and her family.

Linda's father, Frank, and his cousin, Jack, were lifelong friends who shared a deep love for theatre and creative expression. They grew up close. And although Jack moved to the opposite side of the country, they kept in contact with letters filled with wit, a love of language, and irreverent spirit. They shared limericks and short plays.

Jack was involved in theatre in his university days and in community theatre productions. Frank adapted *The Jungle Book* for children's theatre and penned a comedic piece, *McSteg*, which humorously teased his cousin Jack with a playful nod to *MacBeth*. Frank's devotion to theatre rubbed off on his daughter, Linda, who has enjoyed a lifelong career in theatre, herself.

Jack passed away in 2011, leaving a sizable estate. Before Frank passed in 2012, he and Linda discussed how to honor Jack's love of theatre. Frank had attended AACTFest in 2011. Linda was pleased to report that he "was so impressed with the organization and the work we were doing."



After Frank's death, his children created the Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation to honor both men's contributions to the arts. They wanted the spirit of Jack and Frank's love for storytelling and performance to live on through grants for new play development, educational programs, and community theatre initiatives.

The Birth of NewPlayFest

It was during Linda's tenure as President of AACT that AACT NewPlayFest was born. The previous President, Rod McCullough, had responded to a playwright who pointed out that

many AACT members were also playwrights, suggested and that AACT address the need to have their plays produced. Rod appointed a task force, including Linda, to pursue the request. As executive director Texas of Nonprofit Theatres (now Theatre Network Texas), of



Frank Ayre Lee and Jack K. Ayre

Linda was already involved in developing a new play program for that organization. That program became the bones of AACT NewPlayFest.

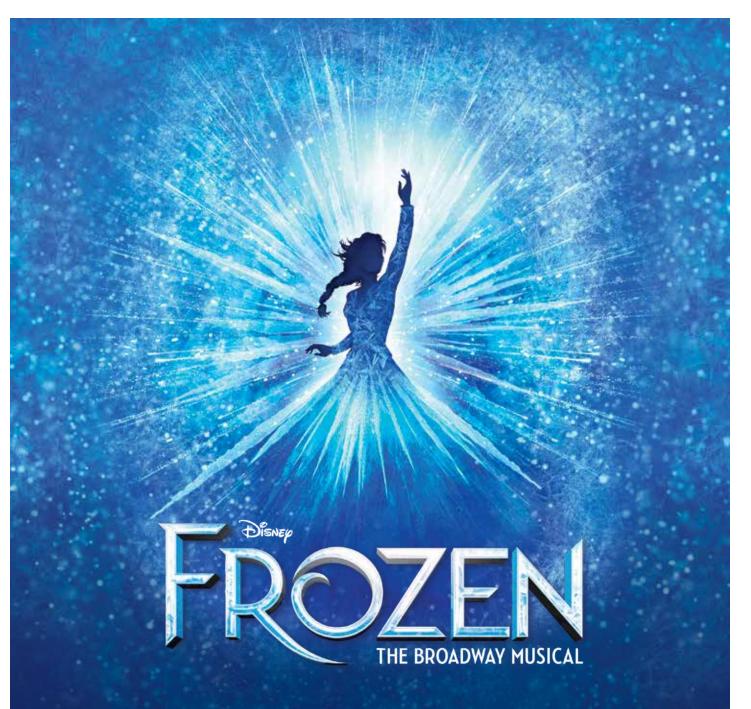
Since then, the program has taken on an identity of its own thanks to AACT theatres across the country that produce the new plays, and to Dramatic Publishing Company, which agreed to publish anthologies of the winning scripts. At the core of its success, however, is the generosity of the Lee family. As outgoing AACT President, in 2013 Linda announced that, through a new foundation, a portion of Jack's estate would provide \$4,000 to each of the NewPlayFest producing theatres, to aid in mounting and marketing the plays.

JKA Jack K. Ayre Frank Ayre Lee FAL Theatre Foundation
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In 2018, AACT increased the benefits to playwrights, the NewPlayFest producing theatres, and to future theatres staging the shows, by providing a dramaturg to travel to each producing theatre to help them and the playwright workshop the scripts before the premiere and publication. The foundation makes that possible by funding the travel expenses of the dramaturg.

The Lee family is justifiably proud of the work the foundation supports. Linda attends many of the world premieres of the new plays. Her sister, Janet Salters, and brother and sister-inlaw, Cliff & Cathy Lee, have also attended some of the premiere performances. All of them witnessed dreams coming true.

Playwright Denise Hinson, one of the winners of AACT NewPlayFest 2019 shared, "I have been impressed by everyone's



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Making Dreams Come True continued from page18

enthusiasm and commitment to not only my play, but to theatre in the United States." Joel Soukkala, who directed Denise's play, *Sweet*, at County Seat Theater Company in Cloquet, Minnesota said, "What an honor and a privilege it has been to be part of AACT NewPlayFest. Creating something from the ground up has been amazing. To be able to showcase our small community theatre to representatives from across the country, and show them what we have to offer in Cloquet, was truly an unforgettable experience."



Sailing on Cliff's boat - Julie Crawford, Jellofish Playwright and NewPlayFest 2014 winner Jim Henry, Cliff Lee, Linda Lee (L-R)

According to playwright Mark Cornell, "The support, the encouragement, the respect, the desire to collaborate and be open to ideas, the great attitudes, were all any person/playwright could hope for in a theatre relationship. There is no way I could have gotten [this script] to this point without the AACT NewPlayFest experience." His play, *On Pine Knoll Street*, was produced by The Sauk in Jonesville, Michigan.

Katy Merriman directed the world premiere of *Escaping the Labyrinth* by Thomas S. Hischak at Des Moines Community Playhouse in Iowa. She called the development process "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."

Spotlight on Youth

In addition to NewPlayFest, the Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation supports AACT's efforts to promote theatre among America's youth. Linda Lee herself championed including youth in AACT, which began with offering a youth membership, then a youth leadership event, and, in 2017, the first YouthFest. The doors are now open to youth to be a part of the national phenomenon that is AACT, inspiring them to take their experiences back to their theatres to inspire others. They will become the next generation of theatre-makers.

Morgan Geo, age 12, of The Minnesota Sky Vault Theatre Company Youth Troupe, says of YouthFest, "It's good to see what other groups are doing, and to think about how they make their decisions. This spurs us on to do things even better ourselves."

"YouthFest was absolutely the most fantastic experience of my theatrical career," enthuses Darrian Scott, age 14, of Clark Youth Theatre in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

One of the major needs of youth companies attending a national festival is travel funds, so in 2019 the foundation began providing AACT with a grant for travel funds to assist youth companies from all over the country to attend and experience the joy of showcasing their work on a national stage.

Both AACT YouthFest and NewPlayFest began as dreams. Thanks to the work of the Lee Family and the support of the Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation, those dreams have come true.

For more information on the Ayre Theatre Foundation, visit **aact.org/theatre-foundation**.



Julie Crawford was AACT's first Executive Director, serving from 1994 to 2017, during which time both NewPlayFest and YouthFest were developed.

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The AACT Advantage

Lou Ursone

What's the difference between theatres with a \$200,000 budget and those with a \$2,000,000 budget? Not much, except a bunch of zeroes. How are they alike? They can all learn, grow, and thrive through participation in AACT.

The two theatre leaders profiled in this issue have vastly different budgets—one at just \$200,000 and the other, \$2.2 million—but both appreciate the value of AACT membership. Here's what they have to say.



Ron Watson

For Ron Watson, Executive Artistic Director at Georgetown Palace Theatre in Georgetown, Texas, "Participating in the National Directors Conference just six months into my time in this role is what helped me learn how to do my job. Being in the same room with generous, like-minded individuals was amazing."

With a B.A. in Directing from Texas State University, and work in professional stage management, Watson had the distinct "pleasure" of starting his job not long before the Covid pandemic.

"Information through the AACT website, roundtables, webinars, and workshops helped me get through that dark time," he said. "Information and updates shared about the Shuttered Venue Operators Grant program was invaluable."

Watson refers to information on the AACT website when searching for job descriptions and other policy matters.

Regardless of the difference in budget, participation in AACT levels the playing field. Using donor dollars wisely is important no matter the budget size, and for Watson, "The discounts from MTI, Sherwin-Williams, and others are terrific for a theatre that produces 12 shows per season."

He also feels that being a part of AACT provides "a safety net. It helps develop camaraderie with colleagues all over the country people who know exactly what we're going through, and who can help with ideas and suggestions for just about any challenge."

"Through AACT, I love helping others by sharing information, and by helping prevent others from making the mistakes I've made," Watson said. "The rule of thumb is that you will likely come away with at least one great idea from any of AACT's educational programs that pays back the initial investment."

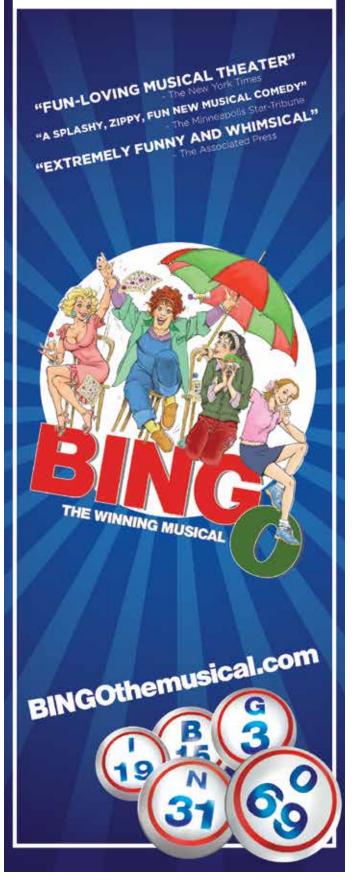
Watson is looking forward to AACTFest 2025 in Des Moines, because of his experience at the 2023 festival in Louisville, Kentucky, citing it as "another gathering where I felt like I learned a lot. And, I got to see some really terrific shows. I don't usually go out to other theatres when I have a night off, but seeing the shows at AACTFest was amazing. I can't wait to go to WorldFest, too."

"Membership in AACT means you have a huge network of support, Watson said. "It absolutely helps me do my job better. The dues are low-even for small theatres-and you will get more than that value back from being able to ask questions and generate ideas. When you're feeling all alone, there's always a way to connect with someone who can help."

And that's how AACT helps theatres thrive!

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Victoria Bartkowiak

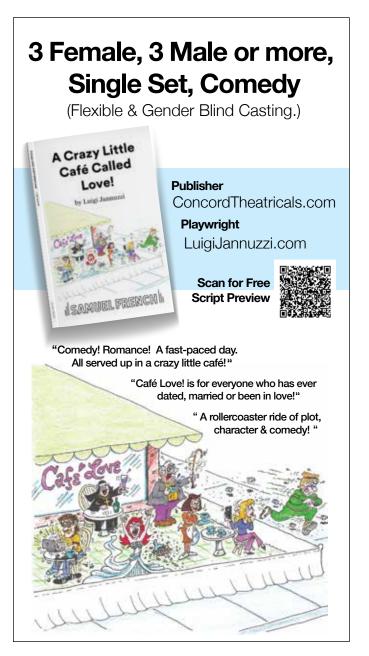
Taking on a leadership role at a community theatre is no easy task. Doing so on an interim basis is even more challenging, and often critical for the success of that theatre.

Founded in 1966, The Little Theatre of Owatonna (Minnesota) was under the leadership of Executive Secretary Sharon Stark for 52 years. Anyone following in those

legendary footsteps faced a monumental challenge.

The easy, short-term, answer back in 2018 was for then-Board Member Victoria Bartkowiak to step in on an interim basis. How did that work out? Bartkowiak is still there—now as Executive Director of this 360-seat theatre and a \$200,000 budget operation. She is the sole employee, as well.

As a graduate of Northern Michigan University with a B.A. in Science–Technical Theatre, she began her college career as a dance major. But after an ankle injury she moved to the tech side. After



some early career apprenticeships, including stage management at the Seaside Music Theatre in Daytona Beach, Florida, Bartkowiak took a break from the arts to raise a family. And her family eventually led her back to her artistic roots.

When her daughter was cast in the community theatre production of *Alice in Wonderland*, Bartkowiak came in to help with props. As so often happens, that volunteer commitment grew, until she found herself on the theatre's board, ultimately ready to step in for that interim assignment.

"During Covid, AACT was a lifeline," she said. "The AACT website and resources were great when looking to see who had already developed pandemic guidelines, or how to handle social distance seating. It was great to know we were not alone. All the webinars are great. There is always some little nugget that pertains to something I'm working on. Everything AACT provides for support is greater than the cost of membership."

Bartkowiak continues, "Participating at the National Directors Conference is outstanding. Meeting with dozens of problem-solvers helps build your network of support. Our board appreciates the value of that (biennial) conference, so I'm sure they'll approve my attendance for November 2025." (For more about the conference, visit **aact.org/ndc**.

Clearly, for as long as she serves as CEO of The Little Theatre of Owatonna, Bartkowiak will rely on AACT—and its huge support network— to help her theatre thrive.



2025 AACT National Awards

AACT's National Awards for 2025 honor 25 individuals and organizations who have contributed significantly to community theatre in America.

Art Cole Lifetime of Leadership Award

Honors a lifetime of leadership in community theatre by members of AACT who have provided leadership at the national level, in addition to local and/or regional levels.



James Walker, Aberdeen Community Theatre, Aberdeen, SD

In 1979, Jim founded Aberdeen Community Theatre, leading efforts to acquire its permanent home in 1992. He remained its Artistic/Managing Director until his retirement this past year. Retirement tributes included praise from arts leaders, government officials, and long-time donors. His participation in the AACTFest cycles through the years resulted in awards at the state, region,

and national levels, with award-winning productions at every level. His decades-long involvement with AACT has included decades of service on the International Committee and as a regular at the Monaco Festival. Jim was appointed Chair of the AACT Festival Commission in 2014, and served as VP of Festivals from 2018 to 2024. He also has served as a highly respected adjudicator at state and regional festivals, and was inducted into the prestigious AACT Fellows in 2015. Said the mayor of Aberdeen, "Jim has brought love, heart, and soul into the arts and to those in his community.

David C. Bryant Outstanding Service Award

Recognizes individual members of AACT for significant, valuable, and lasting service to community theatre.



Marc C. Edson, Chico Theater Company, Chico, CA

Marc was a casting director for background artists in Hollywood from 1983 to 1989, and appeared in several TV shows. In 2003, Marc founded Chico Theater Company in Northern California, where he has directed countless musicals and comedies. "I never dreamed that my career path would take me the direction that it has. But oh, how grateful I am that it did. My years of service to theatre in

Northern California have been very fulfilling. To sit back and watch and hear an audience enjoy a comedy, or feel moved by a poignant drama, or be uplifted by a musical, is a feeling like no other. The satisfaction and joy of moving a production from the page to the stage is one full of heartaches and headaches and love and laughter. I wouldn't have changed a thing! Thank you for the honor of this award."



Larry Pint, Minnesota Association of Community Theatres (MACT), New Prague, MN

Larry's love of theatre started in high school, and when his children entered high school, he volunteered in the school's theatre program and later became tech director. He joined the local community theatre and was soon on its board of directors, where over 20 years, he served as Vice-President, Treasurer, and President. Larry was involved in the formation of the New Prague Arts Coun-

cil in the 1990s and continues to serve on its board, helping to raise over \$950,000 of its \$1 million goal to build an outdoor performance space. Larry joined the Minnesota Association of Community Theatres (MACT) Board in 2000, and has served as its senior vice-president, president, and now as treasurer. He has chaired or co-chaired many festivals, and built and maintains MACT's new website. He also is the editor of MACT's weekly newsletter, which goes out to almost 500 subscribers.

Diamond Crown Organization Award

Recognizes longevity and vitality of AACT-member theatres that have expanded programming and/or facilities in the past 10 years, and have the administrative leadership to remain vital to their communities for the next 10 years. Recipients must have been in continuous operation for 75 years, and organizational members of AACT for the past ten years.

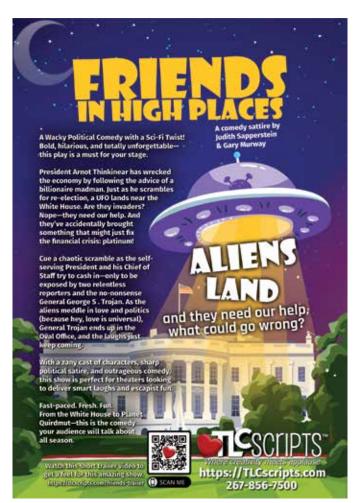


Daytona Playhouse, Daytona, FL

The Daytona Playhouse has been in operation since 1946, 501(c)(3) since 1957,

and a member of AACT since 2005. The Playhouse completed a \$2.2 million renovation in two phases (2016, 2024) to upgrade and expand its 65-year-old facility. Improvements include a major renovation of the front of the Playhouse that provides expanded restroom facilities and a new box office, plus a lift for wheelchairs and walkers. Daytona Playhouse's stated mission is "enriching our community and visitors through the power of live theatre. With a mission to provide diverse and innovative theatre experiences, we offer high-quality productions and creative opportunities for all ages. Our goal is to promote appreciation

continued on page 24 >



AACT National Awards continued from page 23

for and education in all phases of theatre arts." The Playhouse is run primarily by 200-plus volunteers, who ensure that it not only survives, but flourishes.

Distinguished Merit Award

Presented to individuals and organizations in recognition of contributions made to promote and develop the highest standards for community theatre.



Dr. Andrew Morgan, Penguin Project, Peoria, IL

Dr. Morgan is a developmental pediatrician and Professor Emeritus of Clinical Pediatrics at the University of Illinois College of Medicine in Peoria. After earning his M.D. at Johns Hopkins, he completed residency at Children's Memorial Hospital (Chicago) and a fellowship at the Kennedy Institute (Baltimore). For over 40 years, he has diagnosed and treated thousands of chil-

dren with developmental disabilities. Combining his medical expertise with a 30-year passion for theatre, he founded The Penguin Project—a groundbreaking community theatre program for children with special needs, where actors are paired with peer mentors. Since its creation 20 years ago, the program has expanded to 60 locations across 21 states, fostering inclusion, confidence, and creativity. A performer, choreographer, and director, Dr. Morgan's work bridges medicine and the arts, leaving a lasting impact on children and communities nationwide. (Visit **penguinproject.org** for further details about the program.)



David Metcalf, FungusAmongus Players, Dassel-Cokato, MN

Retiring after 34 years of teaching high school theatre and language arts, Dave is now Artistic Director of FungusAmongus Players. Performing at the Ergot Museum in tiny, rural Dassel, Minnesota, the company stages four shows per year. Dave has directed six shows for AACT competition, including two that have advanced to AACT National Festivals, where they've been honored

with Best Featured Actor, Best Actress, and Best Costumer awards, as well as various other nominations. In his career, he has directed over 150 productions for high school and community theatre in various area communities. He has also served for several years as reader/evaluator of scripts submitted to the AACT NewPlayFest.

Mort Clark International Achievement Award

Recognizes individuals and organizations for significant achievement in the promotion of excellence in international community theatre. (This award may be presented at an international event.)



Kelli McLoud-Schingen, World Stage Productions, Tulsa, OK

Based in Tulsa, Oklahoma, Kelli McLoud-Schingen holds an M.A. in Cross Cultural Studies and a B.A. in Communications with a Theatre minor. Her international theatre training includes studies at Aurora University, Roosevelt University, and the Oxford School of Drama. A dedicated advocate for both international and community theatre, Kelli founded the global, social justice-fo-

cused, World Stage Theatre Company in 2017. She serves as an AACT board member and councilor of AITA/IATA (International Association of Theatre Amateurs) council. She has provided cultural competence training to the Tulsa theatre community, and has hosted guest artists from Chile and the UK in Tulsa, as well as taken World Stage productions to the Netherlands and Italy. These initiatives foster empathy, compassion, and a broader global perspective.

Robert E. Gard Superior Volunteer Award

Presented to individuals above the age of 65 who have faithfully served community theatre on a non-paid basis for over 25 years.



Virgil Kleinhesselink, The Des Moines Playhouse, Des Moines, IA

Virgil discovered The Playhouse by chance in 1979, while driving with his wife, Linda, shortly after moving to Des Moines. Having been involved in theatre during high school, and earning a debate scholarship to college, he decided to give The Playhouse a try. As Virgil put it, "It was the easiest way to become a part of a community." That same year, he attended his first show, *A Little*

Night Music, and began volunteering behind the scenes on *Man of La Mancha*. In the 44 years since, Virgil has been involved in approximately 355 productions, holding at least 17 distinct roles in various capacities.



Moe Broom, Warehouse Theatre Company, Yakima, WA

Moe has been part of the fabric of the Warehouse Theatre Company (WTC) in Yakima, Washington, for over 60 years. He joined the WTC when he was just 14, helping to design and run lights for the company's 1964 production of *The Teahouse of the August Moon*. He was hooked. His

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National Awards Robert E. Gard Superior Volunteer Award continued from page 24

work includes time as the technical director at Yakima's Capitol Theatre, as lighting and sound engineer for various venues throughout the northwest, a production director for Nike, and a Career and Technical Education (CTE) instructor and program administrator for the Yakima School District, eventually rising to CTE program director for the entire state of Washington. With that resumé, it might seem impossible that Moe could have the time to work with the WTC, but his commitment to the theatre has never wavered.



Patricia Seely, Warehouse Theatre, Yakima, WA Pat has been involved with the Warehouse Theatre Company of Yakima, Washington for over 40 years, and has served in just about every capacity, both on and off stage. "The Warehouse Theatre Company is my extended family," she says, "always there with love and support, all while producing fantastic theatre for our community." Pat spent 33-plus years teaching music and kindergarten in the public schools. She also is the proud

mother of three children and the grandmother of five grandchildren.



Christine & Jay Kaiser, Grosse Point Theater, Gross Pointe, MI

Chris first became involved with Grosse Pointe Theatre in 1972, wishing to continue her interest in the acting and singing that she enjoyed in high school, and her side gig as a wedding singer. Her stage roles ranged from ensemble and featured characters to leading lady, and she also served on the GPT board. Most recently, Chris has worked as producer for the company's large-cast shows.

Husband Jay says he became involved with community theatre while waiting around for Chris in rehearsals. (His initial foray was in painting ivy on a flat.) Years later, he assisted with set construction in his daughter's high school productions. Now in retirement, Jay finds himself involved building set pieces in almost every show.



Jackie Van Oosbree, Emmetsburg Main Street Community Theatre, Emmetsburg, IA

Jackie has been the heart of Emmetsburg Main Street Community Theatre, dedicating over 45 years to enriching northwest Iowa's cultural landscape. Her tireless efforts helped transform the former Holy Family Catholic Church Parish Hall into the Dinges/Van Oosbree Performing Arts Center—now the theatre's thriving home. Her leadership, vision, and unmatched work ethic have

made the theatre a cornerstone of the community. Whether behind the scenes or in governance, Jackie's passion ensures the arts remain vibrant in Emmetsburg and beyond.



Roy Hensel, Market House Theatre, Paducah, KY

Roy Hensel's dedication to community theatre spans 43 years, with the majority of his service devoted to Market House Theatre (MHT). His journey began in 1982 when he first took the stage in *A Christmas Carol*. Since then, Roy has been involved in over 45 productions, spanning five decades, showcasing his versatility and passion for the arts. He also has served on the MHT board

twice, contributing significantly to the growth and success of MHT as it evolved into a regional community theatre. His community service also

includes serving as a board member of the McCracken County Library, the Market House Museum, and the Paducah Ambassadors. He gives tours of Oak Grove Cemetery and city tours for the passengers of the steamboats, which frequent the riverfront.



Seymour Weinstein, Curtain Call Theatre, Stamford, CT

Seymour Weinstein has been an integral part of Curtain Call's success from day-one. As the volunteer advocate for the arts, he helped with the filing of Curtain Call's 501(c)(3) paperwork in 1990, and has served on the company's board ever since. He also has served on virtually every Curtain Call committee over the past 35 years. Besides chairing the board, he has been a longstand-

ing chair of the Board Development Committee—helping to cultivate new board members. From monitoring at an audition desk to making a curtain speech, Seymour has done it all—except act in a show. Most important, perhaps, his service as legal counsel and advisor has been incredibly valuable to the company these past 25 years.



Mark Wilson, Players Theatre Company, Conroe, TX

For an extraordinary 83 consecutive productions, Mark has volunteered in virtually every capacity imaginable, embodying the true spirit of selflessness and commitment. Whether it's set building, backstage support, working the tech booth, stage managing, assisting front-of-house, or taking his loaded truck back and forth to the storage unit or the local building supply store, he has proved

that no task is too big or small for him to tackle—including growing a full-length beard in a matter of weeks just to walk across the stage for *SpongeBob*. Colleagues say that his collaborative nature and willingness to help in any way, make him "an absolute joy to work with and an invaluable member of the Players Theatre team."

Special Recognition Award

Presented to individuals and organizations whose contributions to community theatre are far-reaching and of a special nature.



Eric Leszczynski, Grosse Pointe Theatre, Grosse Pointe, MI

Eric has been an integral member of Grosse Pointe Theatre since 1993. A techie at heart, his expertise in lighting design, as well as his committee and board leadership, has been key to Grosse Pointe Theatre's success. As an engineer program manager for a global automotive supplier, he generously applies his talents to enhance the technical delivery for the theatre's productions and pro-

grams. Eric has served on GPT's Board of Directors for approximately 15 years, as president, and most recently as technical director. He also serves on the company's Scholarship, Season Advisory, and Facilities Committees. His knowledge and ability to mentor up-and-coming lighting designers and arts leaders is another treasured quality.

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Matthew Spangler



Kenneth Butler, Mass Arts Center, Mansfield, MA

Ken Butler founded the Mass Arts Center in 1993 with \$8 and a small group of artsminded citizens with the idea of creating a home for the arts in Mansfield, Massachusetts. He served as president of the board for seven years and became the company's first and only Executive Director in 2000, when MAC began operating its first small black box theatre. In

late 2020 The Mass Arts Center moved into a larger, now renovated property in Mansfield. Thanks to Ken's leadership, it has grown to a vibrant organization with an arts center that features theatre productions, art gallery exhibits, and theatre educational programs for children and teens—creating opportunities for artistic endeavors throughout southeastern Massachusetts.



Theatre Palisades, Pacific Palisades, CA

In 1963, Theatre Palisades (TP) was founded by three television writers

who wanted to produce original plays, starting with their own scripts. Performances were held at the Pacific Palisades Jewish Community Center (now Kehillat Israel) on Sunset Blvd. By 1967, Theatre Palisades had become a community theatre whose busy schedule included five major productions, with a run of 18 performances per production. TPYouth produced two shows a year by children for a total of 13 performances a year. The theatre also offered chamber music concerts, special shows and membership meetings, and hosted many Palisades Historical Society presentations throughout the year. Unfortunately, the theatre buildings were lost in the 2025 brush fires that devastated the community, and Theatre Palisades continues to produce shows at neighboring and partnering theatres. "Though we have lost our physical space, our dedication to the arts and our community remains steadfast," reads the message on the company's website. "With the support of our patrons, partners, and fellow theatre lovers, Theatre Palisades will rise again."



Hendersonville Theatre, Hendersonville, NC

Since transitioning from an all-volunteer organization to a professionally-staffed community theatre, Henderson Theatre has greatly expanded its artistic reach, growing its acting pool from just 17 in 2021 to over 125 who auditioned for its 2025 season. The

company has launched inclusive programming, from LGBTQ+affirming productions to "pay what you can" performances, ensuring accessibility for all. Operational and technical improvements—such as new artist agreements, upgraded sound and lighting, and enhanced patron services—have strengthened its foundation for future growth. Hurricane Helene caused severe flooding at the theatre, damaging the lower levels and leaving uninsured expenses. As a small-budget theatre with just 115 seats, the financial strain has been especially significant. Despite these challenges, the theatre staged *Misery* in collaboration with Kathy Bates shortly after the hurricane. It is now focused on recovery efforts, including a major fundraiser and new sponsorship initiatives, while continuing to maintain affordable ticket prices for the community.



Asheville Community Theatre, Ashville NC

Since 1946, Asheville Community Theatre has been delighting audiences with highquality performances, making it the oldest continuously operating theatre in the area. ACT provides entertainment, enrichment, and education through the practices and

celebration of the theatre arts. Hurricane Helene dealt a severe blow, causing structural damage and economic losses estimated between \$300,000 and \$500,000—half of the company's annual budget. The theatre's optimism about a strong year has been interrupted, but its determination remains unwavering. In a recent message to the community, the theatre said, "In times like these, it's the little things that mean the most—a helping hand, a kind word, or simply being there for one another."



Flooding due to Hurricane Helene devastated the Newport Theatre Guild's facilities and their local partner, Newport Dance and Cheer Academy, forcing the postponement of The

Newport Theatre Guild, Newport TN

Wizard of Oz. This rural, low-income community is rallying around its theatre, but the company's usual sponsors are unable to contribute, due to their own losses. The theatre was determined to bring joy back to the community by presenting *The Wizard of Oz* in March 2025. The production raised nearly \$28,000 in donations to aid Helene-related flood recovery, six months after the storm devastated parts of Cocke County—with some audience members traveling more than an hour to attend the performances.



Rachel Bohnsack, Northern Starz Center for the Performing Arts, Ramsey, MN

Rachel is the Co-Founder and Executive Director of Northern Starz Center for the Performing Arts. Since Northern Starz' inception in 2012, Rachel has also choreographed over 60 musicals and produced more than 100 shows. She is dedicated to bringing the performing arts to all ages and abilities through programming for K-5, 6-12

(educational conservatory), adults, 55+ (the Willow Tree Project), veterans (Starz & Stripes), individuals with special needs (Penguin Project, Penguin Players, Playful Penguins), and an all-abilities sleepaway theatre and art camp (Camp Under the Starz). Along with Kyle Frederickson (Co-Founder and Artistic Director), dedicated staff members, and hundreds of volunteers, a former medical clinic has been transformed into a vibrant 90-seat black box theatre, a 150-seat event center, a dance studio, a K-2 stage, three music/voice studios, a scene shop, a costume room and shop, and an administrative space. Once a year, when possible, Rachel still finds time to perform on stage..



Julianna Skluzacek, The Merlin Players, Owatonna, MN

Julianna is a graduate of the University of Minnesota, with a degree in Directing. She has directed about 120 plays in her career, and was the founder of The Merlin Players, a community theatre that had to close its doors after 28 years, due to Covid. Her production of *Eleemosynary* was chosen as best of show by the Minnesota Association of Community Theatres and

moved on to regionals in Nebraska. "Community theatre enriches the community in which it lives," she says. "It brings people together in a way that is difficult to copy in other organizations. It trains actors and technical talent for professional theatre across the United States. It's a joyful experience that creates lasting friendships. It has been a powerful influence in my life."

Twink Lynch Organizational Award

Recognizes AACT-member theatres for successfully completing major steps in new directions, expanding services to their community, or moving to the next level of organizational development.



Moorestown Theater Company, Moorestown, NJ

The Moorestown Theater Company (MTC) debuted on March 31, 2003, and was named New Jersey's 'Outstanding Community Theater of The Year' in 2022 by the New

Jersey Association of Community Theaters. In 23 seasons, MTC has presented 238 Productions, with 1,075 Performances by 10,038 Cast Members. MTC has won 18 national awards (Jr. Theater Festival since 2013), two regional awards (ESTAFest '17), and 72 local awards since 2007. MTC's Founding Producing Artistic Director Mark Morgan received the prestigious 'Freddie G. Fellowship Award' at JTF '25. MTC was able to continue operations during Covid (performing 19 musicals) and has presented three Penguin Project shows. MTC says it is honored to be part of the community theatre world, and proud to have been 'Transforming Lives Since 2003.'

Corporate Award

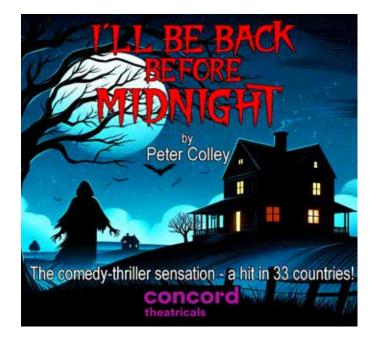
Presented to businesses and corporations for significant financial support of community theatre on a regional or national basis.

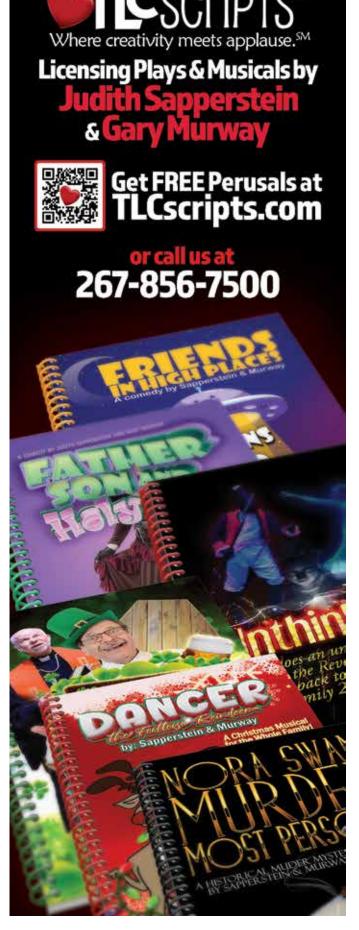


Corteva Agriscience, Johnston, IA

Since 2009, Corteva Agriscience, formerly Pioneer Hi-Bred International, has

been a corporate partner at the Des Moines Community Playhouse. Beyond contributing annually to the success of productions, Corteva consistently fills the auditorium for preview night, bringing new faces to the theatre, as well as friends who enjoy returning there each year. Corteva Agriscience staff members serve on the Playhouse Board of Directors and Capital Campaign committees, helping to sustain their commitment to the company through fundraising and time.





AACT Fellows Named

Four distinguished leaders have been elected to join the ranks of AACT Fellows—an honor reserved for those whose extraordinary dedication has shaped the very heart of community theatre and elevated AACT's mission. Nomination and election to this select group is the responsibility of the current Fellow membership.

These remarkable individuals have inspired audiences, mentored artists, and championed the transformative power of theatre for years. Please join us in celebrating their achievements—their passion and leadership continue to light the way for community theatres nationwide.



Michael Cochran

Paducah, Kentucky

Michael earned a B.A. in Theatre from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater and an M.F.A. in Theatre from Southern Illinois University Carbondale. He worked professionally in theatre and film in Chicago and Kansas City before joining the Market House Theatre (MHT) in Paducah, Kentucky, in 1983. In 1996, he was named the company's Executive Director. In his career, Mi-

chael has directed more than 150 productions, and designed or produced over 700, earning local, state, and regional awards in the process. Under his leadership, MHT received the Kentucky Governor's Award for Community Arts Organization in 2017, and was honored by the City of Paducah and the Paducah Chamber of Commerce. In 2023, MHT received AACT's Twink Lynch Organization Award after successfully renovating 11 historic buildings into a thriving theatre campus. That same year, Michael was awarded the Distinguished Merit Award for his outstanding contributions to community theatre. After nearly 42 years at MHT, Michael is retiring to work as a freelance director, playwright, and consultant. A member of the Dramatists Guild, his play *Eternity* was selected as a winner of the AACT NewPlayFest 2018 and published by Dramatic Publishing. His scripts have been produced by community, high school, and college theatres nationwide. Michael currently serves on the AACT Board.



Donna Fisher

Casper, Wyoming

Donna has been involved in theatre since 1979, when she played Lady Precious Harp in *Land of the Dragon*. Since then, she has acted, directed, and teched over 250 shows. She was founder and director of Wyoming Repertory Theater Company and Painted Past Productions. In 2014, she was instrumental in founding Casper Theater Company, directing many productions there and serving

as its Artistic Director. She also made six consecutive trips to Europe to entertain the children of the U.S. Military in Italy, Germany, Belgium, Austria, and France. Donna helped form the Wyoming State Theater Festival Committee, and in 2005, was named a Wyoming Woman of Distinction for her achievements in local theatre. She has served AACT twice as Region 7 Representative (for Montana, Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming) and as Wyoming State Contact, as well as a Festival Commissioner and Festival Adjudicator. In 2020, AACT presented her with the David C. Bryant Award, which honors individual members for significant, valuable, and lasting service to community theatre.



Jon Douglas Rake

Tacoma, Washington

Jon earned his degree in directing from UC San Diego, where he studied under Tony-winning director Alan Schneider. He built a successful career in Los Angeles as a dancer, choreographer, and director, which led to meeting his partner, Jeff, with whom he has shared 42 years. Together, they relocated to the Pacific Northwest to establish Tacoma Musical Playhouse, a nonprofit community

theatre. Now in its 32nd season, the theatre continues to thrive, earning national and international recognition. Jon has served on the AACT Board as Region 9 Representative (Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Washington) for two terms, and is continuing as its ex-officio representative. "I have devoted much of my life to community theatre, driven by the joy of witnessing the unique camaraderie and talent it fosters," Jon said. "My passion lies in creating an inclusive and inspiring environment where individuals feel empowered to share and grow their talents while bringing exceptional productions to our community."



Michael Spicer Salina, Kansas

Michael has spent his 44-year career in community theatre, serving as Executive Director of Theatre Salina for 28 years. During his tenure, the company has doubled the size of its campus and is in the process of creating two additions. Theatre Salina now produces 14 productions annually across all platforms, including Center for Theatre

Arts, the vibrant educational wing of the Theatre. Michael has also seen two productions from the theatre perform at national AACTFest. He has served on the boards of AACT, Texas Nonprofit Theatres, and the Kansas Theatre Association. AACT has honored him with both the David C. Bryant Award and the Art Cole Lifetime of Leadership Award. Theatre Salina itself is the recipient of the Governor's Arts Award for organizational excellence, and AACT's Twink Lynch Organizational Achievement Award, which recognizes AACT member theatres for successfully completing major steps in new directions, expanding services to their community, or moving to the next level of organizational development.



Sharon Burum

Duncan. Oklahoma

Sharon is a performing arts consultant. She taught Drama in public schools in Texas and Oklahoma for 28 years and is the founding director of Teen Theatre, a summer theatre arts program for teens. Following she spent 10 years directing musicals at Hodgson's Studio of Music and Drama. Active with Duncan Little Theatre and the Oklahoma Community Theatre Association for over 35

years, she has directed 80 productions, chaired a number of state and Region VI festivals, and serves on the Region VI board. She was an AACT board member for 11 years and travels as an AACT Commissioner and Adjudicator. Her awards include the Lifetime Achievement from DLT, Hall of Honor from OCTA, an Oklahoma Governor's Arts Award in 2010, and in 2022 was named to the Duncan Area Arts Hall of Fame. Her husband Randy, her daughter Kate and dog Rolex complete her world.

Eat, Drink, Plays!

Mary Doveton

Kentucky Derby attendees enjoy Mint Juleps. Wimbledon offers its famous Pimm's Cup. The US Open Tennis Tournament now partners with Grey Goose Vodka to produce a signature drink called the 'Honey Deuce.'This vodka, lemonade, and raspberry concoction, garnished with three small green honey dew melon balls, serves up 'tennis balls' and a name mimicking a score. Fans are thrilled, and the drink has generated over \$11 million in drink sales in the world of tennis.

While on a much smaller scale, a number of community theatres have found ways to offer something special in their lobbies to make the visit there more enjoyable for their audiences

Pre-Covid, lots of light-up items were popular, from roses for *Beauty and the Beast* and wands for *Cinderella*, to swords for *Peter Pan* and chocolate bars for *Willie Wonka*. Currently, many theatres rely on popcorn, T-shirts, candy, and soda. Some offer bar items, and several that we talked to offered promotional items associated with individual shows.

Theatres offering these extras generally fall into three groups: those who go it alone, those who partner with local businesses, and a few who partner with other local non-profits.

People-power is a big determiner of how much any theatre can take on. Finding the folks who will do the creating, the ordering, the serving, the inventory, the cleanup, and the reporting can certainly be factors to explore before adding on any promotions or sales.

Kristy Meanor at the Wetumpka Depot Community Theatre in Alabama says, "When we have the staff and the stamina, we theme our concession sales to coordinate with the shows." 'Bleeding Armadillo' cupcakes tempted patrons at *Steel Magnolias*, along with RC Cola, Moon Pies, and peanuts for several other Southern-themed shows. A special Margarita, a tiki bar, and a 'Lost Shaker of Salt Soiree' accompanied *Jimmy Buffett's Escape to Margaritaville*.

The creative folk at Theatre Salina in Kansas own an embroidery machine, which enables them to put their logo on many items that they buy in bulk. Operations Manager Ali Schade said, "Our theatre temperature tends to run cold, so we ordered a bunch of fleece throws, put our logo on them and they sold out really fast."

In Bradenton, Florida, Rick Kerby of the Manatee Players reports that while they stepped back from concessions and special promotions during Covid, they have been gradually re-introducing them. Their recent decision to allow food and drink in the house has been well received, increasing sales.



In 2024, Blue Note Brewery released 'Legally Blonde Ale' to partner with the musical of the same name at the Woodland Opera House in Woodland, California. Spokane Civic Theatre, actively exploring partnerships with local businesses, has already signed on with a brewhouse, a farmers market, and a bakery.

John Rambo at Hickory Community Theatre in Hickory, North Carolina, takes his popcorn seriously. The theatre has a partnership with local business Tastebud Popcorn, which specializes in

many varieties of both sweet and savory popcorns. While John says the Movie Theatre Butter Popcorn remains their best seller, they sometimes theme the popcorn with a particular show. For example, they arranged for a special blackberry flavor to enhance Hickory's production of the NewPlayFest production, *Eating Blackberries*. However, John admitted his theatre had not yet found appropriate shows to partner with Tastebud flavors like "Unicorn Poop" and "Decadent Dog." Market House Theatre in Paducah, Kentucky, is getting ready for its upcoming production of *Waitress* by hosting the West Kentucky Pie Baking Contest. They are teaming up with a local nonprofit and invit-

ing bakers to submit two identical pies (one for judging, one for sharing). In addition to cash prizes, the Grand Prize Winner's recipe will be printed in the *Waitress* playbill, and they will receive free tickets to the show.



Concessions have taken a slightly different turn in Valparaiso, Indiana, where instead of partnering with local businesses, Scot MacDonald at the Memorial Opera House reports a partnership with a local nonprofit, Opportunity Enterprises. OE, as it's commonly known in Valparaiso, provides job placement and steady income opportunities for members of the community with physical and mental exceptionalities. One of the many services OE provides is through their "Do Goodies" market. The theatre purchases pre-packaged popcorn from them, which supports OE, and then resells it in their theatre's concessions, which supports the Memorial Opera House. It's a win-win all around. Several recipes rotate through the year, and Scot reports that the Chicago blend (caramel and cheddar cheese) doesn't last long on the shelves. Coupled with their regular items and bar sales, Scot says the theatre generates \$50,000-\$60,000 in annual revenue.

The Popcorn-Palooza-Prize, however, must go to Texas, Midland, where volunteers turn out 15 tons of popcorn every summer for their annual fundraiser of 77 years, the Summer Mummers. The melodrama/silent movie/talent show



format encourages patrons to sip a cold one and throw handfuls of popcorn in the air, on the stage, and at each other in the historic Yucca Theatre. About 15,000 hours of volunteer commitment each summer generates around \$190,000 in popcorn sales alone.

A new venture at Midland Community Theatre is also showing promise. 'Treat Boxes' include a soft drink, a selection of treats, and a whimsical keepsake tied to the production. Audiences responded well to a trial run, and plans are being made to feature them at future productions.

Of course, each AACT-member theatre must make its own decision about what fits best with its staffing abilities and own audience's tastes. But isn't it fun to see what others are doing, and to fantasize about an ideal Mint Julep-Pimm's Cup-Honey Deuce waiting out there for the world of Community Theatre?



Mary Doveton is founder and Executive Director Emeritus at Theatre Lawrence (Kansas), past AACT Board Member, an AACT Fellow, and a member of the AACT Spotlight Editorial Team.

New Roles



Jon Montgomery has been appointed Executive Director of HITS Theatre, in Houston, Texas. "Jon's passion for arts education, combined with his leadership experience and deep commitment to empowering young performers, makes him the perfect person to lead HITS into its next chapter," said Board President Katie Rushing. Jon has served as Interim Executive Director at the Ellen Noël Art Museum in Odessa, Texas; Executive Artistic Director for Basin Theatre Works in Odes-

sa, Texas; Executive Artistic Director for The Depot Theater in Dodge City, Kansas; Staging STEM Manager in the Department of Education at The Alley Theatre in Houston, Texas; and Fine Arts Director and Theatre Instructor for Incarnate Word Academy in Corpus Christi, Texas. He was the Private/Parochial School and Special Interests Chair on the K-12 Education Committee for the Texas Educational Theatre Association. As a professional director and choreographer, he is an Associate Member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society. He is also a Member-at-Large on the AACT Board of Directors.



Dahveed Bullis has stepped into the role of Artistic Director of Stage Left Theater in Spokane, Washington. Bullis is a community-centered theatre artist, who is "committed to breaking barriers and creating opportunities for all." A leader in the Spokane arts scene, he has worked to uplift historically resilient communities by telling their stories, as well has his own. Born in Spokane, Bullis earned a B.A. in Theatre from Eastern Washington University, and this year, an M.S. in

Management and Leadership from Western Governors University. He co-founded Spokane Playwrights Laboratory and teaches acting exploration classes at the Blue Door Theatre.



Kearney Jordan Olson has also joined the Stage Left Theatre team as Managing Director. Olson is a well-known figure in the local theatre community, having performed and directed a number of productions. With over a decade of experience in managing the children's academy at Spokane Civic Theatre, Kearney's leadership is aligned in areas such as fundraising, grant management, budget oversight, operational excellence, and the development of educational programs and com-

munity partnerships. She will be collaborating closely with Artistic Director Dahveed Bullis and their seasoned Technical Director, James

"Moss" Landsiedel, as they guide Spokane's progressive nonprofit theatre toward new achievements.



Benjamin S. Grimes has been named the Managing Artistic Director of Market House Theatre, in Paducah, Kentucky, beginning his tenure on July 1. Grimes joins MHT following a nationally recognized career that blends both the performing arts and public service. A graduate of The Conservatory of Theatre Arts at Webster University, with a B.F.A. in Acting, Grimes began his career performing in regional theatres across the country. He joined the U.S. Army in 2006, serving as

an Airborne Infantryman with the 82nd Airborne Division. Following his final deployment, he pursued a Master's in Public Service from the Clinton School of Public Service, focusing on theatre as a tool for social impact. His innovative work in this area led him to found Riverside Actors Theatre, a company in Central Arkansas dedicated to addressing trauma and elevating the voices of veterans and at-risk communities through performance and storytelling.

Please join AACT in congratulating these remarkable people who share in our commitment to a thriving community theatre community in America.



By Doug Segrest & Inisity Meanor HOORAY FOR HARRY WOOD A New Laugh-Out-Loud Screwball Comedy

Strong Leading Roles for Senior Actors

Snappy Dialogue with a Dash of Mystery Reminiscent of the Golden-Age of Hollywood Classics

Member Theatre Hub After the Storm, a New Artistic Vision

Jon Montgomery

Hendersonville Theatre, nestled in the picturesque heart of Hendersonville, North Carolina, has long been a cornerstone of the local arts scene. Founded in 1966, the theatre operated as a volunteerrun organization for decades, In the post-Covid landscape, however, the theatre is embracing a bold new chapter under the stewardship of Managing Artistic Director Victoria Lamberth.

After a long, successful stint in the corporate world, Lamberth found herself drawn to the theatre—a place where creativity and community came together. When her husband's work brought them to Hendersonville, North Carolina, in 2017, she joined what was then named Hendersonville Little Theatre as a volunteer and actor. Over the next few years, she transitioned from volunteer to staff, and in 2021, stepped into the role of Managing Artistic Director. That same year, the theatre changed its name to Hendersonville Theatre, with a stated commitment to inclusion, diversity and transformative theatrical experiences for everyone.

The Covid pandemic proved to be a turning point. Like many others, the theatre was forced to shut down. However, thanks to a reserve of funds set aside for emergencies, the theatre managed to weather the storm.



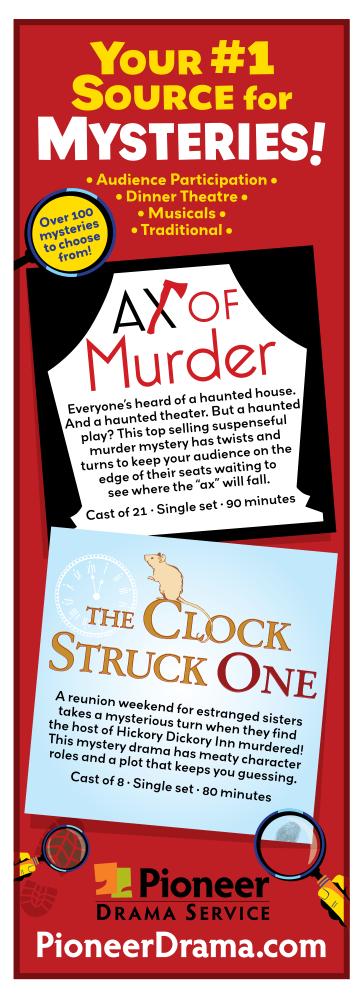
Hendersonville Theatre

When the theatre reopened, it became clear that a transformation was necessary. Change was not just an option—it was a matter of survival. The theatre began building a professional staff for the first time in its history. Lamberth considered this an essential move for the organization's long-term sustainability. Since then, the theatre has expanded its programming significantly.

"We're busting at the seams in terms of programming," Lamberth said. The theatre, which serves a population of approximately 15,000 in Hendersonville—part of a larger county with a population of around 100,000—has expanded its season and is beginning to run out of space. Plans for expansion are in the works.

At the heart of Lamberth's vision for Hendersonville Theatre is the idea of creating a "safe haven" for the community—a place for individuals to come together, challenge their perspectives, and find solace in shared experiences. Part of this commitment to community engagement comes in the form of special events and initiatives designed to build connections. The theatre's growing concert series, fundraising events, and performances are designed to offer something

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Member Hub continued from page 33

for everyone, regardless of age or background. In doing so, they're not just entertaining; they are actively shaping the cultural landscape of Hendersonville and the surrounding area.

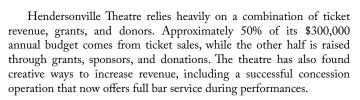
The theatre's resilience was truly tested during the aftermath of Hurricane Helene, the deadly and devastating tropical storm that caused widespread catastrophic damage across the Southeastern United States in September 2024. In its wake, the small creek behind the theatre building swelled into a dangerous flood, damaging the lower levels of the building and ruining essential equipment, including electronics and costumes. For a time, it seemed as though the building itself might be lost.



The theatre was forced to close for several months, as repairs and cleanup efforts began. With no power, water, or internet, many staff members and volunteers were displaced. Once power was restored, the space offered anyone in the community a place to charge devices, check

Hendersonville Theatre interior

in with families, and even stay overnight. While the damage was significant, the theatre's spirit has remained unbroken. FEMA grants are helping to fund repairs, and there is hope that the funding will also help to make the building more resilient against future flooding.



The theatre season includes plays and musicals, as well as concerts by outside performers. Other offerings include a one-act play festival, and readings of new works throughout the year.

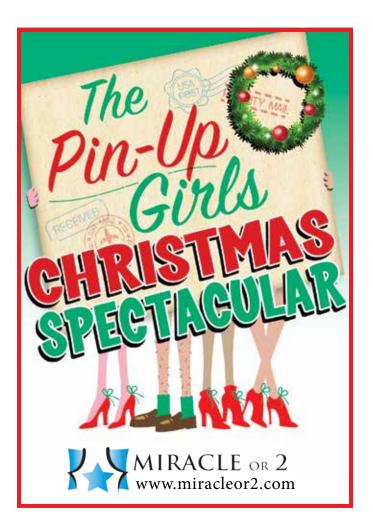
With a clear vision for its future, the theatre is not just surviving it's thriving. The professional staff, led by Lamberth, remains committed to pushing the artistic boundaries of what the theatre can offer, while keeping its doors open to the entire community.

The road ahead is still uncertain, but one thing is clear: Hendersonville Theatre is no longer content to merely exist. Under Lamberth's leadership, it is becoming a vital hub for both the arts and the community—a place where creativity, passion, and resilience are woven into the fabric of every performance.

For the people of Hendersonville and beyond, this is just the beginning of a new and exciting chapter in the life of a beloved theatre.



Jon Montgomery is a Member at Large on the Board of Directors for AACT, and is the Executive Director of HITS Theatre in Houston, Texas. He has previously served as Executive Artistic Director for both The Depot Theater and Basin Theatre Works.





Regionally Speaking

Each of AACT's 10 regions has dedicated representatives who serve as key points of contact for theatres, members, and festival organizers. Region VIII, the focus here, includes Arizona, California, Hawaii, Nevada, and Guam. For more on our 10 regions and Representatives, visit **aact.org/regions**

Greetings, *Spotlight* readers! My name is Marc Edson, and I am the Representative for AACT Region VIII.



Naturally, because this is community theatre, there are many other hats that I wear at my home theatre, Chico Theater Company, including Executive Director, Managing Director, Business Manager, and chief bottle washer. The home for all these jobs is in the Northern California town of Chico, about two hours north of Sacramento. I founded CTC 22 years ago, and it has been the source of many joys, a few heartaches (and headaches), and the meeting place for some of the greatest people I have met in my life.

Early on, I discovered AACT and signed our theatre up immediately. We quickly began to reap the many benefits of AACT membership, including vendor and publisher discounts, ASCAP licensing, workshops, resources, and this wonderful magazine, *Spotlight*. AACT has been a great part of our success throughout the years. Once only leasing a portion of our building, we have grown to own and occupy the entire facility—providing us with dedicated rehearsal spaces for dance, blocking, and music, as well as our main stage and expanded lobby.

As I was reading through *Spotlight* several years ago, I noticed that our region didn't have a Regional Representative. I contacted the AACT office about it, and after several interviews was appointed the Region VIII Representative, which includes California, Nevada, Arizona, Hawaii, and Guam. I was excited and proud to join the team and attend my first AACT Board of Directors meeting, in San Diego. There I met a dedicated group of staff and volunteers from around the country. The thing that impressed me the most was how many wonderful folks were a part of this group, and how many programs and initiatives they were involved in. AACT remains a thriving and vibrant



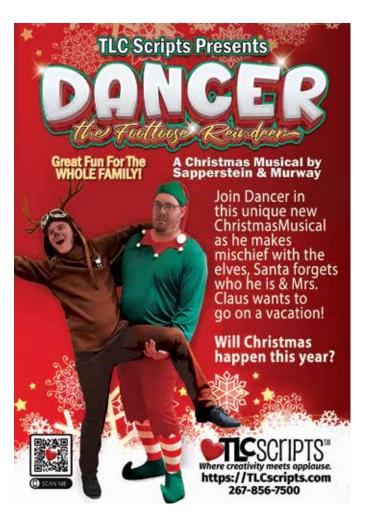
organization that truly cares for the community theatres in the U.S. and beyond.

It is my hope that Region VIII can begin to grow its membership and blossom into a more active part of AACT. Among other things, I hope to inspire our Region's theatres to take part in the AACTFest cycle, with the goal of sending representatives to the national festival. We are all busy working at our own theatres, but imagine being able to tell your patrons that your team is going to compete in the state, regional—and ultimately, the national festival!

Shifting focus to Regional news, Chris Hamby, from TheaterWorks of Northern Nevada, was recently awarded a prestigious fellowship from the Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust. As part of this year's class of Piper Fellows, he receives a grant to engage in immersive learning opportunities. Congrats to Chris!

Finally, if you find yourself near Chico, I hope you will visit Chico Theater Company to see our nicely appointed building and attend one of our shows. We perform seven to eight shows each year, averaging around 100 performances. We produce mostly musicals, but also present several non-musicals, as well, and have hosted several original works. We also open our space between shows to outside groups, ranging from belly dancers and schools to independent companies and film-makers.

Here's hoping that good luck is upon you, and that your houses are full of patrons—and joy.



Spotlight Award Honors The Spier Family Foundation



AACT is thrilled to award the Spotlight Award to The Spier Family Foundation, whose trustees, Greg and Kathy Spier, have been major supporters of the Mass Arts Center (MAC) in Mansfield, Massachusetts since 2019.

Each year the foundation has donated \$5,000 as season sponsors, and an additional \$5,000 as gala sponsors. In 2021, the foundation donated \$25,000 to help MAC create an accessible restroom and add an access ramp to the arts center educational wing. In 2023 it donated \$8,000 for automatic access doors. Greg and Kathy Spier have always said "yes" to helping meet the needs of the arts center to create a more accessible space for patrons, artists and students.

The Spier Family Foundation's founders, Alex and Sonja Spier, made it their mission "to leave the world a better place."



Mass Arts Center and Spier Foundation group photo at the ribbon cutting for the new access ramp thanks to the Spier Foundation.

Alex passed away in September 2017, but he lived a remarkable life and left behind an incredible legacy. He grew up in Amsterdam, in the Netherlands, and was a member of the Dutch Underground during WWII. He was involved in a number of engagements prior to his capture and imprisonment in Auschwitz Concentration Camp in 1941, and his eventual liberation from Bergen-Belsen in April, 1944.

Alex emigrated to America in 1945, and initially stayed with his late sister, Lore Siegel in New Bedford, Massachusetts. Utilizing his skills as a watchmaker, he gained employment with local jewelers, and then opened Spier the Jeweler in Mansfield, Massachusetts, in 1947.

He met Sonja Vorsanger in 1951 and within 82 days they married and moved to Foxboro, where they opened their second

store in 1953. Alex continued to operate the store until 1970.

Alex's core beliefthe importance of leaving the world a better place than he found it-led to decades of philanthropic giving, both personally and through the Spier Family Foundation, to local causes including the Foxboro Fire Department, Bethany Church, The Hockomock YMCA, Mass Arts The Center, Boyden Library, and The Foxboro Senior Center. He also



Spier Foundation Trustees Greg and Kathy Spier

funded major research projects for cancer, heart disease, vascular disease, and made possible the Cancer Infusion floor in the Yawkey Building at Massachusetts General Hospital. He contributed 50 homes to Habitat for Humanity in Naples, Florida, and in 2013 was named one of the Ten Most Influential People in Naples.

Alex Spier was a small man in stature but a giant in life. To continue his mission, the Spier Family Foundation remains dedicated to improving the well-being of the communities in which the family has worked and lived. **spierfamilyfoundation.org**



Inclusivity In Theatre Reclaiming the Stage: The Power of Community in Appalachia

Jon Montgomery

Tucker Leighty-Phillips' journey in the arts began long before he became a familiar face at Appalshop. Based in Letcher County, Kentucky, Appalshop is a vibrant cultural organization dedicated to preserving Appalachian traditions while fostering contemporary creativity and social change. Through education, media, theatre, music, and the arts, it works to document and revitalize the region's rich heritage, ensuring that both time-honored customs and modern innovations thrive.

As a child, Tucker appeared in numerous theatrical productions, finding himself in the spotlight by the 5th grade. Yet, like many young performers, he eventually moved away from theatre as he entered adulthood. But his creative spirit would not remain dormant for long.

Revisiting his artistic roots, Tucker embraced a multifaceted approach to his creative life exploring writing, visual arts, and performance in



Appalshop

ways that blended various forms of expression. This culminated in a pivotal moment when Tucker joined the Roadside Theater, part of the Appalshop collective in Kentucky. Appalshop's Roadside Theater is a professional ensemble of community-trained storytellers in the coalfields of Appalachia. Not only did he contribute to the revival of a historical community theatre, but he also embraced the freedom to create without fear, rediscovering his love for theatre.

At the heart of Tucker's artistic philosophy is a deep commitment to community programming. His work seeks to break down barriers and bring art directly to people, crafting diverse theatrical performances that are accessible, engaging, and versatile. His innovative approach thrives on the intersection of art forms, challenging traditional boundaries and offering something for everyone.

One of the most persistent misconceptions about Appalachia is that it is a homogenous, "backward" region, lacking in diversity and intellectual rigor. Tucker is passionate about dispelling this myth. He is quick to point out that Appalachia is home to a diverse array of people, including botanists, artists, and scientists, many of whom challenge the stereotypes that the media has propagated for decades. The southern accent, often associated with anti-intellectualism, has long been a target of mockery in popular culture, from *The Beverly Hillbillies* to *Deliverance* and beyond. But as Tucker recalls a sentiment he has heard before, some of the most radical movements have come from the most repressed places.

For the past four years, Tucker has worked at Appalshop as the publicity manager, helping to amplify the organization's diverse programming to a broader audience. His role is pivotal in promoting Appalachian stories and challenging misconceptions about the region. Appalshop's programming, which is often free to the public, is made possible through grant funding, sponsorships, and crowdfunding efforts. A major aspect of Tucker's work is ensuring that the arts are accessible to everyone, especially those in historically underrepresented and underserved communities. Appalshop, through its various initiatives, works diligently to ensure that all programming is free, opening space for people who might not otherwise have access to the arts. One of Tucker's most important goals is to make people feel that the spaces created for artistic expression are *their* spaces—spaces where they have a voice in the process. The key, as Tucker has learned over the years, is giving communities the agency to lead the way.

This approach is evident in the way performances are organized. Roadside Theater often places its shows in community centers, town halls, or other public spaces that are not traditionally seen as venues for high art. These are spaces where people feel comfortable, where they already gather to discuss their lives, and where they are more likely to engage with the performance. For Tucker, the physical location of the performance is just as important as the art itself. If the audience feels that the space is accessible to them—whether by location, cost, or atmosphere—they are more inclined to participate, to talk back, and to connect with the artists.

The stories of Appalachia are multifaceted, and it is vital that the full richness of the region's culture, history, and people is represented. In this way, Tucker and Appalshop continue to work towards one simple but powerful goal: to make the arts accessible to everyone, regardless of where they come from or what others may think of them.

Regardless of the artistic medium, the goal remains the same – to provide a platform for voices that have long been marginalized, and to create spaces where people can connect, share, and engage in the collective process of artistic expression.

The work continues, and with it, the promise of a more inclusive, dynamic, and vibrant future for Appalachian arts.



Tucker Leighty-Phillips Publicity Manager Appalshop

Tucker Leighty-Phillips (he/him) grew up in Laurel County, Kentucky, where he booked punk rock shows before becoming a road crew member for a number of national touring bands. He returns to Kentucky from Tempe, Arizona, where

he recently completed an M.F.A in Creative Writing, teaching fiction courses at the undergraduate level as well as in larger community spaces. He hopes his passion for writing and narrative will engage and find a place among a larger network of enthusiastic storytellers.



Jon Montgomery is a Member at Large on the Board of Directors for AACT, and is the Executive Director of HITS Theatre in Houston, Texas. He has previously served as Executive Artistic Director for both The Depot Theater and Basin Theatre Works.

Friends We'll Miss: Jon Kerkhoff

Kristi Quinn



AACT recently lost a beloved leader and tireless advocate: Jon Kerkoff, whose remarkable contributions and unwavering dedication will be deeply missed and never forgotten.

The first time I met Jon was at AACTFest many years ago. I was with a local contingent who was experiencing a regional festival for the first time. Jon was interested in learning about us, and was excited

OLIVER TWIST the musical Bring the past to life with this musical adaptation of the classic Charles Dickens tale.

TwistedPlays.com

to have our small community theatre participate in and learn about the festival process.

After a brief time, Jon suggested that we host a festival at our own theatre, believing that we would be a perfect fit. With his help and guidance, we not only hosted a state festival, but the regional festival as well, and later many other AACT festivals.

We were younger and greener then, and Jon was crucial in helping us make these festivals happen. His technical expertise assisted the theatre's novice crew with the ins and outs of festival production. He encouraged me to consider joining the Festival Commission, and later to become Vice-President of Festivals. I loved taking on those roles.

As a founding member of AACT, Jon played an instrumental role in its growth and mission. His dedicated service spanned nearly two decades, during which he held multiple leadership positions, including Vice President of Festivals (1991–1995, 2005–2009), Executive Vice-President (1995–1997), President (1997–1999), and Past President (1999–2001), as well as Endowment Chair. In 1994, he was named an AACT Fellow, in recognition of his outstanding contributions to community theatre, and later served as Chair of the AACT Fellows.

Beyond his executive roles, Jon was a founding member of the AACT Legacy Society, an endowment established to ensure the long-term vitality of AACT's mission and festival programs.

Jon's visionary leadership and enduring commitment helped shape the organization's success and sustainability for future generations. We are grateful for his service and devotion to community theatre throughout the country, and for his commitment and leadership of AACT.



One of the award-winning short plays your audience will love!

Short Plays by the Dozen

Among the most produced works by senior theatre groups in the country, these plays by Arthur Keyser are now available from Theatre Odyssey.



\$75.00

www.theatreodyssey.org



Years of Service Awards for 2025

AACT is truly grateful for the contributions and commitment of our Board, Volunteers, Committee Members, and Staff. We appreciate the energy, enthusiasm, and dedication they bring to their roles and work in supporting AACT and community theatre in America.

The following volunteers have served AACT in many ways, including as Board Members, on AACT Committees, and as State Contacts.

5 Years of Service

Steven Butler	Sarasota, FL
Susan Goes	Cottage Grove, OR
David Kilpatrick	Des Moines, IA
Scot MacDonald	Valparaiso, IN
Dennis Yslas	Fort Worth, TX

10 Years of Service

Marianne Adams	Helena, MT
Winston Daniels	Euless, TX
Ted Miller	Richland, WA
Larry Pint	New Prague, MN
Katrina Ploof	Ocala, FL

15 Years of Service

Michael Cochran	Paducah, KY
Allen Ebert	Monona, WI
John Eppert III	Independence, MO
Susan Harrington	Roslindale, MA
Beverley Lord	Foxborough, MA

20 Years of Service

Scott Bloom	Churchton, MD
Nancy Eppert	Independence, MO
Donna Fisher	Casper, WY
Carolyn McCloskey	McMinnville, OR
Jim Walker	Bath, SD

25 Years of Service

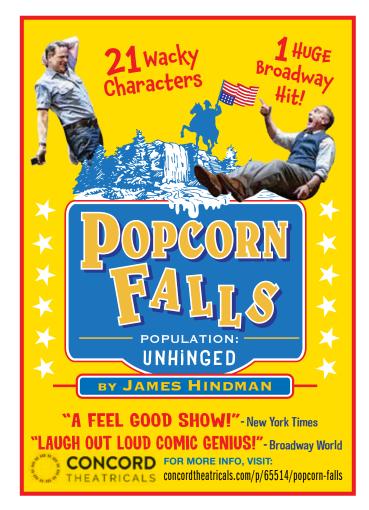
Linda Lee	Fort Worth, TX
Penelope Notter	Grand Rapids, MI
Jack Phillips	Downers Grove, IL

30 Years of Service

Kay Armstrong	Dallas, TX
Mary Doveton	Lawrence, KS
Kathleen Maldonado	Alto, NM

35 Years of Service

Stephen Krempasky	Farragut, TN
Jill Patchin	Grand Rapids, MI
Frank Peot	Sun Prairie, WI
Gary Walker	Grand Rapids, MI
Ron Ziegler	North Port, FL



Safeguarding Youth in Your Theatre

Presented by Adam Bell, Risk Control Specialist – Nonprofit + Human Services at Church Mutual Insurance Company, S.I. (a stock insurer)*

Community theatres play a vital role in nurturing young talent and fostering a love for the arts. However, with this comes the responsibility to ensure the safety and well-being of all participants, especially the youth. Sexual misconduct is a serious risk that can have devastating consequences for victims and organizations alike. By implementing proactive measures, community theatres can help create a safe environment where young performers can thrive.

Understanding the risk

Sexual misconduct in youth programs can take many forms, including inappropriate behavior, harassment, and abuse. While youth programs generally think about protecting children from adults, it is important to also consider the rising risk of peer-to-peer sexual misconduct. The unique environment of community theatres, where close interactions and trust are essential, can unfortunately also create opportunities for misconduct if proper safeguards are not in place. It's crucial for organizations to recognize these risks and take steps to mitigate them.

Best practices for prevention

Preventing sexual misconduct in community theatre youth programs requires a multifaceted approach. By implementing comprehensive screening processes, establishing clear policies, providing regular training, ensuring vigilant supervision, and fostering a safe environment, organizations can significantly reduce the risk of abuse. Below are some best practices that community theatres can adopt to proactively protect their youth participants:

1. Comprehensive screening and selection processes

- **Background checks**: Conduct thorough and periodic background checks on all employees and volunteers, including criminal history and reference checks, to prevent individuals with a history of misconduct from accessing youth.¹
- Application and interview processes: Implement detailed application and interview processes, with behavior-based questions ("Tell me about a time when...") rather than hypothetical questions ("What would you do if..."), to assess candidates' suitability for working with children².

2. Clear policies and procedures

- Code of conduct: Develop and enforce a robust code of conduct outlining acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. Communicate it clearly to all staff, volunteers, and participants, and have it reviewed and signed annually by all members³.
- **Reporting procedures:** Establish clear reporting procedures for suspicions or allegations of misconduct. Ensure everyone knows how to report concerns and handle reports promptly. Offer anonymous reporting options to encourage individuals to come forward without fear of retaliation.⁴ Multiple reporting avenues should be created to remove any barriers a potential reporter may face. For example, you could consider using reporting avenues such as a tip line, drop box, QR codes, or an email inbox with multiple views and multiple designated recipients.

3. Training and education

Staff and volunteer training: Provide regular, interactive training for staff and volunteers on recognizing and preventing sexual misconduct. This should be provided to both new and veteran staff. Include information on appropriate boundaries, signs of abuse, and how to respond to disclosures, using role-playing scenarios to reinforce learning.⁵

• Youth education: Educate youth participants about their rights and inappropriate behavior. Encourage them to speak up if they feel uncomfortable or unsafe. Use workshops and discussions to empower youth to recognize and report misconduct.⁶

4. Monitoring and supervision

- Supervision policies: Ensure adequate supervision of all activities, especially one-on-one interactions between adults and youth. Implement policies requiring at least two adults to be present during activities to reduce the risk of misconduct and provide witnesses in case of allegations.⁷ Adult interactions with children should be observable and interruptible.
- Use of technology: Use technology such as security cameras to monitor common areas and ensure private spaces are not misused. Regular audits of camera footage can help identify and address concerning behavior.⁸

5. Creating a safe environment

- Culture of openness: Foster a culture of openness and respect where youth feel safe to express concerns. Encourage open communication and prioritize their safety. Regular check-ins with youth participants can help identify issues early.
- **Policy reviews:** Regularly review and update policies and procedures to reflect best practices and legal requirements. Involve staff, volunteers, and youth to ensure policies are practical and effective.

6. Engaging external experts

- Partner with specialized consultants and your insurer: Work with organizations that offer comprehensive sexual abuse prevention programs, including training and ongoing support. Additionally, leverage risk management services from your insurance carrier, such as resources and value-added services on preventing sexual misconduct.
- **Consult with local attorneys:** Work with attorneys who specialize in sexual misconduct and molestation cases to gain critical legal insights and guidance. These professionals can help draft and review policies, ensure compliance with laws, and advise on handling allegations and investigations.

Legal and regulatory considerations

Organizations must also be aware of and comply with relevant legal and regulatory guidelines. This includes adhering to mandatory reporting laws, which require certain individuals to report suspected abuse to authorities. Familiarize yourself with local, state, and federal regulations to ensure compliance and protect your organization from legal repercussions.

- Mandatory reporting laws: These laws vary by state but generally require professionals working with children to report suspicions of abuse. Failure to report can result in legal consequences for both the individual and the organization.
- **Title IX regulations**: Title IX regulations require educational institutions to promptly and effectively address any form of sexual harassment or misconduct. This includes supporting victims and taking steps to prevent further incidents.
- Clery Act: The Clery Act requires educational institutions to maintain and disclose campus crime statistics and security information. Compliance involves timely reporting of crimes and ensuring transparency in handling sexual misconduct cases.

By taking proactive steps to prevent sexual misconduct, community theatres can create a safe and supportive environment for young performers. Comprehensive screening processes, clear policies, regular training, and vigilant supervision are essential components of an effective prevention strategy. Remember, the safety and well-being of your youth participants should always be a top priority.

¹Lathrop GPM | https://www.lathropgpm.com/insights/ sexual-misconduct-liability-insurance-coverage-and-considerations-for-public-entities/

²Beazley Group | https://www.beazley.com/en-us/products/executive-risk-usa/sexual-molestation-liability-safeguard

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention | https://www.cdc. gov/child-abuse-neglect/communication-resources/PreventingChild-SexualAbuse-a.pdf

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention | https://www.cdc. gov/child-abuse-neglect/programs/index.html

⁵ Safe Kids Thrive | https://safekidsthrive.org/prevention-topics/ training/training-best-practices/

⁶U.S. Department of Education | https://www.ed.gov/media/ document/recommendations-educational-institutions-preventing-and-responding-sexual-and-dating-violence-108413.pdf

⁷ U.S. Department of Justice | https://www.justice.gov/ovw/ file/900716/dl ⁸ SchoolSafety.gov | https://www.schoolsafety.gov/resource/factsheet-study-state-policies-prohibit-aiding-and-abetting-sexual-misconduct-schools

This information is intended solely to provide general guidance on topics that may be of interest to you. While we have made reasonable efforts to present accurate and reliable information, Church Mutual Insurance Company, S.I. disclaims all liability for any errors or omissions, or for any actions you take or fail to take based on this article. The information provided may not apply to your particular facts or circumstances; therefore, you should seek professional advice prior to relying on any information that may be found in this article.

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Adam Bell is a Risk Control Specialist in the Nonprofit + Human Services Center of Excellence at Church Mutual Insurance Company, S.I. (a stock insurer)*. He has nearly 25 years of nonprofit leadership experience, with knowledge in risk management, operations, program development, facility management, board relations, fundraising, customer service and more.

Milestone Anniversaries

Diamond (celebrating 75 years)

Angelo Civic Theatre (San Angelo, Texas)

The Barre Players (Barre, Massachusetts)

The Footlight Players (Michigan City, Indiana)

Kentwood Players (Los Angeles, California)

Little Theatre of Mechanicsburg (Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania)

Ocala Civic Theatre (Ocala, Florida)

Playcrafters of Skippack (Skippack, Pennsylvania)

Soldiers' Theatre (U.S. Army, Vicenza Italy)

Stockton Civic Theatre (Stockton, California)

Venice Theatre (Venice, Florida)

Gold (celebrating 50 years)

Boone Community Theatre (Boone, Iowa)

Community Players (Beatrice, Nebraska)

Fine Arts, County of Effingham (Effingham, Illinois)

Grandstreet Theatre (Helena, Montana)

The Pumphouse Players (Cartersville, Georgia)

Theatre On The Ridge (Paradise, California)

Wisconsin Rapids Community Theatre (Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin)

Silver (celebrating 25 years)

Broadway Theatre (Mount Pleasant, Michigan)

Center Stage Jackson (Jackson, Michigan)

Children's Musical Theatre of Bartlesville (Bartlesville, Oklahoma)

Iowa River Players (Rowan, Iowa)

M.T. Pockets Theatre Company (Morgantown, West Virginia)

Rover Dramawerks (Plano, Texas)

Woodbridge Community Youth Players (Brick, New Jersey)

AACT's congratulations to you all for your dedication and hard work in reaching these milestones in your theatre's history.

AACT honors theatres in this way on a regular basis. If you'd like yours to be included in future Milestone listings, be sure to add your founding date to your theatre's AACTmember profile.

Century Club on page 42 >

AACT Century Club Members



Footlight Club Jamaica Plains, Massachusetts 148 years in 2025



Memorial Opera House Valparaiso, Indiana 132 years in 2025



Belmont Dramatic Club, Inc. Belmont, Massachusetts 122 years in 2025



Barnstomers Theater Ridley Park, Pennsylvania 117 years in 2025

Players Club of Swarthmore

Swarthmore, Pennsylvania



114 years in 2025 Players of Utica

Carmel, Indiana 110 years in 2025

Galesburg, Illinois

110 years in 2025

New Hartford, New York 112 years in 2025

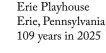
Booth Tarkington Civic Theatre

Prairie Players Civic Theatre

Players of Utica



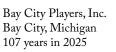






Waterloo Community Playhouse/ Black Hawk Children's Theatre Waterloo, Iowa 109 years in 2025





Tacoma Little Theatre

Tacoma, Washington

107 years in 2025





Concord Players Concord, Massachusetts 106 years in 2025



Cranford Dramatic Club Cranford, New Jersey 106 years in 2025



Des Moines Community Playhouse Des Moines, Iowa 106 years in 2025



Peoria Players Theatre Peoria, Illinois 106 years in 2025



Theatre Jacksonville Jacksonville, Florida 106 years in 2025



Theatre Memphis Memphis, Tennessee 105 years in 20245



Kanawha Players Charleston, West Virginia 103 years in 2025



Little Theatre of Wilkes-Barre Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania 103 years in 2025



Shreveport Little Theatre Shreveport, Louisiana 103 years in 2025



Theatre Tulsa Tulsa, Oklahoma 103 years in 2025



Whittier Community Theatre Whittier, California 103 years in 2025



Chattanooga Theatre Centre Chattanooga, Tennessee 102 years in 2025



Community Players Bloomington, Illinois 102 years in 2025



Florence Little Theatre Florence, South Carolina 102 years in 2025



Quincy Community Theatre Quincy, Illinois 102 years in 2025



Omaha Community Playhouse Omaha, Nebraska 101 years in 2025



Walpole Footlighters Walpole, Massachusetts 101 years in 2025



Arlington Friends of the Drama Arlington, Massachusetts 100 years in 2025



Theatre Cedar Rapids Cedar Rapids, Iowa 100 years in 2025





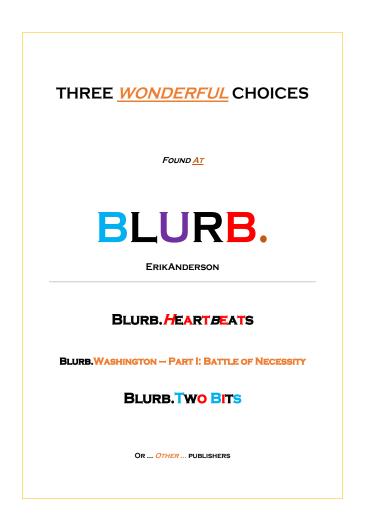
Advocacy Matters

Lou Ursone

When President Trump signed an Executive Order dismantling the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities (PCAH) on Inauguration Day, a shock wave resonated through every cultural institution in the country. Since that cold January day, multiple Executive Orders aimed at arts organizations have followed. In February, the president purged the board of the Kennedy Center of all its Biden-era members, replacing them with party loyalists. He was then elected board chair. As of early April, 80% of the National Endowment for the Humanities staff had been placed on administrative leave.

Though no complete shutdowns of the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities have yet been implemented, it appears that the writing is on the wall, and we all need to redouble our efforts as arts advocates. I urge you to write to your U.S. Senators and Representatives. Be sure that your board and staff do so, too. And encourage your patrons to write. We need to make our voices heard!

The Americans for the Arts website has the most comprehensive and up-to-date information regarding all legislative action at the federal level. Letter-writing templates, best practices, and other advocacy information can be found at **americansforthearts.org**.



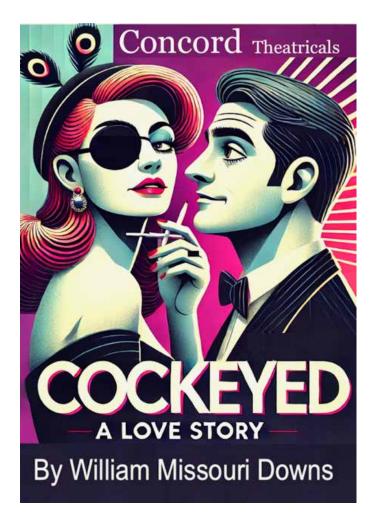
In addition, AACT is looking for information to share regarding unique ways you and your community of theatres are raising awareness (and funds), as we look to a future that may be devoid of federal funding.

As an example, on World Theatre Day in March, 18 community and professional theatres in our county worked together to utilize a \$10,000 seed grant that I was able to secure from Bank of America. Each participating theatre received an equal share of the grant, as well as a free, full-page ad from Hearst CT Media. The theatres agreed to share the approved press release and artwork with media outlets, social media channels, and internal publications. While none of the organizations raised millions, the campaign clearly showed the public that we support each other, and we definitely succeeded at increasing awareness.

Please send me your success stories, questions, or ideas to Lou@curtaincallinc.com.



Lou Ursone is the Executive Director of Curtain Call, Inc. in Stamford, Connecticut, a member of the AACT Board of Directors, and serves on the Spotlight Editorial Team.



AACT Corporate Partners

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.



Support Theatre in America

Become an AACT Corporate Partner! For information, visit **aact.org/partner**.

Resource Center: Member Resource Library Expands

Stephen Peithman

AACT's newly designed website provides many opportunities for sharing resources with our members, and the Resource Library (**aact.org/library**) is a good example—adding more than 50 articles and forms since the beginning of the year.

A new feature is a list of the most recent additions to the Library. You can also browse articles and forms by category, or search by title or key word. As always, access is limited to AACT members only.

Below are just some of the resources added in recent months, listed by category.

Acting & Directing:

- 1. Script Analysis Worksheet for Production Elements (MS Excel)
- 2. Commissioning New Works
- 3. Devised (Collaborative) Theatre Productions
- 4. Guide to Producing Original Plays
- 5. A Rehearsal and Preparation Guide for Actors
- 6. Stage Presence and Audience Connection
- 7. Character Development
- 8. Casting Tips from Fellow Directors

Administration & Management

- 1. A Theatre Manager's Guide to the ADA
- 2. Finding an ASL interpreter
- 3. Fiscal Policies & Procedures: A Template and Guide
- 4. Branding Your Core Purpose, Mission & More
- 5. Strategic Planning in Nonprofits
- 6. Defying Gravity Conversations with Leaders from Nonprofit Theater
- 7. Developing an Employee Handbook (includes samples)
- 8. Your Performance Space: Rent, Lease or Buy

Boards & Governance

- 1. Principles for Good Governance and Ethical Practice: A Guide
- 2. Creating Strong Board/Staff Partnerships
- 3. Board Passages: Three Stages in a Nonprofit Board's Lifecycle
- 4. Board Building: The Nominating Committee's Role

Fundraising & Grants

- 1. Aligning Donor Motivations & Donor Messaging
- 2. Grant Writing for Theatres
- 3. Fundraising From Generosity to Loyalty
- 4. How to Collect Compelling Stories in Fundraising
- 5. Volunteers as Prospects for Gifts or Bequests

6. The Secret of Effective Fundraising (is No Secret)

Marketing

- 1. Promote Your Theatre—and Your Next Show
- 2. Digital Marketing Strategies
- 3. Marketing Budget for Digital Campaigns
- 4. Marketing to Families

Technical Topics

- 1. Introduction to Theatre Sound Design
- 2. LED Stage Lighting: A Guide
- 3. Character/Scene Breakdown template (MS Excel)
- 4. Production Props List template (MS Word & MS Excel)
- 5. Costume Plot template (MS Excel)
- 6. Shift Plot template (MS Word & Excel)
- 7. Enriching Historical Costumes (3-article series)
- 8. Planning Your Lighting Design
- 9. Stage Management Handbook

Volunteers

- 1. Strategies for Recruiting Volunteers
- 2. Secrets of Motivation: How to Get and Keep Volunteers
- 3. Effective Management of Volunteer Programs

These are just a few of the recently added or updated articles and forms in the AACT Resource Library. Browse or search all items at (**aact.org/library**).



Calendar of Events

Dates	Event	St	City	Phone	Web Site
June 7	Adjudication Seminar (Final Virtual Session)		Virtual	817-732-3177 x2	aact.org/seminar
June 22-24	AACT YouthFest 2025	IA	Des Moines	817-732-3177 x2	aact.org/youthfest
June 22-24	Community Theatre Management Conference (CTMC)	IA	Des Moines	817-732-3177 x2	aact.org/ctmc25
June 23	AACT YouthFest Monologue Competition	IA	Des Moines	817-732-3177	aact.org/youthfest-monologue
June 25	Adjudication Seminar (In-Person Sessions)	IA	Des Moines	817-732-3177 x2	aact.org/adjudication25
June 25-29	AACT Silent Auction	IA	Des Moines	817-732-3177	aact.org/silent-auction
June 25-28	AACTFest Monologue Competition	IA	Des Moines	817-732-3177	aact.org/aactfest-2025- monologue-competition
June 25-28	AACT Design Competition	IA	Des Moines	817-732-3177	aact.org/design25
June 25-28	AACTFest 2025	IA	Des Moines	817-732-3177	aact.org/25

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William Missouri Downs Cockeyed
Dramatic Publishing Kite Runner
Ellis Jay Theatricals A Christmas Carol - Spirits of Christmas 202525
Sean Grennan Now and Then 10
Heuer Publishing Tears of the Soul
Historical Emporium 34
Hooray for Harry Wood
International Authors Society
Luigi Jannuzzi A Crazy Little Café Called Love
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Tobins Lake Studios	
Twisted Plays Oliver Twist	
Uncle Ty-Rone	
-	

FINALIST IN THE 2015 NEW PLAY FESTIVAL OF THE PLAYERS THEATRE

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Top Contedy: The Nearly Final Play of Sutton McAllister



Featured Show by a Female Playwright

Histity abounds in this drawing room style consoly that will issue you wondering who's who, what's what, and where is the nearly final almost postariumous play of the Not-Duite-Dead Sutton McAlleter.

"Family drama, comedy, and excitement all in one show!"



GOOD OLD FASHIONED FAMILY THEATER A Historic Musical by Judith Sapperstein & Gary Murway

Bring History to Life with the new musical, The Freedom Ring!

Step back in time to the American Revolution, where spies, romance, and intrigue unfold in the thrilling musical, The Freedom Ring! Written by Judith Sapperstein & Gary Murway, this captivating production blends historical drama, heartfelt romance, and lively humor, complete with a unique twist inspired by the saying, "if only these walls could talk."

Follow Philmore Fothergill, a reluctant spy torn between love and duty, as he risks everything to aid the Revolution. With the help of his clever friend Elias and a daring network of tavern women, Philmore's untold story of bravery and sacrifice is hidden away—until centuries later, when a modern-day descendant, Melvin Gusset, discovers he can hear the voices of the past... through the very furniture that witnessed it all.

- A gripping mix of history, music, and adventure
- · Engaging songs that bring the past to life
- Romance and humor woven into a revolutionary tale
- A powerful finale where history finally speaks—if you're willing to listen

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