



spotlight

September/October 2020 \$5.00

american association of community theatre

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June 14-19, 2021

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Chris Serface
AACT President

I won't hold back. Times are tough. Never have any of us been in a situation like the one that COVID-19 has brought. Something that is so much a part of each and every one of us has been taken away. For some, it will come back sooner than others, but for many, it will be a long and difficult road back to reopening.

Now, more than ever, is the time for us to be there for one another. To utilize our collective experiences to lift one another up, and come out of our long intermission stronger and more united.

I know that I wouldn't be making it through these times without the support and counsel of friends—better yet, family—that I have met through AACT. I've been able to listen as they have begun to open their theatres, and I've shared in their successes and stumbles. I've been able to watch as they have come up with new and innovative ways to create art in their communities. I've been able to share my ideas and borrow other's ideas to keep my theatre producing. I've been able to call/Zoom/Facetime them when I've hit a wall and don't know where to go.

AACT is here to help you find those people, too. If you haven't already been a part of our weekly webinars, schedule some time to do so. It's a great way to start building your network. Find some familiar faces, or introduce yourself to some new ones, and you will realize that you aren't alone. The great thing is that

we already have our love of theatre in common, and we get to build upon that.

We're looking to come together safely in Louisville for AACTFest 2021, and AACT's staff and board are working hard to make this happen. If you haven't seen how the selection process for the festival will take place this cycle, please check out the article in this issue of *Spotlight*. AACTFest will be different than we're used to, but the new process will make sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to showcase their productions.

We all know there's a certain feeling that comes over us all when we enter a theatre. That anticipation that we are about to see art live on stage. Knowing that we are about to share a collective experience that will engage our emotions. Remember and hold on to those feelings, because we'll all be together again after this intermission is over, and Act II is going to be amazing.

Stay healthy, stay safe.

Chris Serface

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You can be a part of this group of dedicated individuals focused on both the long-term sustainability of AACT's mission, and providing financial support for member theatres participating in national festivals

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On the Cover

AACT will host the national theatre festival, AACTFest 2021, in Louisville, Kentucky, next summer. Stay safe, stay strong, and we will meet for a spectacular festival in 2021.

Artwork by Amy Scheidegger (amyartisticrebuttal.com/) at Rock & Roar Creative (rockandroarcreative.com/)

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AACT welcomes *Spotlight* input and requests for advertising rates. Contact David Cockerell at david@aact.org to submit content. Contact Darlene DeLorenzo at darlene@aact.org for advertising rates and specs. David and Darlene are also available at the phone number above.



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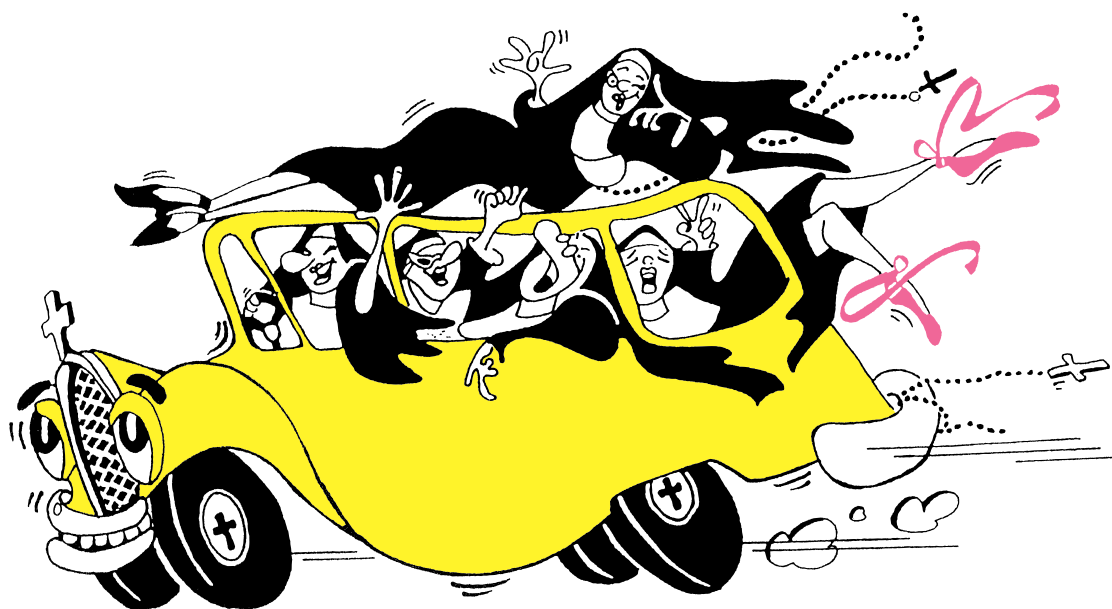
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IV-B Kristy Meanor
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V Jamie Ulmer
Beatrice, NE (2025)

VI Sally Barnes
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VII Donna Fisher
Casper, WY (2021)

VIII Dennis Gilmore
Indio, CA (2021)

IX Jon Douglas Rake
Tacoma, WA (2021)

X Dane Winters
Germany (US Army) (2021)

Upcoming Meetings**AACT Executive Committee Fall Meeting**

The AACT Executive Committee Meeting will be held virtually on Thursday, November 19, 2020, 4:30 – 6:30 pm (Eastern). This is a closed meeting.

Most AACT meetings are open. Contact the AACT office or visit aact.org/calendar for details.

For more information and reports from AACT meetings:
aact.org/board-committee-documents

Questions regarding meetings? – Contact Quiana Clark-Roland at quiana@aact.org or call 817-732-3177

AACT Staff

Quiana Clark-Roland, Executive Director

David Cockerell, Marketing/Communications Director

Kathy Pingel, NewPlayFest Dramaturge,
Education Coordinator

Ron Ziegler, Festivals Coordinator, Education Coordinator

Karen Matheny, Membership Coordinator

Winston Daniels, Operations and Events Assistant

Jill Patchin, Corporate Partners Manager

Darlene DeLorenzo, Vendor Services Coordinator

Stephen Peithman, Webmaster /
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Susan Austin, NewPlayFest Coordinator

Spotlight

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AACTFest 2021 – A Celebration of Theatre

AACTFest 2021
June 14-19, 2021
Louisville, Kentucky



The national festival is a celebration of theatre. Make connections, new and familiar friendships, and plan to rejoice in your life in theatre. Put AACTFest 2021 on your calendar, and come celebrate with us.

Theatre everywhere is facing—and meeting—the challenges presented by the coronavirus pandemic. And AACTFest is no exception. At its heart is the festival system itself—the state-to-regional-to-national process that for decades has selected the 12 productions to perform at nationals. This showcase for the best of community theatre in America continues with a one-time-only invitational system, culminating in the national festival, June 14-19, 2021 in Louisville, Kentucky.



SeanPavonePhoto

Downtown Louisville from the Ohio River

“It will be different,” explains Jim Walker, AACT Vice President for Festivals, “but not unfamiliar to AACT, which used the invitational model for the first AACTFest, years ago. In essence, we’re going back to our roots, this time as a way to reduce barriers to participation, while supporting the festival’s essential mission. With these changes in place for 2021, we will once again gather to attend workshops, network, see compelling theatre from across the nation, and enjoy the biggest theatre family reunion in the United States.”

AACTFest 2021 Invitational

AACT understands the uncertainty the pandemic has brought to theatres as they consider the possibility of applying to perform in the 2021 National Invitational AACTFest in Louisville. To that end, important changes in the national rules have been made to ease their risk and cost.

First, theatres need not decide on a specific production for performance until after the application deadline, November 1, 2020. This time around, AACT is asking for theatre organizations—rather than productions—to apply. Festival performances are restricted to 60 minutes, but if a theatre decides to enter a production that is already planned for performance in its season, the show need not be cut to be adjudicated. The caveat is that a script that indicates possible cuts must be submitted to the adjudicators when they travel to see the production. Of course, theatres may also mount a production specifically for the festival, rather than entering a show from their season.

The 2021 invitational process eliminates a great deal of expense for applicant theatres. Travel is not required, and the cost of adjudication will be absorbed by AACT. (The theatre’s only expenses would be for mounting a show in their home theatre.) The National Companies selected by the traveling adjudication will also receive a \$3,100 stipend to assist with travel to Louisville.

For more information, and application to perform at the national theatre festival, visit aact.org/invitational. The *AACTFest 2021 Handbook* is available at aact.org/handbook.

AACT Invitational Traveling Adjudicators

Several committees drawn from the AACT Board have helped shape the invitational festival—composing the application, offering questions for theatres chosen to be interviewed, and even creating a FAQ sheet. A thread woven through each committee has been, “How do we make this more accessible?” Board member Bob Frame advocated for a clear set of expectations for large and small theatres, while Kristofer Geddie urged the interview be a two-way conversation. AACT staff has also looked at how to improve the adjudication process.

“Adjudication” is a formal term, but in reality, all audience members adjudicate. After all, they see a show, access the strengths and weaknesses, and conclude with a judgment on whether they liked it, or not. Sometimes they skip over the assessment part:

“Good play.”

“Why did you like it? What made it a good play?”

“I don’t know; I just know when I see it.”

What makes AACT adjudicators different? Trained and/or sanctioned by AACT, they have been instructed to offer balanced observations by identifying both suc-

cesses and areas for improvement. However, it isn't enough to know something was successful—an adjudicator must also know why. It's also not enough to recognize a weakness—an adjudicator must be able to recommend approaches for the company to rectify it. Importantly, in a professional adjudication, the play is not measured by how much an adjudicator likes or dislikes it. Plays are only measured against one standard: Was it fully realized?

Here's how the AACT Adjudication Curriculum puts it:

A fully realized production demonstrates the company understands the intention of the playwright, has chosen a viable concept and has wholly executed that concept. A fully realized character is a consistent, complex person who has meaningful partnerships with other characters, and demonstrates an arc of change or discovery. It is not merely dependent on emotional bravery. Fully realized technical design intrinsically helps to tell the story seamlessly and illuminates the themes therein. The director of a fully realized production marries all production elements successfully.

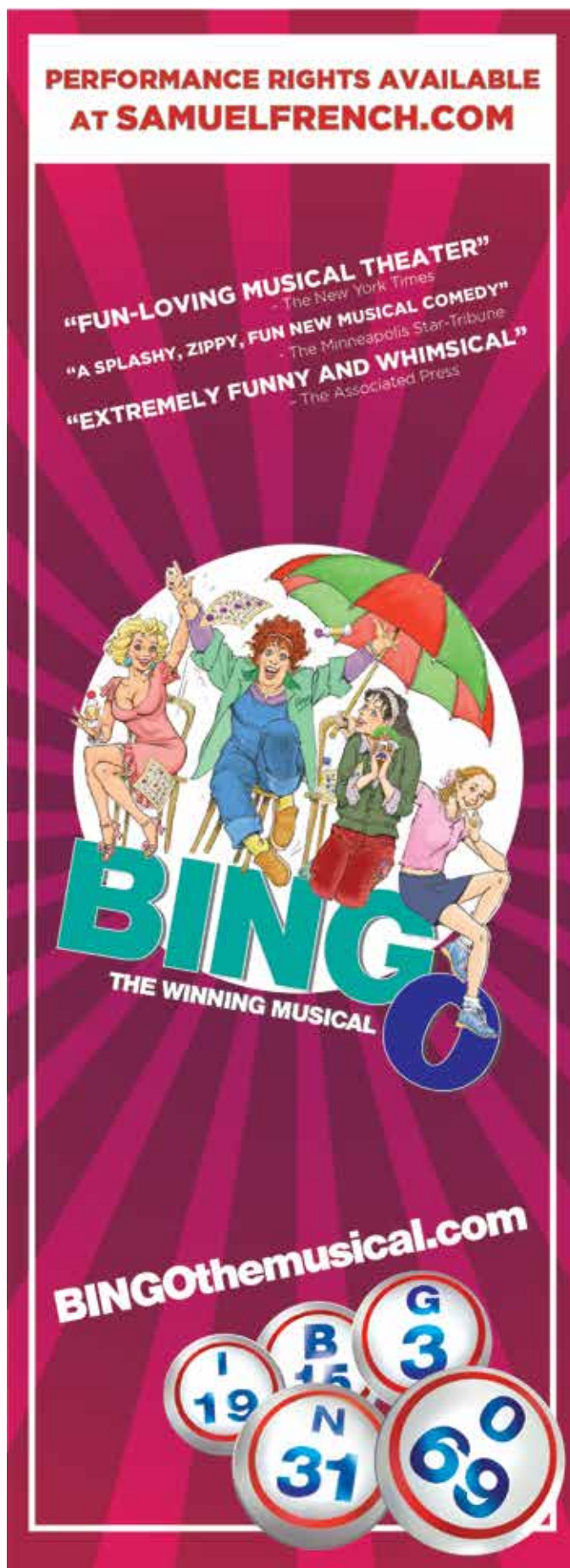


Paola Noguera

Jessica Washington in *The Lexington Players* production of *Who Will Sing for Lena* at the National Theatre Festival, AACTFest 2019, in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

As might be expected, since there are changes to the 2021 AACTFest process, adjudication will also be different in some ways. Ten traveling adjudicators will be chosen from across the nation with an eye on training, demonstrated ability, diversity, and experience. These adjudicators will be hired by AACT, and as-

continued on next page ►



signed to see five performances outside their home state. All will have a refresher course to ensure continuity in approach.

It is true that individual adjudicators notice and value a play's elements differently from their colleagues. However, all adjudicators will be expected to make their interaction a positive experience for the cast, director, designers, and crew—not by sugar-coating their commentary, but by respectfully disseminating constructive, useful information.

If the theatre wishes a public adjudication immediately following the performance, the adjudicators will address the entire company and remaining audience members for the standard 7-10-minute assessment. Whether or not the theatre opts for a public adjudication, there will be a 30-60-minute discussion with the director after the play or the following day. If the director wishes to include the entire company, it will be his or her prerogative to do so.

AACTFest 2021 National Festival Adjudication

The 2021 national festival in Louisville will feature three experienced and nationally known adjudicators, whose comments on productions are intended as a learning experience for all participating company and audience members. The national adjudicators are Allen Ebert, Executive Director at Children's Theater of Madison in Madison, Wisconsin; Faye M. Price, Co-Artistic Producing Director and Co-Center Director of Pillsbury House + Theatre in Minneapolis, Minnesota; Amy Wratchford, Managing Director of the American Shakespeare Center in Staunton, Virginia; and alternate adjudicator Rick St. Peter, award-winning stage director, producer, and educator.

For more information on the national adjudicators, visit aact.org/21.

AACT YouthFest 2021

Youth theatre companies from around the country will be selected to perform at AACTFest 2021. These youth groups will then be adjudicated in an open forum that fosters a learning and educational experience for all.

Applications are available, and the deadline has been extended to November 1, 2020. Travel and lodging grants will be available to the groups selected, who will also have workshops, activities, and social events just for them.

For information on applying, directors may visit aact.org/youthfest.



Paola Noguera

Premiere Arts Arts Ambassadors in Elkhart, Indiana presents *Once Upon a Mattress* at AACT YouthFest 2019 in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

continued on page 12 ►

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by Londos D'Arrigo

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Registration

Early registration opens **September 1, 2020** (aact.org/21), and AACT members will receive a 15% discount on registration fees. Should your plans change, refunds will be available until May 1, 2021.

Early Bird Rates (Sept 1, 2020 - March 1, 2021)

AACT Member	\$ 280.00
Non-Member	\$ 360.00
AACT Youth/Youth Company Discount (18 and Younger)	\$ -50.00

Add-on festival events:

Adjudication Training - Lvl 1 Course	\$ 35.00
Adjudication Training - Lvl 2 (Weeklong)	\$ 140.00
Youth Monologue Contest Entry Fee	\$ 20.00
AACT YouthFest company members	\$ 15.00
Adult Monologue Contest Entry Fee	\$ 20.00



Renee McVey

AACTFest workshops are always exciting and cover a wide variety of topics, from improvisation to administration to stage movement

Call for AACTFest 2021 Workshops

The AACT Workshop Committee is looking for workshop presenters to share their expertise at AACTFest 2021. Workshop Proposals must be received by November 15, 2020, via the online RFP (Request for Proposals) at aact.org/workshop-rfp.

Topics may include, but are not limited to:

- COVID-19 recovery, outreach, reinventing productions, audience safety, and communications
- Licensing
- Acting (various styles and techniques)
- Fight Choreography
- Musical Theatre
- Directing
- Starting a Special Needs Theatre Program
- Theatre for Youth
- Administration
- Technology (IT)

We would also love to see more proposals for workshops on:

- Technical theatre
- Improvisation
- Anything you feel would benefit attendees

Workshops are well received when those in attendance have a chance to learn by doing, so please keep that in mind as you put together your proposal. Most workshops will be in the traditional 75-minute format, but the committee is open to ideas for longer or shorter presentations. The committee is also interested in suggestions for new and exciting workshop topics that could be presented by someone you know to be knowledgeable, with good communication skills. Note: AACT does not provide honorariums for general session workshop presenters.

Email your workshop ideas to Nancy Eppert at workshops@aact.org.

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Volunteer Opportunities

In Louisville, the AACT team will work hard to ensure a rewarding festival experience for all who attend. However, we also rely heavily on the expertise, time, and commitment of volunteers to make that happen. Whether for a few hours or a full-week commitment, greeters, booth sitters, stuffers, and smiling faces are needed to help create the festival magic. If you are interested and can dedicate a few hours to volunteer, please email quiana@aacf.org.

Host Hotel

The Hyatt Regency Downtown is our host hotel, offering discounted rates for festival attendees. It's also the location for AACTFest special events, workshops, exhibits, and conferences. The four-star hotel is within walking distance of the Kentucky Center for the Performing Arts, and Actors Theatre of Louisville. (A trolley will be available to transport those staying at the hotel to the festival theatre.) The Hyatt is also just steps from the Fourth Street Live District, Louisville's premier dining and entertainment destination.

Hyatt Regency Louisville

320 W Jefferson St

Louisville, KY 40202

Website: aacf.org/hyatt

Hyatt's Safety & Health Commitment: hyatt.com/en-US/info/care-and-cleanliness-americas

Room Rates:

Double: \$159 + tax

Single: \$159 + tax

Reservations: aacf.org/reservations or 877-803-7534

AACTFest 2021 Discount Code: G-ACTT

Deadline to Reserve: May 31, 2021

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To ensure that AACT gets credit for your reservation:

- Use the code, or tell the hotel you are with AACT.
- Don't cancel at the last minute – no one else has time to book that room.
- Stay for your entire reservation time – don't check out early.



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

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VANCOUVER SUN

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JOIN OR RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP!

Don't Miss Out on the Benefits of AACT Membership for 2020-2021

The American Association of Community Theatre has been committed for more than 30 years to providing you with the best, most timely resources to help you succeed. Due to the recent global COVID-19 crisis, we are working on new ways to help theatres and provide resources. (Visit our website at aact.org/covid.)

In response to the global crisis, and considering the impact it is having on theatres, AACT is making monthly memberships available. AACT is pleased to offer this cost-conscious option, which allows members of AACT to sign up for a monthly payment plan.

How do I sign-up for the monthly payment plan?

The monthly payment option may be selected on the online application form when joining AACT, or during the regular renewal period for existing members. Please note that this option is available only for payments with a valid credit card.

Organizations

Organizational Budget	Monthly	Annual
Under \$10 K	\$9	\$85
\$10K - \$24K	\$11	\$120
\$25K - \$99K	\$15	\$185
\$100K - \$249K	\$27	\$300
\$250K - \$499K	\$33	\$400
\$500K - 999K	\$49	\$570
OVER - \$1 Million	\$81	\$955

Individuals

	Monthly	Annual
Individual	\$9	\$80
Senior	\$6	\$65

How to Join or Renew

To join or renew your membership, go to aact.org/membership-fees.

If you or your theatre are having financial difficulties, reach out to Karen at karen@aact.org to discuss payment plan options.

Note: If your organization has previously not paid electronically, we ask that you start doing so online at aact.org. This will minimize exposure of our team by avoiding physical presence at the post office box and bank locations. If you require assistance, please let us know. AACT will be moving all membership join/renew processes online by 2021-2022. Paper invoicing will be available by request. ♦

Learn more about membership benefits: aact.org/benefits



ASCAP Offers 30% AACT Member Discount

ASCAP, the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers, offers AACT members a discount on royalties for copyrighted music.

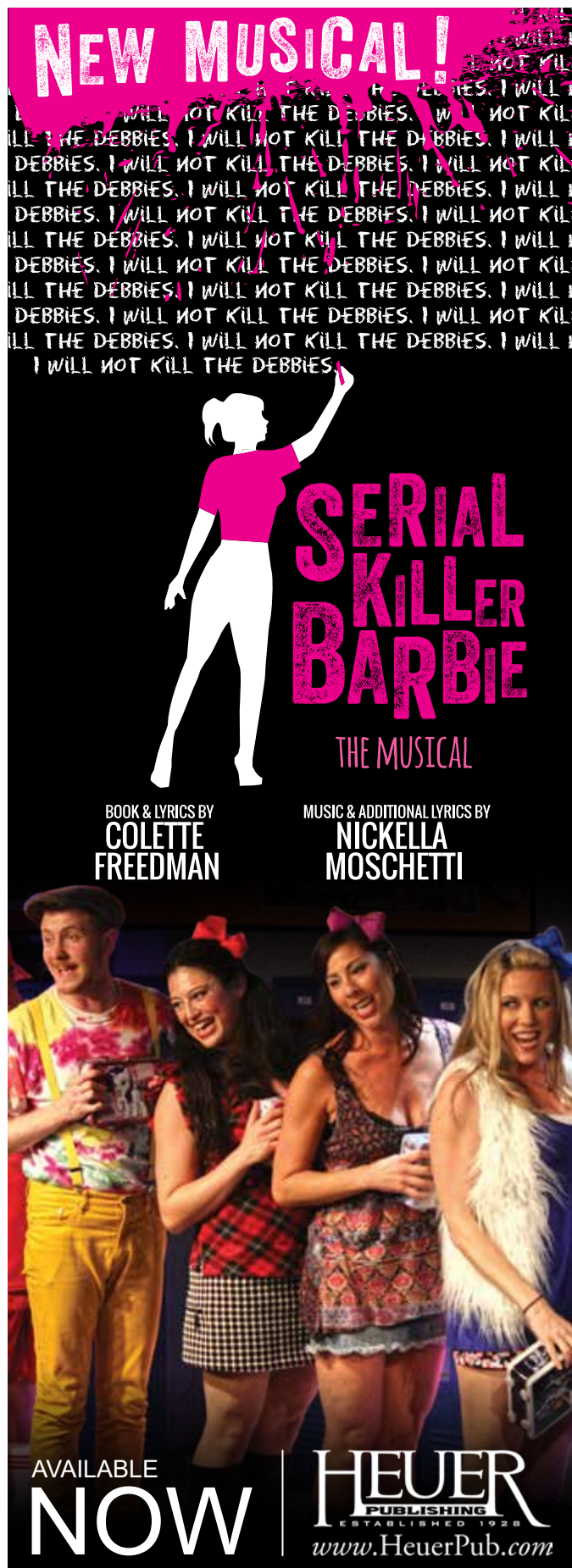
ASCAP's Community Theatre License year is September 1 – August 31. Theatres that sign up through the AACT office by September 1 will receive a 30% discount on the ASCAP license fee. An AACT membership is required to receive the discounted rate. Both AACT membership and ASCAP fees must be received in the AACT office by September 10, along with a signed ASCAP license for the discounted rate without a late penalty fee. (If AACT already has an ASCAP license on file for you, there is no need to send a new one.)



The Community Theatre License covers the theatre for the AACT membership year at all its venues. The license includes copyrighted pre-show, intermission, and post-show music played by means other than live performers. It is important to stress, the Community Theatre License does NOT cover recorded music during a play or music performed live, such as in a musical revue or concert. As artists, or people involved in the arts, we understand and respect the need for artists to be compensated for their craft. It is important to remember the only payment composers receive for a creative work is usually through royalties. The generous discount provided to AACT members by ASCAP is just one of the many benefits of an AACT membership. More information may be found at aact.org/ascap. ♦

ASCAP 2020 – 2021 RATE SCHEDULE FOR COMMUNITY THEATRES

Operating Budget	ASCAP Fee	With AACT Discount
\$0 - \$24,999	\$189.40	\$132.58
\$25,000 - \$499,999	\$247.50	\$173.25
\$500,000 and over	\$360.30	\$252.21





Responding to a Global Pandemic: Theatre Tulsa Takes the Reins

Sara Phoenix

Opening night of Theatre Tulsa's production of *A Little Night Music* was magical.

A strong, polished performance. Accolades and praise from patrons. Hugs and congratulations as audience members met with actors at the stage door after the show. It had that buzzing energy that we all know and thrive on. People started posting on social media that Theatre Tulsa had another hit, that everyone must see this beautiful production, filled with the top actors and vocalists in town.

At least you can take some comfort in the fact that you are not alone. Theatre Tulsa's journey this past spring and summer has been much the same as yours. What follows is some insight into how our company responded to the pandemic, to provide some ideas and motivation to help you move forward, even when the show can't go on.

After the closing of *A Little Night Music*, we faced a long and slow process of time passing, dates slipping by, and missing major milestones. We were about to open *Matilda* in April, then *Frozen Jr.* in May, then go into the summer rehearsing our next season's opening musical, *Singin' in the Rain*. All of it trickled by as we scrambled to respond to a life-threatening situation that changed nearly every week.

As Artistic Director, I make decisions based on data, but also on my gut feeling. It's a talent we ADs have for knowing what people will or won't come see, or what themes will resonate with our supporters.

In the midst of this pandemic, that same skill was essential in sensing how likely people would be to return to an enclosed space and sit near others. We did surveys. We listened to webinars and podcasts. We read every article on the topic. But I didn't need a lot of data to tell me what I already felt—we were going to be down and out for a long while.

Take Charge

Here's the thing about Theatre Tulsa—we've been through a lot and we've never stopped producing theatre. We proudly say that Theatre Tulsa has survived a Great Depression, multiple wars and many lean periods. Over its 98-year history, this company has often been at the top, and sometimes close to shutting down.

The key has been to pivot in the right direction. Early Theatre Tulsa performances took place in a tent on the edge of the city, until we got a venue of our own. During World War II, Theatre Tulsa performed in veterans hospitals. We've never faced a global pandemic of this size before, so what was going to be the right pivot now?



Tina Fowler

A Little Night Music at Theatre Tulsa, March 2020

That was forever ago, on March 13 of this year.

The next morning the City of Tulsa shut down all municipal buildings and banned large gatherings, including our venue, the Tulsa Performing Arts Center.

Our successful run of *A Little Night Music* opened and closed the same night.

Trust Your Gut

You may have similar stories—shows closing early or getting cancelled, education programs on hold, fundraisers postponed indefinitely, and many other projects left in limbo.

Make Big Choices

Our first step was to plan a dramatic shift of our schedule. Rather than try to force ourselves into opening on time, or continually delaying our productions bit by bit, we postponed our entire upcoming season for one year. (Theatre Tulsa was the first in our city and region to do so.)

Everything was up for discussion.

That gave us the flexibility to respond to the state of our community, as the pandemic continued to restrict our ability to create, congregate, and collaborate. We still had a few productions from the past season uncompleted. Perhaps we could get those up within those 15 months—or not, we didn't know—but now we could respond as it felt right, experiment with safer ways of welcoming people back to the theatre, or create entirely new ways of presenting theatre. Everything was up for discussion.

We also had to quickly adapt our plans for our summer education program. We typically have more than 100 students, ages 7-18, in daily classes and rehearsals during June and July for their big shows at the end of the session. Even though the city and state was reopening at that time, it didn't feel right to have children and families in such close proximity.

Within a couple of weeks, our staff had developed a plan to launch online summer sessions throughout those months, including setting up virtual rooms, building a makeshift video studio



Josh Thomas

Sara Phoenix announces the Theatre Tulsa postponement of the upcoming season to her community from the stage of the Tulsa Performing Arts Center

in our offices, and recruiting qualified instructors for a wide range of topics.

By the end of the summer, we had essentially broken even on the project. However, we gained valuable insights into how to operate an educational program online, as well as how to program it toward additional audiences. For example,

continued on next page ►



Hilarious COMEDY PLAYS

Mad Sisters

6 Female | Two Acts

Daphne adores her sister Anne. To Daphne, Anne is beautiful, successful and smart - all the things Daphne longs to be. Anne on the other hand wants nothing to do with her sister and is intent on working her way into a small clique of indulgent and pretentious wealthy women. When Daphne's wacky friends convince her she can be like Anne if she tries, Daphne sets off on a madcap adventure to do the impossible and win her sister's acceptance.

Mad Sisters is an uplifting and joyful comic romp that reminds us just how wonderful and truly mad our sisters can be.

Murder on the Menu

5 Female, 3 Male | Two Acts

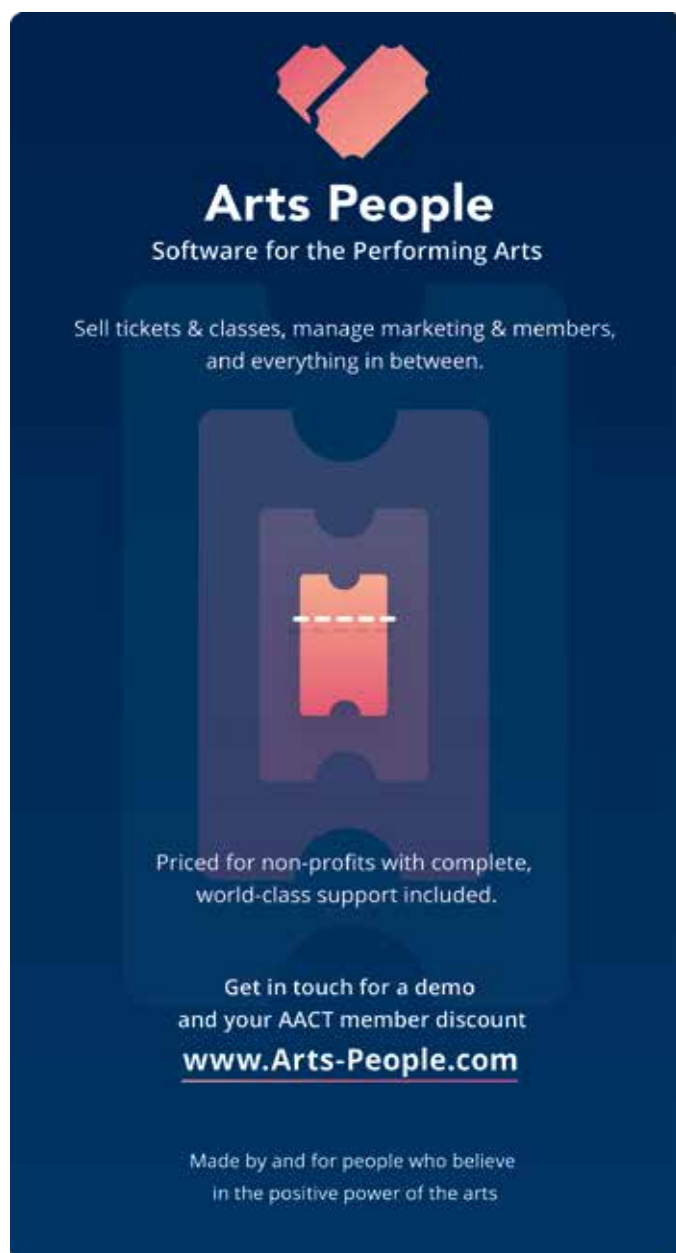
Sophia has been conned into buying a derelict theatre. Now with crushing bank loan payments to make and no money, the jobless Sophia decides to defy the odds and dig her way out of her financial mess by reopening the theatre as a cafe. Her already dire situation worsens, when she soon discovers that the theatre is inhabited by the pompous ghosts of dead Shakespearean characters who are hell bent on keeping their home just as it is. By chance, Sophia discovers that the only way to get rid of the ghosts is to murder them as they were killed in their original plays. At Sophia's cafe, Murder is now on the menu.

Also available... The Jailhouse Frocks, The Wedding of the Century, The Supermarket Sisterhood, The Old People Are Revolting, Twas the Fight Before Christmas... and many more!

Order your free perusal scripts at
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we discovered that an online program was more enticing to older students than younger ones. That has pushed us to develop online activities in the fall for adults and seniors—two groups that we had never pursued because of our traditional focus on youth. We expect that these adult-oriented online courses will become a healthy supplement to our youth programs once in-person rehearsals can resume, adding a new revenue opportunity where we had none before.

So, if we're postponing and breaking even, how did Theatre Tulsa keep the doors open and our staff employed? Fortunately for us, there was multiple pandemic relief funding on city, county, state, and national levels that was available to us as a non-profit small business. We kept our ear to the ground and aggressively pursued every single application that became available in the wake of the pandemic.



The advertisement for Arts People software features a dark blue background. At the top, there is a logo consisting of two overlapping red and orange shapes. Below the logo, the text "Arts People" is written in a large, white, sans-serif font, followed by "Software for the Performing Arts" in a smaller, white, sans-serif font. Underneath this, a line of text reads "Sell tickets & classes, manage marketing & members, and everything in between." In the center, there is a large, stylized graphic of a red and orange ticket with a white dashed line across its middle. Below the ticket graphic, the text "Priced for non-profits with complete, world-class support included." is written in white. At the bottom, there is a call to action: "Get in touch for a demo and your AACT member discount" followed by the website "www.Arts-People.com" in a bold, white, sans-serif font. The very bottom line of text reads "Made by and for people who believe in the positive power of the arts" in a small, white, sans-serif font.

We also reviewed our liability insurance, and found that our event cancellations for the remaining run of *A Little Night Music* qualified for a significant claim, for which we were able to get the maximum annual amount.

Stay Nimble

Now that we have been living with this pandemic for several months, I truly believe that local community theatres will lead the way back to the theatre for all performing arts organizations across the country.

Why community theatres? Because we have flexibility that larger, professional theatres do not have. We are not bound by bureaucracies, unions, or national tour schedules.

Our smaller numbers are actually an asset here. We can make big decisions and execute them quickly. We have volunteers and other supporters who are willing to jump in and get their hands dirty to help take ownership of their beloved theatre, to help it survive this crisis.

Reach Out for Help

Although we made some big decisions for Theatre Tulsa, I'm the first to admit that I don't have all the answers. But collectively, we do have a lot of support across the country. Remember that you are among a large community of theatre practitioners who are working toward the same result—to survive and thrive during an unprecedented crisis—and we're all willing to help. Keep in contact with your friends in theatre, as well as AACT's community resources to stay on top of all the latest news and decisions that we all are making in our own communities.

There truly is a light at the end of the tunnel. ♦

Sara Phoenix serves as Artistic Director for Theatre Tulsa in Tulsa, Oklahoma. She holds a BFA in theatre from the University of Oklahoma and is a certified theatre educator, workshop presenter, adjudicator, and founder of Theatre Tulsa's youth education program. Sara has served on several committees for AACT, including Workshops, Education, NewPlayFest, and Festival Adjudication. She was a co-facilitator of AACT's Youth Summit in 2015, and helped to initiate the Youth Conference and Youth Festival at AACTFest 2017 National Festival in Rochester, Minnesota. She currently serves on the AACT Board as Executive Vice President.



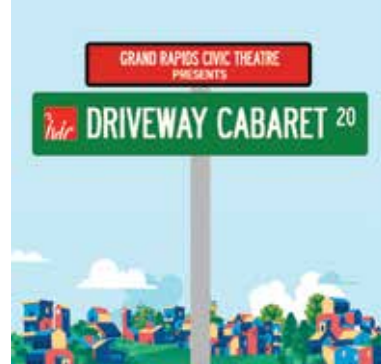
Maria Martinez

Theatre Tulsa Academy presents virtual sessions in many different subjects including tutorials in makeup for the stage



Driveway Cabaret Takes the Show on the Road

Ben Greene



Like many community theatres across the nation, Grand Rapids Civic Theatre (GRCT) was faced with an unprecedented challenge: How to keep entertaining its community, engaging with its volunteers, and bringing in revenue after the coronavirus pandemic had shuttered their doors.

During a brainstorming session, members of GRCT's leadership team had an epiphany: If their patrons couldn't come to their shows, they would bring shows to their patrons. Two months later, Civic Theatre has wrapped up two rounds of mobile Broadway concerts, dubbed *Driveway Cabaret*. This portable fundraiser has been a significant success, selling out the first 100 performances in just over three days.

The concept is simple: for a \$250

contribution, patrons may sign up to host up to 25 people at a concert at their own home. Concerts are 40 minutes in length, performed in driveways, front yards, back yards, decks, and other outdoor spaces of all varieties. Performers arrive in small groups, caravan-style. The first group arrives and performs, followed immediately by a second, and so on. This allows GRCT to maximize the number of homes that can be reached in an evening, while minimizing the time commitment from volunteer performers and stage managers. Small performing groups also allow for social distancing.

Indeed, the safety of performers and patrons was top priority. GRCT requires that performance spaces be 10 feet by 10 feet wide, with a minimum distance of 10 feet between performers and patrons. Theatre staff visit each home before the performance to mark out spaces using small yard flags. In addition, performance groups who travel together are mostly people who are quarantining together. Guests are asked to maintain an appropriate social distance during performances, and hosts are responsible for ensuring their guests follow appropriate safety protocols.

Each *Driveway Cabaret* concert is different, based on the

skillset of the performers in each group. As a result, if you happen to be invited to two different performances by two different hosts, there's a good chance you'll see two different shows. The content varies from Broadway standards to new favorites, and everything in between. Virtual auditions were held in June, and the final cast and crew consisted of 30 performers and six stage managers. As might be expected, both cast and crew were thrilled to be involved in some semblance of production again, after over four months in the dark.

Because of the overwhelming response from the first round of performances, GRCT booked 120 more performances for the month of August. They sold out in just over three days.

As *Spotlight* went to press, the company was considering additional *Driveway Cabaret* performances for September.

Ben Greene is the Director of Marketing and Engagement at Grand Rapids Civic Theatre in Grand Rapids, Michigan



Audrey and Jesse Aukerman perform in Grand Rapids Civic Theatre's Driveway Cabaret in the Midtown neighborhood of Grand Rapids, Michigan, July 7, 2020



NewPlayFest 2022 Producing Theatres

AACT NewPlayFest 2022 has selected the Producing Theatres. These Producing Theatres will read scripts that make it to the final round, select the winning plays, and produce the world premiere of the winning plays between June 2021 and December 2022.



Des Moines Community Playhouse Des Moines, Iowa

The Des Moines Community Playhouse, using all volunteer casts and crews, presents a full season of musicals, dramas, comedies, and family shows each year. The shows represent the best of Broadway, present and past, with professional quality sets, costumes, and acting at a price nearly everyone in the community can afford.

But The Playhouse isn't merely an entertainment venue. A commitment to education extends beyond opportunities for the community to get involved, behind-the-scenes, with the shows. The Playhouse has an extensive education department, providing classes for all ages, and outreach programs for schools and community centers.

The Playhouse is one of the largest and oldest continuously-operating theatres in the United States.

1972, founding board members each put up their own homes as collateral in order to purchase what had been a bowling alley, and convert it into a theatre. In 1999, the mortgage was fully paid, and Golden Chain Theatre now owns its facility, outright.

Today, the theatre strives to present a wide variety of quality live entertainment, promote fine arts education, and continue making a vibrant contribution to the community's economy, culture, and spirit.

Golden Chain Theatre presents a season of six productions each year. Programming also includes the Jr. Players youth performance troupe, Summer Melodrama and Traveling Troupe, Platinum Players senior performance group, 10x10 Play Festival, children and teens summer workshops, and dinner theatre events.



Market House Theatre Paducah, Kentucky

Founded in 1963, Market House Theatre (MHT) is celebrating its 56th season.

MHT produces annually a Signature Season of six plays and a Family Series of three or four plays. In addition, its touring company, Story Theatre, performs in four states, and produces five Playtime productions each year—early-childhood immersive plays with original scripts. MHT has also won state and regional awards, participating in AACTFest festivals.

The current budget for MHT is just over \$1 million a year. It has a full-time and part-time staff of 16, including an artistic staff of three, and a technical staff of five. Last year MHT served over 35,000 participants in its educational outreach and on-campus programming.



Golden Chain Theatre Oakhurst, California

Founded in 1967 as a summer melodrama troupe, Golden Chain Theatre is a thriving nonprofit community theatre located in Oakhurst, California—not far from Yosemite National Park. In



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The company has initiated an estimated \$5 million project to renovate nearly 44,000 square feet of historic space, and make significant upgrades to all 10 of MHT's historic buildings.



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

Center Stage Theatre has its origins in the Midland Theatre Guild, which began in 1929. The Guild moved to its current home as part of Midland Center of the Arts in 1971. In 2008, it merged with the Midland Music Society to create Center Stage Theatre, which continues as part of Midland Center for the Arts, presenting up to 10 productions each year.

Each year, Center Stage Theatre presents a five-show subscription package comprised of a wide variety of plays and musicals, from Greek tragedy to musicals fresh from Broadway. Center Stage Theatre is today a national award-winning community theatre program, with a volunteer base over 300-strong, and a performance season that draws tens of thousands of theatre-goers from across Michigan's Great Lakes Bay Region. The theatre's productions of *Urinetown* (2011) and *Venus in Fur* (2017) advanced to the national AACTFest theatre festival.



Midland Community Theatre Midland, Texas

Midland Community Theatre (MCT) was founded in 1946 by Art Cole, marking its 75th anniversary in 2020.

MCT produces musicals, comedies, dramas, mysteries, melodramas, and children's theatre in three performance spaces, along with diverse educational classes and programming.

The company's annual programing includes a membership season of nine productions; a Summer Mommers fundraiser for the theatre's operating fund (since 1949); a theatre school offering after-school classes; the Pickwick Players, offering teen classes, workshops, and three productions; Applause Players, a drama therapy program for youth with autism and their families; and Centerstage, an after-school project for teenagers who are not involved in Pickwicks.

MCT is proud to have produced original works for over 25 years, as part of its McLaren Playwriting competition, and is looking forward to mounting an AACT NewPlayFest production in 2022, continuing its tradition of showcasing emerging playwrights.



Theatre Tuscaloosa Tuscaloosa, Alabama

Theatre Tuscaloosa was founded in 1971 as the Tuscaloosa Community Players. In 1976, the Arts Council of Tuscaloosa leased the Historic Bama Theatre as a performing arts center, and the Players' production of *George Washington Slept Here* served as the inaugural event. The group performed there for 22 years, evolving into "Theatre Tuscaloosa" in the 1980s.

The company then forged an alliance with Shelton State Community College, and in the 1990s, raised funds to complete construction of a fine arts center at the new Martin Campus. In exchange, Shelton State named Theatre Tuscaloosa as its resident company.

Theatre Tuscaloosa produces five mainstage productions, and two SecondStage productions, designed to foster new directorial and performing talent. The Theatre Tuscaloosa Academy develops the talents and skills of volunteer performers, crew, and front-of-house staff. The company also hosts a Summer Theatre Camp in cooperation with Tuscaloosa Children's Theatre. ♦

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Friends We'll Miss

To Dream the Impossible Dream

Judy Alhorn and Chad-Alan Carr

Bennie Nipper was a Texas theatre legend, and the Co-Founder and Artistic Director of AACT charter member Bay Area Harbour Playhouse in Dickinson, Texas.

Born Bennie Bernita Tapp on October 1, 1928, in Terry, Texas, she attended Lon Morris College in Jacksonville, TX, where she met two people who set the course of her life. One was Zula Pearson, a drama instructor who inspired Bennie to become a theatre teacher. The other was the love of her life, Oscar Nipper. The two married in 1949 and were together 65 years, until his death in 2014.

Bennie earned an AA degree from Lon Morris College, and a BFA in Theatre and a M. Ed. degree from the University of Texas. She taught public school for 38 years, during which time she met Nina Vance, who was the driving force behind creating the original Alley Theatre in Houston. Bennie could relate to Nina, because both grew up in small Texas communities and shared a pioneer spirit; they were Texas girls with wills of iron. Nina hired Bennie to teach classes, and encouraged her to act and direct. In watching Nina operate and expand the Alley Theatre, Bennie began to dream of creating her own theatre.

In the meantime, she performed and directed for the Austin Civic Theatre, the Indianapolis Circle of Players, and local venues like Pasadena Little Theatre, Clear Creek Country Theatre, College of the Mainland Arena Theatre, and San Jacinto College South Theatre. She and Oscar were founding members of Pasadena Little Theatre, as well as Texas Non-Profit Theatres, a state-wide association. She also established a travelling theatre troupe called Number 1 Plays and Players, which performed for a decade, and was a charter member of what is now known as AACT.



Houston Chronicle/Kirk Sides

After retirement, Bennie and Oscar took on a mammoth undertaking—starting their own theatre company. In 1990, she located a site for a new theatre—an abandoned machine shop in Dickinson, Texas that had originally housed the Hollywood Movie Theatre. It was an abandoned building with a multitude of issues (filled with years of trash, covered with poison ivy, a haven for vagrants and wandering animals, a badly leaking roof, grimy welding equipment, giant heavy valves hanging from the ceiling on huge I-beams, and mud-caked floors with tire tracks from large trucks that drove through the interior). It seemed impossible, but Bennie saw a huge open space, a high ceiling, a balcony which had been left untouched—and a town that had no community theatre. There, Bennie would begin the last chapter in her life's mission, and together she and Oscar would create the closing act of their life story: The Bay Area Harbour Playhouse and Fine Arts Academy.

Bennie Nipper is survived by nieces, nephews, and their families—and by an infinite number of students, friends, neighbors, actors, and audience members who learned from her, laughed with her, and loved her so much. ♦

New plays written to be performed online!



Eight pets tell their stories of confinement in this ten-minute comedy.



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Join this hilarious family as they struggle to endure being stuck at home – together!



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www.hiStage.com

AACT Legacy Society

With all the talk of uncertain times, social distancing, and “new normal,” it’s good to know that an AACT group is working to keep community theatre alive and well.

That group is the AACT Legacy Society, made up of dedicated individuals who are eager to ensure that live theatre will return, and assist companies with educational and performance opportunities.

Established by the AACT Endowment Board of Trustees to accept current and planned gifts, the Legacy Society is focused on both the long-term sustainability of AACT’s mission to help theatres thrive, and providing financial support for member theatres participating in national festivals.

The result gives theatres opportunities to learn, grow, and create. And you can be a part of it.

With a \$5,000 cash donation, pledge, or inclusion of the AACT Endowment as a beneficiary in your estate planning, you become a member of this visionary Legacy Society, and your gift will help assure sustainability for AACT programs, now and in the future.

You choose where your Legacy gift will be directed:

1. *AACT Mission and Long-Term Sustainability Fund.* The mission of AACT is to foster and encourage the development of, and commitment to, the highest standards of excellence in production, management, governance, community relations, and service by community theatres. This fund assists in providing leadership and networking opportunities, as well as services, publications, programs, meetings, and other activities to meet the needs of nonprofit community theatres, and continuing AACT’s role as a national voice for community theatre.

2. *Festival Support for AACT-member companies participating in AACTFest.* This fund makes the AACT’s national community theatre festival more accessible by providing travel expense support to entering companies.

Legacy Society funds are managed by the AACT Endowment Board of Trustees, who oversee the investment and growth of the funds. Mission and Festival Funds are kept separate, with independent investment, spending, and accounting policies.

The AACT Endowment Fund was established in 1985, and since 1991, participating companies of every national festival have received travel grants. Legacy Society gifts help to ensure that record of success will continue.

For more information on becoming a member of the AACT Legacy Society, contact:

Quiana Clark-Roland, Executive Director
American Association of Community Theatre
P.O. Box 101476
Fort Worth, TX 76185-1476
Email: info@aact.org

AACT is a 501 (c)(3) charitable organization. Contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.



American Association of Community Theatre Honoring Years of Service to AACT

AACT is truly grateful for the contributions and commitment of our Board, Volunteers, Committee Members, and Staff. We are grateful for the energy, enthusiasm, and dedication they bring to their roles and work in support of Community Theatre in America.

In celebration of our volunteers, the AACT Board of Directors recognizes the following volunteers who have served AACT as Board members, on committees and other groups, and as State Contacts. Service pins are presented to recognize five-year milestones of volunteer and staff service.



The AACT Years of Service pin

5 Years

Lucinda Lawrence, Champaign, Illinois

Tom Booth, Tupelo, Mississippi

William (Bill) Anderson, Jr., Grand Rapids, Michigan

Winston Daniels, Euless, Texas

10 Years

Jamie Ulmer, Beatrice, Nebraska

Dr. Roger Ellis, Grand Rapids, Michigan

15 Years

Donna Fisher, Casper, Wyoming

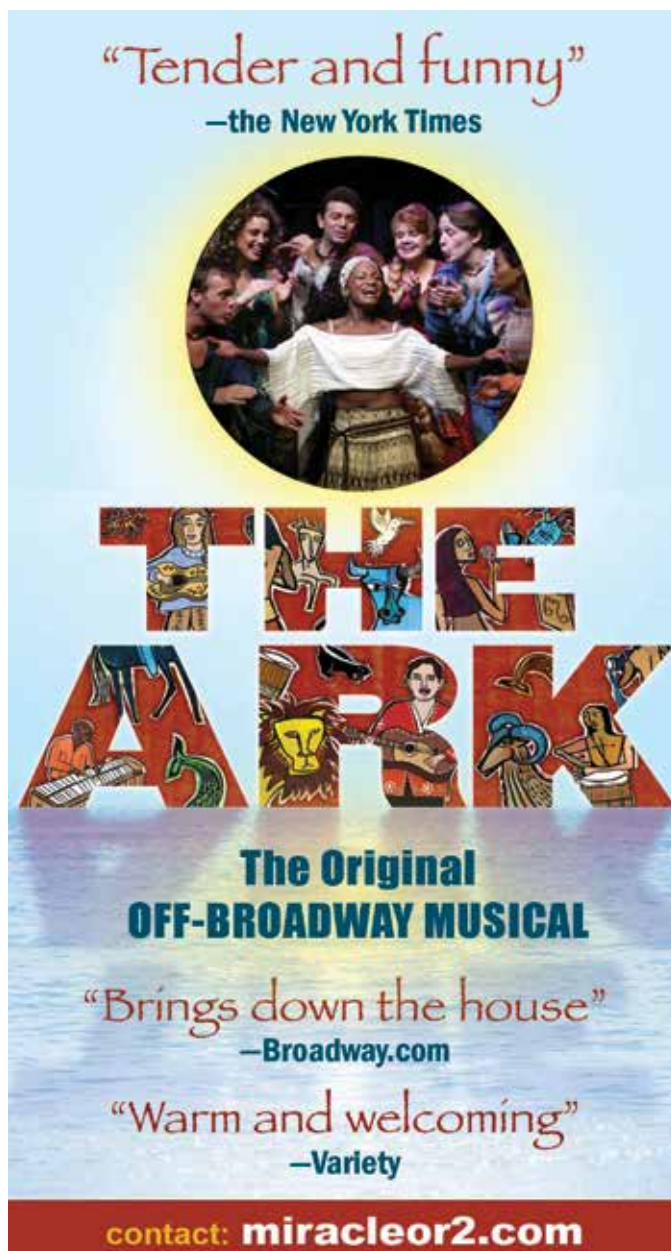
Nancy Eppert, Independence, Missouri

20 Years

Dennis Gilmore, Indio, California

25 Years

Kathleen A. Maldonado, Alto, New Mexico



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Annual Member Meeting Highlights

Frank Peot, AACT Secretary

AACT's Annual Member Meeting was held virtually on June 6, with approximately 90 members in attendance.

Reports were received from the Finance Committee, the Executive Director, Committees, and Regions. (Complete individual reports can be viewed on the AACT website: aact.org/docs, membership login required).

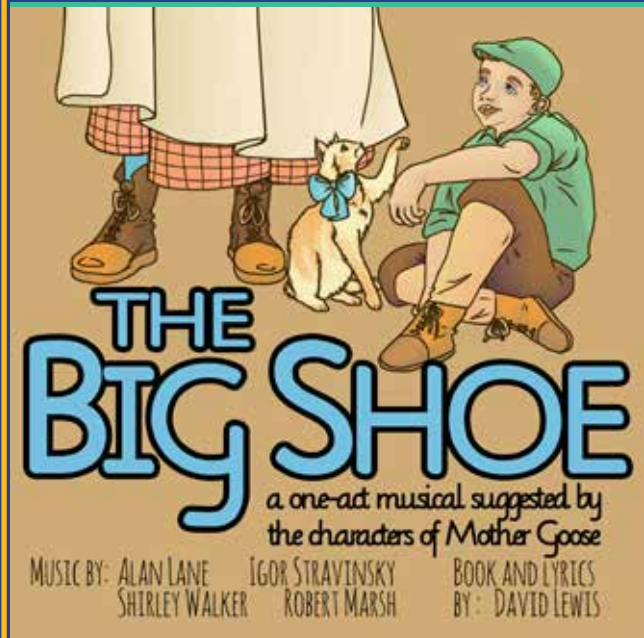
President Rick Kerby thanked everyone for their participation and understanding, especially in this time of a pandemic.

Highlights of the meeting:

- Emily Anderson, Chad-Alan Carr, Kristi Quinn, Jennifer Van Bruggen-Hamilton, and Jim Walker were elected to the Board of Directors for three-year terms.
- Kristi Quinn, Chairperson of the Invitational Taskforce, explained the invitational format for AACTFest 2021, noting that new guidelines would be posted soon.
- Financially, AACT is in a very good position, thanks to the staff and membership, Treasurer Michael Fox reported. Maintaining our financial stability will rest mainly on membership renewals, which can be handled quickly and easily online. Membership renewal reminders are also being sent via U.S. mail.
- AACT has initiated a series of webinars on the AACT website. These have been successful and well received by participants. New webinars are being added on a regular basis.
- Beverley Lord reported that the World Amateur Theatre Congress in Monaco, scheduled for August 2021, will be shorter this coming year due to coronavirus concerns.
- The AACT Endowment is moving forward as expected during this time of financial instability, and remains stable. Legacy Society memberships are still available and welcomed.
- Chris Serface was elected as the new AACT President for 2020-2021. Others elected to office include Executive Vice President Sara Phoenix, Vice President for Festivals Jim Walker, Treasurer Michael Fox, and Secretary Frank Peot.
- New committee appointments were announced, and Allen Ebert was appointed to a three-year term on the Board, and to serve as Chairperson of the Education Committee.
- There was a discussion of AACT's diversity plan, which is part of the organization's Strategic Plan.

Michael Fox honored outgoing president Rick Kerby with words of appreciation and thanks for his service. ♦

Radio-theater ready for your consideration



IDEAL FOR THE HOLIDAYS

The Big Shoe was work-shopped in January at the Pacific BoyChoir Academy. A live one hour recording was made in a radio format.

THE STORY

Can the Big Shoe — home to orphaned children and struggling adults — be saved from heartless banker Anabel Sprat, planning to tear it down in her quest to create the modern Spratville? Set in a small English village, c. 1900. One set. One act. One hour. Minimum cast size: 9.

For a copy of the recording in CD or MP3, and/or the libretto in PDF, please contact David Lewis davidcoast@yahoo.com
510-387-9533

Also from David Lewis
to be published this fall by BearManor Media
Those Ringlings: The Complete Book and Lyrics of the Musical
"With proper handling, deserves a shot at a Tony" — Variety

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Spotlight on Discounter

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AACT has joined with MindEdge Learning to offer the very latest in self-paced online courses and certificate programs. These programs are perfect for those who seek to advance in their current positions, explore career alternatives, or enhance their knowledge in their area of interest.

- E-courses provide affordable, practical, and accessible information to people working in and with the nonprofit field, whether as paid staff, directors, board members, philanthropists, or volunteers
- E-courses cover a variety of topics, including nonprofit management, leadership, finance, and human resources
- Take a demo to sample the interactive exercises and mini-cases that you will experience once you register

Courses can be taken for CEU's (Continuing Education Credits), and start at just \$79 each. AACT will also provide 1:1 AACTEd Hours for each CEU credit completed. AACT members will receive special promotional discounts on e-courses throughout the year. ♦

aact.org/mindedge-learning

Make A Legacy Gift

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

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

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Spotlight Award Honors Diane Hanisch

The AACT Spotlight Award partners AACT with theatres to recognize individuals and organizations for long or special service that has had a significant impact on the quality of their local theatres. Any AACT member theatre may apply to present the Spotlight Award.



Arts for Life President, Mary McCreight, presents the AACT Spotlight Award to Diane Hanisch at the Best Performance Awards Virtual Ceremony, June 14, 2020

Arts for Life honored **Diane Hanisch** with the AACT Spotlight Award at its Best Performance Awards Virtual Ceremony on June 14, 2020. Arts for Life President Mary McCreight presented the award, and AACT Executive Director Quiana Clark-Roland congratulated Diane by video.

Diane is an accomplished musician who has served Arts for Life as Musical Director, arranger, and conductor, for almost 20 years.

Each year, the organization produces the Best Performance Awards, showcasing some of the best community musical theatre in the Greater St. Louis area. Diane works with around 15 nominated theatres, individually, in preparation for their performances. She painstakingly arranges the musical scores for a full orchestra. She encourages and inspires each group, offering suggestions on how to make their performance shine. She also shares her expertise on techniques that build energy with the ebb and flow of music. Throughout the process, Diane is calming and assuring, building confidence in every performer.

The Arts for Life musical revues help raise valuable funds for many local and national charities, and its success is due in great part to Diane, according to Arts for Life President McCreight.

"Diane is always willing to go the extra mile for a show's success," she says. "Thank you, Diane! No one is more deserving of the AACT Spotlight Award!" ♦

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OTHER MUSICALS:

- Christmas My Way – A Sinatra Holiday Bash
- I Left My Heart – A Salute to the Music of Tony Bennett
- Simply Simone – The Music of Nina Simone
- Babes in Hollywood – The Music of Garland and Rooney
- One More For My Baby - A Sinatra Songbook
- Town Without Pity – The Love Songs of Gene Pitney
- Bonnie & Clyde
- Club Morocco

PLAYS:

- Dracula - The Case of the Silver Scream (Film Noir)
- The Incredible Jungle Journey of Fenda Maria
- Casa Blue—The Last Moments in the Life of Freda Kahlo
- Vampire Monologues
- War of the Worlds

Scripts, Information, and Licensing at:
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The TheaterMakers Summit is a gathering of the world's top theatrical talent for a weekend of education, inspiration, and connection. In 2020, The TheaterMakers Summit will be held virtually for theater people around the globe to attend from the safety of their homes.

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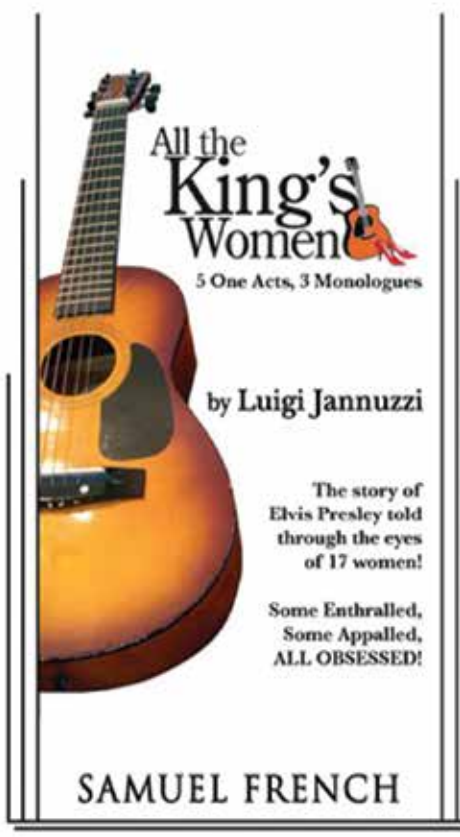
Speakers include many performers, producers, designers and theatre managers, among them Emmy and Tony Award-winning costume designer Paul Tazewell, Robert Diamond, President/Editor-in-Chief of BroadwayWorld.com, and AACT's Executive Director, Quiana Clark-Roland.

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Advocacy is about educating and informing elected officials, the public, and the media about the importance of the performing arts. It is up to us—performing artists, administrators, and audience members—to explain the value of the performing arts to lawmakers. Arts Advocacy Basics: aact.org/basics

Ask Congress to fully support the arts and all workers during the pandemic and beyond. Performing Arts Alliance has provided an editable draft of a note for your personalization: aact.org/support

Also, add your name to an open letter to Congress at Be An Arts Hero: beanartshero.com/



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