

spotlight

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY THEATRE

JULY/AUGUST 2022



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President's Letter

Chris Surface
AACT President



Surprise!

You have me for one more letter before I turn the gavel over to our incoming President and we welcome some new board members. As I stated last issue, it has been an extreme pleasure to serve as your President and I want to thank all of you for making this an amazing experience for me. aactWORLDFEST, as always, did not fail to impress. The joy of seeing theatre from beyond our country is always an invigorating and emotional occurrence. My standing ovation goes out to Murray and Lori Chase and the dedicated staff of Venice Theatre who continue to make this an event that can't be missed. Look for aactWORLDFEST 2022 reports and photos in the September/October issue of *Spotlight*.

Events are something that has always been a strong part of AACT. The ability to come together in person and share knowledge with one another is priceless. I encourage you to explore what AACT offers and register. AACT offers early registration for all of our events, and it helps us effectively plan when we know in advance how many will attend. Help us continue to offer these opportunities by signing up early!

As I wind down, I'm going to leave you with something that was taught to me. One of my early mentors always used the phrase, "theatre begets theatre." I've carried this with me and use it as one of my guiding principles, and it's something that I think is inherent in AACT. It doesn't matter if a theatre has a budget of 10 dollars or 10 million dollars or more, the fact that theatre is happening, makes it possible for all other theatre to happen. We are here to support and learn from one another to help theatre thrive for all of us.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris Surface".

A photograph of a theater production of "Midsummer Night's Dream". In the center, a man in a light-colored suit and a wide-brimmed hat is holding a woman in a white dress. They are both looking upwards. On either side of them, a woman in a brown uniform and a hat sits on the floor, looking towards the center. The background is a dark stage with blue and purple lighting. A large, stylized "HEUER PUBLISHING" logo is in the top left corner. Text in the top right corner reads "Midsummer Night's Dream", "Abridged by Robert Gonzalez, Ph.D.", "University of Tampa", and "90 min.". At the bottom, there is a white banner with the text "FREE READS! for AACT Members" on the left, and "Scan QR Code" with an arrow pointing to a QR code on the right. Below the QR code, it says "or Visit HeuerPub.com to see full list of free reads."

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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.

On the cover: Baristas Ian (Nicholas Bubb) and Ben (Ayden Simonich) interrogate *The Bean Shack's* customer-turned-suspect Beverly (Janet Jones Johnson) in Golden Chain Theatre's world premiere production of *Café Mocha Murders* by Deanna Strasse, photo: Steve Montalto

Thank you to Subplot Studio for their sponsorship of the new look and design of *Spotlight* magazine. We look forward to this ongoing and growing partnership in order to bring you the best *Spotlight* quality and content. We encourage you to check out the wonderful products and services **Subplot.com** has to offer you and your theatre!

SEE WHAT'S NEW!

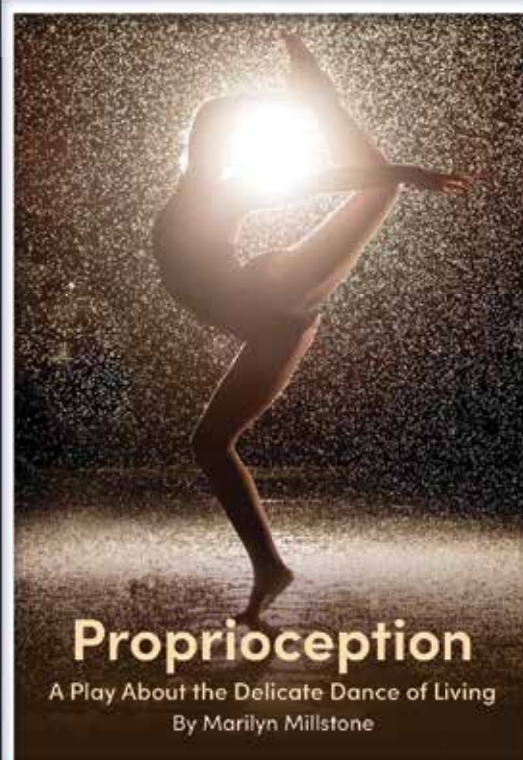
from **dpc** Dramatic Publishing

Included in the American Association of Community Theatre
AACT Newplayfest Winning Plays: Volume 4 (2020).



A normal day goes into high gear when Clair learns that a publisher saw her recipe for “Mayonnaise Casserole” and wants to feature it in a new cookbook. Her husband isn’t happy with the situation, and their daughter suddenly shows up with stunning news and a mysterious friend. Arriving for dinner are the editor and photographer, who have a hidden agenda for the cookbook. A food-slinging argument erupts, revealing secrets and setting the stage for Clair’s loving wisdom.

Cast size: 3m., 3w.



Kylie is a young prima ballerina with a torn ACL and a chip on her shoulder. Esther is an elderly widowed Holocaust survivor estranged from her only child. Both are patients of renowned Black physical therapist Mike Sheffield. When Sheffield decides that the two women should share appointments, attachments form, conflicts erupt, secrets surface and lives unravel. A play about how we heal ... and how we don't.

Cast size: 2m., 2w.

See the entire anthology at: www.dramaticpublishing.com/aact-vol-4

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Casper, WY (2022)

TBD

Jon Douglas Rake

Tacoma, WA (2022)

Dane Winters

Germany (US Army) (2022)

Upcoming Events

AACT Online Roundtables

July 19 - Audience Enrichment

August 16 - Accessibility Toolkit

2022 schedule: aact.org/roundtables

AACT Virtual Masterclass

August 4 - Marketing 101 with Julie Nemitz

aact.org/webinars

AACT Industry Connection

August 10 - Subplot Studios

aact.org/industry-connections

AACT Executive Committee Meeting

November 19

Hyatt Regency Louisville

320 West Jefferson Street

Louisville, Kentucky 40202

502-581-1234

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Spotlight

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Life, Love, Laughter— and Murder

Golden Chain Theatre's World Premiere of *Café Mocha Murders*

Despite the raging storm outside, it seems like a perfectly normal night for a staff meeting at the local coffee shop, The Bean Shack. That is, until the lights go out, and someone winds up dead.

That's the premise of Deanna Strasse's *Café Mocha Murders*, which received its AACT NewPlayFest 2022 world premiere March 25 at Golden Chain Theatre (GCT) in Oakhurst, California.

Under the direction of Jennifer Janine (who also serves as the theatre's artistic director), the over-the-top whodunit underscored GCT's mission to offer a vibrant contribution to the community's economy, culture, and spirit. In fact, by all accounts, the theatre was so full of life, love, and laughter that many in the audience forgot about trying to solve the murder.

Key to the show's success is the script by Deanna Strasse, who has performed in her fair share of murder mysteries, and always wanted to write one herself.



Veteran barista Ivy (Kaley Marsh) makes *The Devil's Joe*, the infamous secret coffee drink and possible murder weapon in Golden Chain Theatre's production of *Café Mocha Murders*

"There's something very enthralling about mysteries of any kind, but especially when murder is involved," she says in her program notes. "The play becomes not only a form of entertainment, but a mind game as well. I wanted to have all the intrigue (and some humor) you'd expect from a murder mystery, but I also wanted more. I wanted a story about adversaries who come to see that



they have more in common than they originally thought. I wanted a story featuring strong female characters who can't see eye-to-eye until they're forced to. The tale is kooky, over-the-top, and far-fetched, but at its core it's about people learning to get along."

Luckily, the playwright and team at GCT didn't have to work hard at getting along. When asked about the process of working directly with a playwright, Director Jennifer Janine said, "Sometimes you wonder if it would feel like too many cooks in the kitchen, but we lucked out. Deanna has been a dream to work with. Seeing inside her mind was a wonderful learning opportunity for all involved."

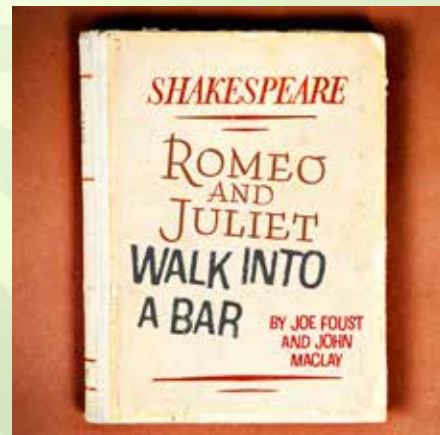
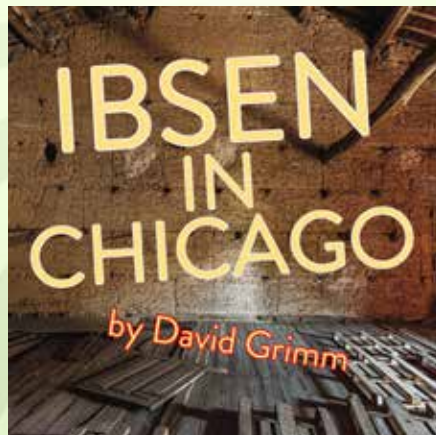
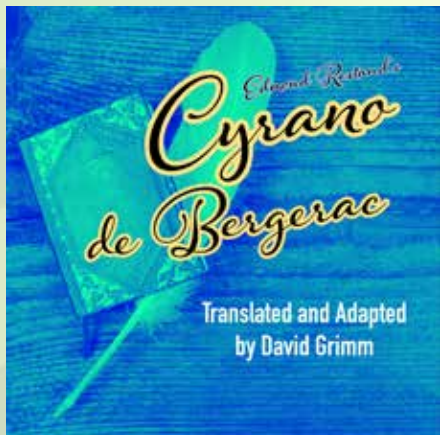
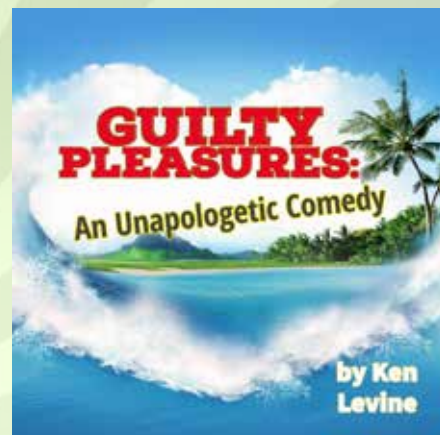
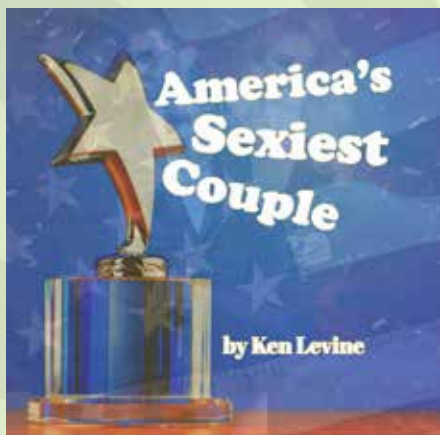
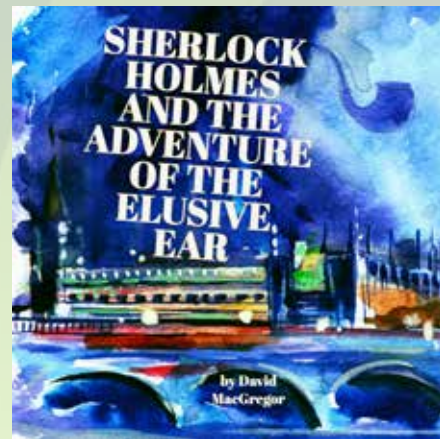
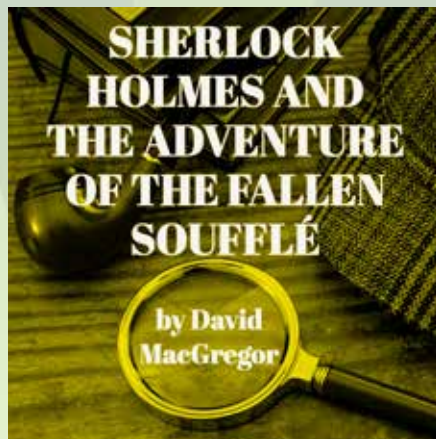
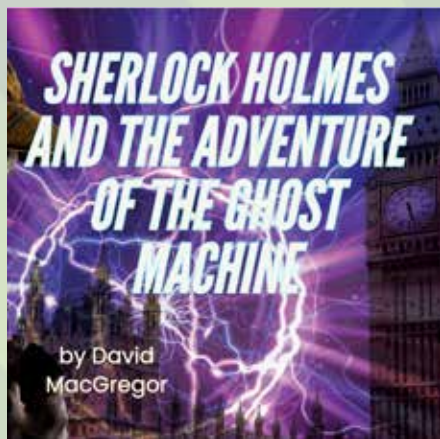
In return, Strasse praised Janine and AACT NewPlayFest Dramaturg Kathy Pingel as her strongest advocates from the beginning.

"Working on a new play requires a team who can see its possibilities and identify its shortcomings," Strasse explained. "Kathy and Jennifer helped me further develop the show, contributed valuable bits, moved text around, and so much more. The show became tighter, stronger, and better. This process has been an amazing gift for a playwright, and I cannot say thank you to them enough."

- Deanna Strasse



Playwright Deanna Strasse, Director Jennifer Janine, and AACT Dramaturg Kathy Pingel celebrate the opening of *Café Mocha Murders* at Golden Chain Theatre



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Photograph by Silian Reining. © 2020 Miami New Drama
Keith Randolph Smith in the 2017 Miami New Drama production of *Our Town*

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Janine also praised the local community for embracing the new-play experience, noting that “our audiences did not disappoint. Our wonderful, loyal patrons trust GCT to give them an entertaining evening, even if the title of a show is new to them. Attendance was great for all three weekends of the show’s run. The laughter in our very full auditorium felt like a sitcom laugh track. I only wish Deanna had been able to stay for the show’s entire run, so she could bask in her success.”

Local audiences were not the only ones to be charmed by the entire experience. In addition to the playwright, also in attendance on opening night were Linda Lee from the Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation (who generously sponsors AACT NewPlayFest), Carrie Blomquist from Dramatic Publishing Company (who publishes an anthology of NewPlayFest’s winning scripts), AACT’s Kathy Pingel (NewPlayFest Dramaturg) and David A. VanCleave (AACT Education Coordinator). All said they consider themselves fortunate to be part of the celebration of Deanna Strasse’s and GCT’s successful collaboration.

Celebrating its 55th consecutive season, Golden Chain Theatre has remained true to its mission “to passionately engage people of all ages in presenting quality live entertainment, promote fine arts education, as well as contributing to the community’s economy, culture, and spirit.”



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

The successful AACT NewPlayFest 2022 world premiere of *Café Mocha Murders* is a testament to that spirit.

About the Playwright

Deanna Strasse is a Milwaukee-based playwright who enjoys mixing the heartfelt with the hilarious. She has written and published several full-length shows, one-acts, and youth productions, including *Dancing with Hamlet*, *Summers in Prague*, *A Play About Parker*, *Islands*, and *Molly’s (Mostly) Accurate Mythology Anthology*. Her scripts have been performed and workshopped across Wisconsin, as well as Minneapolis (Chameleon Theatre Circle), Long Island (Spark Creative Works), Seattle (Macha Theatre Works), and more.



Jennifer Janine, Golden Chain Theatre Artistic Director, receives a check from Linda M. Lee of the Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation on opening night of the world premiere of *Café Mocha Murders* by Deanna Strasse, March 25, 2022, in Oakhurst, California



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



Opening Night of the AACT NewPlayFest 2022 world premiere of *Café Mocha Murders*, by Deanna Strasse, at Golden Chain Theatre in Oakhurst, California

Seated (left to right): Janet Jones Johnson (cast), Kaley Marsh (cast), Lanie Suderman (Lighting Designer), Jason Walle (cast), Paige Ferbrache (cast), Cassie Longcor (cast) **Standing** (left to right): James Mierkey (Technical Director/Scenic Designer), Donovan Rich (Sound Designer), Adam Greenwood (cast), Shannon Brewington (cast), Christine Ferbrache (House Manager), Allyson Ferbrache (Assistant to the Directors), Miranda Simonich (GCT Board, Costumer/Scenic Designer), Jennifer Olsen (Assistant Director), Ayden Simonich (cast), Jennifer Janine (GCT Artistic Director, Director, Scenic Designer), Nicholas Bubb (cast), Deanna Strasse (Playwright), Kathy Pingel (AACT Dramaturg), Michael Van Buren (GCT Board President, set construction), David A. VanCleave (AACT Education Coordinator), Carrie Blomquist (Dramatic Publishing Professional Leasing Director), Grace Mierkey (Stage Manager), Linda M. Lee (Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation), Lina Shaw Huey (Assistant Stage Manager)

Creating World Premieres

NewPlayFest 2024 Producing Theatres

The Producing Theatres have been selected for AACT NewPlayFest 2024. 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 2023 and December 2024.



Cottage Grove, Oregon

cottage theatre.org

Cottage Theatre produces a year-round season of plays and musicals, typically offering six major productions each year. About 30% of Cottage Theatre's audience resides in Cottage Grove (population 10,000), with 60% coming from within a 25-mile radius, and 10% drawn from more than 50 miles away. In addition to its main season, Cottage Theatre offers summer theatre camps for children, and partners with the local high school to offer an annual *Rhythm & Blues Revue* concert series.

Founded in 1982, Cottage Theatre has grown tremendously since its humble beginnings—outdoors under a parachute, which blew away during the second weekend of performances. The theatre operated out of a former health food store for 15 years before raising funds to build its current facility in 1998. A second capital campaign in 2006 funded the addition of a rehearsal hall. In 2022, following a decade of (pre-pandemic) audience growth and sold-out performances, Cottage Theatre completed a \$2.5 million transformation that added 50 more seats and remodeled 100% of its public-facing spaces. The theatre's auditorium now holds 195 seats in an intimate proscenium-plus-thrust configuration. A volunteer-centered organization, Cottage Theatre operates with a tiny paid staff and relies on talented, dedicated volunteers to direct, design, and perform in its productions.



Hickory, North Carolina

hickorytheatre.org

Founded in 1949, the Hickory Community Theatre (HCT) is one of the oldest, continuously operating community theatres in the state. HCT presents an annual season of nine shows—six in the Broadway-style Jeffers Theatre and three in the basement cabaret, known as the Firemen's Kitchen. Since its inception, HCT has always had a home in the Hickory Municipal Building, which also provides a

third performance space (the black box Council Chamber Theatre), which is the home of the RugBug Theatre for children and the Encore Players senior theatre troupe. HCT has four full-time staff and over 300 volunteers performing on stage, working backstage, and running the front of house.



Lincoln, Nebraska

lincolnpayhouse.com

Lincoln Community Playhouse has been an integral part of the local arts community since 1946. After several homes, the Playhouse built its own theatre in 1972. The Playhouse produces six to eight shows per season in two performance spaces (272-seat mainstage, 100-seat black box).

The Playhouse is renowned for its outreach programming, including The Penguin Project, Radio Active Players Senior Theatre, and free performances. Through the COVID shutdown, the Playhouse continued programming with old-time radio scripts offering 140 roles, with performances in the parking lot.

The Playhouse was a Producing Theatre in the 2018 AACT New Play Festival, with *TBD (To Be Determined)*, by Paul Elliot. (The play is now titled *Making Sweet Tea and Other Secrets*.)



Spokane, Washington

stagelefttheater.org

Stage Left Theater is the Inland Northwest's premiere progressive nonprofit theatre, whose mission is "to tell stories, build community, and pursue equity through the production of new and existing theatrical works. We engage in discussions that bring to light the experiences of traditionally underrepresented communities, with an emphasis on expanding diversity both on the stage and in our leadership."

In an ongoing effort to reach more inclusive audiences, Stage Left now produces both live and virtual content, expanding its goal of creating theatre for all. Visit the Stage Left Theater website to find out more about the theatre and its mission.



Jonesville, Michigan

thesauk.org

Sauk Theatre began in 1961 as the Broad Street Players.

The organization purchased the former Jonesville Opera House in 1971 and converted it into what is now the Sauk Theatre. The Sauk, also known as Hillsdale Community Theatre, annually produces a five-show mainstage, three-show SaukSeconds season, and a summer "Family Fun" production. Also, each summer, Plays-in-Development readings give local playwrights an opportunity to workshop their plays. The program began in 2015 and expanded nationally and, in 2018, internationally. New plays are also presented as part of the annual Sauk Shorts, an evening of 10-minute plays. The Sauk's Teen Theatre Project is developing a peer-created anti-bullying play to tour local schools. All these activities have earned the company local, state, and national attention for its unique programming and dedication to producing new work.



Verona, Wisconsin

vact.org

Verona Area Community Theater (VACT) was founded in 1992, and since has grown exponentially, offering 10-12 productions each season, with paid annual attendance of well over 9,000. In addition to musicals and plays featuring adults and youth, at least five productions each year are for youth only, and in 2022, VACT began a program for actors aged 55 and over. Staff and cast for all VACT productions are almost entirely volunteers.

VACT performs most shows in two local school performing arts centers, while rehearsals, class programming, and some smaller productions use its own, state-of-the-art building that opened in 2017 after a major three-year fundraising campaign. The building includes a dance studio, music room, full shop and lighting area, costume room, costume storage and prop area, and office and conference space, as well as a 120-seat theatre.

VACT's year-round arts programming for youth and adults includes classes and workshops, summer camps, and a dance program in partnership with the City of Verona Recreation Department. VACT offers scholarships to outgoing high school seniors, and its application assistance program provides mentorship and financial assistance to teens of color who have participated in VACT programs and are in the process of applying to colleges, training, or trade programs.

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Seeking Workshop Proposals (and Ideas) for AACTFest 2023

AACTFest 2023 in Louisville, June 12-17, 2023, will be the first in-person AACTFest in four years, and the AACT Education and Workshops Committees want your help making it the best festival ever.

AACT is currently accepting proposals and ideas for in-person workshops that will inspire and engage all who attend.

Workshops can explore any aspect of theatre, including:

- Acting
- Administration
- Design / Tech
- Directing
- Diversity / Inclusion
- Education
- Fight/ Intimacy Choreography
- Licensing
- Marketing / Outreach
- Musical Theatre
- IT (Tech)
- Youth Programming
- ...and more!



AACT workshops include a variety of topics and presentation styles that educate, inspire, and challenge festival attendees

Here are some top tips to consider when submitting a proposal:

- Think Outside the Box! Unique and specific topics are encouraged, no matter how “out-there” they sound
- Active and Hands On! The most well-received workshops allow attendees to learn by doing. Take advantage of being there in person
- Think About Time! Most workshops are 75-minute sessions, but the committees are open to ideas for both longer or shorter presentations, if those work better for the subjects at hand

Complete the form at aact.org/workshop-rfp and submit your proposal by the October 30, 2022 deadline.

Is there a subject you want to learn more about? We'd love to hear your suggestions! Email your ideas to AACT Education Coordinator David A. VanCleave at dvancleave@aact.org.

Help us provide you with the most enriching experience possible in Louisville at AACTFest 2023!

2023 Design Competition Goes Hybrid

The 2023 AACT Design Competition, to be held concurrently with AACTFest 2023 in Louisville, Kentucky, next June, will adopt a hybrid model, allowing designers to present their designs at-festival or virtually.

Designs categories include Scenic, Lighting, Properties, Costume, and Special Design. All designs must be the work of AACT individual members or be designs used for AACT organizational member productions. Productions need to have been staged between **July 1, 2021 and May 31, 2023**.

Watch for further details in the September/October 2022 *Spotlight*, including:

- The competition's hybrid model
- Design requirements and guidelines
- The adjudication rubric
- Entry procedures and forms

Introducing the New AACT Webinars

Gain new skills and enhance those you have

AACT is excited to introduce a newly curated collection of virtual educational programs focused on directing, design/tech, dramaturgy, education/youth programming, management, marketing/community outreach, and more.

Each program in our AACT Webinars offers a unique format but are all designed to benefit theatre organizations and individual artists across the nation, regardless of location or budget size.

Here is a look at the Roundtables, Virtual Masterclasses, and Industry Connections coming this year, as well as a sneak peek at two brand-new programs launching this fall.

Roundtables

Monthly, panel-based discussions are available to AACT members only, these free events feature four to six experts sharing their insight and experience. Attendees may submit questions during the event or in advance.

July 19: On the Road to AACTFest

Is performing at AACTFest in your future? Don't let the logistics put a damper on the exciting experience. Learn everything you need to know about taking a show on the road.

August 16: Accessibility Toolkit

Come away with practical ideas for serving all your audiences and volunteers, including those with special needs, mobility issues, language barriers, impaired vision or hearing, economic barriers, and more.

September 20: Audience Enrichment

Further engage theatergoers through pre-show lectures, post-show discussions, audience study guides, and more.

October 18: Season Selection

Choosing the right productions for your theatre is a never-ending process. Learn strategies to plan the perfect, well-rounded season to engage your audience.

November 15: Board Development

Enhance your board's effectiveness by clarifying and developing roles and responsibilities, policies, recruitment strategies, and more. Top tools for governing, advisory, fundraising, and working boards.

Virtual Masterclasses

Virtual Masterclasses are 75 to 90-minute in-depth explorations of specific skills or topics, offered every other month. Registration is \$15 for AACT members; \$25 for non-members.

August 4: Marketing 101

Learn how to keep up with the busy pace of marketing, even without a dedicated PR staff. Develop overall strategies, design creative content, and discover the platforms that will save time and build audiences.



Presenter Julie Nemitz is an in-demand theatre marketing expert who educates and inspires theatre organizations and theatre-makers to create innovative and effective marketing strategies, systems, and content. Inside the Theatre Marketing Academy Lab, Julie has

taught workshops and masterclasses to over 1,000 arts organizations across North America and Australia.

October 6: Making Something Out of Nothing: Big Designs/Tiny Budgets

In a perfect world, a designer's budget would be as grand as their vision. Luckily, a production's quality is not directly proportional to its budget size. Learn creative strategies for delivering show-stopping designs on any budget.



Presenter Susanna Douthit has designed costumes, props, and sets on budgets of all sizes. She has designed costumes for Olympic figure skating champion Brian Boitano, Ballet Nacional del Perú, the world premiere of *Our Town the Opera*, and countless community

theatres and drag queens.

December 1: Finders Keepers: Volunteer Recruitment, Retention, and Recognition

Discover how to identify new volunteers and keep them coming back with practical volunteer management strategies.



Presenter Mary Jo DeNolf spent 22 years as the Director of Operations and Volunteers at Grand Rapids Civic Theatre, where she also worked as stage manager and props designer. She was the production manager for AACTFest in 2017, 2019, and 2021, and is currently AACT's Festivals/Engagement Coordinator.

Script Club

Our new Script Club launches this September and will be offered every other month. Each session focuses on a different script trending with community theatres. Attendees read the script in advance to prepare for small and large group discussions of the play's themes, challenges, and opportunities.

Visit aact.org/webinars for topics, dates, and registration details.

AACT Community Theatre Management Conference 2023 (CTMC)

Details coming soon! aact.org/ctmc

AACT will once again be offering a virtual and in-person CTMC conference next spring. Gain new insights and solid, practical information on a wide variety of topics important to you and your theatre.

Industry Connections

These 30-minute presentations from major theatre resource providers showcase their services and support for theatre-makers. These monthly events stream live on social media to the general public, but only members have the opportunity to interact with presenters.

- **August 10: Subplot Studios, with Jimmy apRoberts**
- **September 10: Music Theatre International (MTI), with John Prignano**
- **October 12: Broadway Media, with Quentin Sanford**

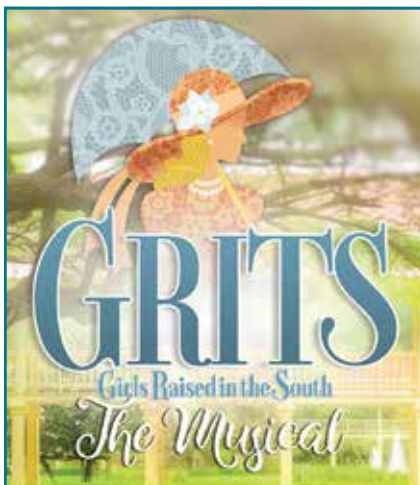
Follow-Up

Interested in joining a Roundtable panel or teaching a Virtual Masterclass? Have questions about any of our AACT Webinars? Contact AACT Education Coordinator, David A. VanCleave, at dvancleave@aact.org.

Donate to AACT Programming and Services

AACT is able to further its mission with the support and generosity of donors and members. Your gift helps connect local theatres and individuals with networking, resources, educational experiences, and support to suit the needs of those involved in community theatre.

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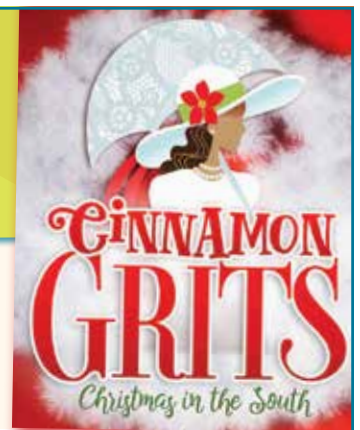
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Christine Crowley, Boerne Community Theatre Executive Director, presents the Spotlight Award to Allen Rudolph at TExFest 2022

Spotlight Award

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

Boerne (TX) Community Theatre, (BCT), honored **Allen Rudolph** with the AACT Spotlight Award during the Theatre Network of Texas (TNT) TExFest 2022 in February. The community theatre Festival was held at the Cailloux City Center for the Performing Arts in Kerrville, Texas. BCT Executive Director Christine Crowley made the Spotlight Award presentation.

Allen has served Boerne Community Theatre since its inception in the 1990s, in many roles, including actor, director, scene designer and builder, lighting and props designer, and often performing handyman duties to help avoid costly repairs. During the recent pandemic quarantine, Allen spent many days alone at the theatre, cleaning, organizing, repairing, and getting the theatre ready to resume live productions. He has also been active with Theatre Network of Texas' Quad III, serving as Festival Chair for several years!

Allen studied at the National Shakespeare Conservatory in New York before returning to Boerne, and his nomination letter points to his wide experience and formal education in "providing BCT with a professional touch while maintaining the spirit of a community theatre. His knowledge and abilities are paramount to the theatre's success; we have learned so much from him and value his continuing contribution to our theatre."



Make a Legacy Gift

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

To learn more about AACT's Legacy Society, visit aact.org/legacy or contact the AACT office at info@aact.org



One Set—11 Shows How Smart Design Saved Chattanooga Theatre Center's Season

Tammy Knotts

"Necessity is the mother of invention," goes the old saying—and it's still true. The imaginative solution described below could be a game-changer for theatres dealing with any number of challenges from budget constraints to volunteer shortages, to reducing waste.

It began when, like so many theatres, Chattanooga Theatre Centre (CTC) began making plans to reopen after COVID-19 restrictions had forced it to close for the first time in its 98-year history.

The pandemic had already halted a production of Agatha Christie's *The Hollow*. In CTC's smaller Circle Theatre sat the set of *Barefoot in the Park*, which was scheduled to open soon after *The Hollow*. Both plays were written and selected in a different world where COVID wasn't an issue. There was kissing, people up close, and fighting.

"We didn't feel like we could do those plays justice by trimming them or editing them to keep actors safe," explains CTC Director of Productions Scott Dunlap. "Right away, we ruled out the Circle as a performance space because of the intimacy of it. It was too close to keep everyone six feet apart, as required."

However, the Mainstage Theatre *was* large enough to maintain social distance on stage and between those in the audience. With *The Hollow* closed, CTC decided to keep the set, in hopes of staging the show when it could. But how, when the availability of staff and volunteers had plummeted, due to the pandemic?

According to CTC Executive Director Rodney Van Valkenburg, that was the moment that prompted Dunlap's clever solution—to use the same basic set, modifying it for each subsequent production. That would give the audience a fresh stage for each show, while reducing the number of staff and volunteers required for building totally new sets.



The set for Agatha Christie's The Hollow on CTC's Mainstage Theatre

Making it Work

After combing through hundreds of small-cast plays that could be performed on the existing set while observing pandemic safety protocols, CTC chose Emily Mann's *Having Our Say* for the first production.

Having Our Say had a cast of two women and required the first set redesign. Dunlap said, "It was the easiest transition. We kept most of the *Hollow* set the same, except for some decorations and moving some off-stage spaces around to create more depth for the living room of those ladies."

Dunlap also suggested the precaution of double-casting each show, something "that came from my years of directing youth theatre—if one kid gets sick, you have a replacement. But with COVID, of course, if one person in the cast tested positive, the whole cast would have to be out. So, we needed a backup plan with a second cast."



The original set for The Hollow restructured for Having Our Say

continued on next page

Choices and Taking Chances

Along with *Having Our Say*, CTC chose *Lobby Hero* and *It's a Wonderful Life: A Radio Play* as productions that would continue using the same set.

"With each show, we just kept holding out hope that we would get back to doing *The Hollow*," Dunlap said. "But with each play, we got further out from our original intent, and took bigger chances with each one. We started changing the set color, painting the floor differently, and really mixing it up."

Since the original set had been designed for a particular show with its own staging requirements, Dunlap had to figure out what changes would be needed to accommodate each new show.

Going from the Delany sisters' living room in *Having Our Say* to the foyer of a Manhattan apartment building for *Lobby Hero* involved a significant transformation, with more paint treatment and embellishments. Just as important, these choices would be done in a way to make the next switch easier.

"We were always thinking of three shows at a time and how this would evolve from show to show," Dunlap explains. "For example, once *Lobby Hero* opened, I began sketching the set for *It's a Wonderful Life*."

As he did, he had to make choices, knowing that certain things about the set's existing core elements would not change. Though the walls got a complete color change, the floor was painted in a way that would be used later for *The Wind in the Willows*.



The set as altered for Almost Maine

And yet, throughout the process, Dunlap managed to transform each set in a way that made them virtually unrecognizable from the previous one. Even actors returning to see a new show said they had trouble distinguishing which parts had been used in their production's set.

Notably, instead of keeping the theatre's inventive solution a secret, CTC's Marketing Director Julie Van Valkenburg chose to display Dunlap's set renderings in the mainstage lobby, showcasing these amazing transformations.

"What we didn't have during the pandemic was time and money. We had half the staff and were doing with less than the normal number of volunteers in an effort to reduce COVID exposure. There was no way we could have built a new set from the ground up for each show, due to the lack of money and labor shortage. Re-using the set really saved us."

- Rodney Van Valkenburg

Executive Director



Another transformation for the production of Lobby Hero

Challenges of Change

The show that proved to be the most challenging to redesign was *Working*, the season's only musical. The challenge for Dunlap was that *The Hollow* set was designed for a murder mystery, and one of the ways in which he had chosen to create tension was to have the entrances and exits out of balance. The set had four entrances from the center to stage-left, and only one entrance on stage-right—problematic for a musical.

"It makes it difficult when you want half of the actors to come from one side and half from the other side," Dunlap explains, "so we added entrances a bit downstage on the stage-right side to give more balance."

The Miss Firecracker Contest was Dunlap's favorite design, because of "the way that everything worked. There was a swinging door that went into the kitchen, and the

script calls for the actors to come into the kitchen from the dining room. I created a similar space in the hallway and an entrance, altogether making a figure-eight configuration. As a director myself, I thought it would be a lot of fun to block the actors through that, and it also was a really beautiful set."

"Actually, all the shows were beautiful," Dunlap adds, "and I'm really proud of each one, because they were all different. They all had the same bones, but each had a different personality. It's like costuming people to make them look like different characters."

Throughout this journey, Dunlap had some valuable assistance. "Crew member Annie Collins and I worked and painted sets so often that we began to know immediately what the problem areas would be. We learned to communicate non-verbally about what needed to happen to the space and how to proceed with the work, which was fun," he says.



The setting for The Miss Firecracker Contest presented challenges

"As we moved forward and added Jesse Headrick to our crew, it was nice to have some fresh eyes to give perspective on it. He worked on how to create a cleaner, safer space both onstage and backstage, which helped in cleaning, caring and maintaining the set," said Dunlap. "Without the help of Annie, Jesse, and Justin Holderman, none of this would have happened."

Dunlap not only designed and transformed the same set for each show, but also worked on costuming, painting, pulling props, and designing new lighting, which Alex Miller-Long came in and installed.

Though there were moments when Dunlap felt he was losing steam, once the last production had closed and the set removed, he found it "a little bittersweet. Part of me wanted to get one more show out of it."

The set pieces have had an amazing history. Originally built for *The Hollow*, which was postponed, they were repurposed for *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Dunlap then recycled the set for *Having Our Say*, *Lobby Hero*, *It's a Wonderful Life: A Radio Play*, *Almost Maine*, *The Wind in the Willows*, *Vintage Hitchcock: A Radio Play*, *The Miss Firecracker Contest*, *Working* before finally coming at last full circle with the October-November 2021 production of *The Hollow*.

"It was important for us to find a way to do live performances safely and well, I'm very proud we were able to produce shows during the pandemic without sacrificing quality. We maintained our standards. And we wouldn't have had such a successful season without Scott's creativity and ingenuity."

- Rodney Van Valkenburg

Executive Director

While CTC's "one set—11 shows" solution was the result of constraints posed by COVID-19, the savings in both costs and hours of labor would translate well to theatres seeking to make the most of available resources for any number of reasons.

And, while Dunlap admits that it was exciting to finally take it all down and start fresh, he also is proud of what CTC accomplished: "We really made lemonade out of the lemons we had last year."



The transformation for the production of Vintage Hitchcock: A Radio Play

Tammy Knotts has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Communications with a minor in English from the University of Alabama in Huntsville and has written news articles for The Daily Sentinel in Scottsboro, Alabama, and The Huntsville Times. In recent years, she has enjoyed writing blog articles for the Chattanooga Theatre Centre after her youngest son, Paul, began acting in youth shows at CTC.

WELCOME Newly Elected Members-at-Large to the AACT Board of Directors

The AACT Board of Directors elected the following to the Board of Directors for three-year terms. The Board of Directors elected officers at the board meeting held at aactWORLDFEST in Venice, Florida, June 25, 2022



Kay Armstrong

Dallas, Texas/Region VI

Kay has been in service to AACT for over 25 years at state, regional, and national levels. She has served on AACT committees and task forces multiple times. She is an AACT Fellow and Art

Cole Lifetime Leadership recipient. She was AACT's editor/publisher of the Twink Lynch *Spotlight on Boards* book. She worked in arts management over 40 years for state and local arts organizations (theatre and dance) and sat on state and local performing arts granting panels. She is a member of the South West Theatre Conference and AACT and serves as an adjudicator for Broadway Dallas' High School Musical Theatre Awards.



Tom Booth

Tupelo, Mississippi/Region IVA

Tom has served as Executive Director of Tupelo Community Theatre since 2002. He has degrees from Mississippi State University and the University of Southern Mississippi, and

became involved with theatre in 1978 at Amory Community Theatre, and then with Tupelo Community Theatre in 1992. He has served as president of Rotary Club of Tupelo, The Mississippi Theatre Association (MTA), and The Downtown Tupelo Main Street Association, as well as in leadership positions with MTA, the Southeastern Theatre Conference and on the AACT Board. Tom has directed 10 winning productions at MTA, named best director twice, had three winners at SETC and brought *Lone Star* to AACTFest, where it won three awards, including Outstanding Achievement in Scenic Design.



Steven H. Butler

Gainesville, Florida/Region IVB

Steven currently serves as Member-At-Large with the AACT Board of Directors. He was appointed to the board in 2019 by then President Rick Kirby. Since then, Steven has

been of service on the following committees: Finance, Nomination, and NewPlayFest. During the COVID lockdown, Steven was of great help to the AACT's Webinar series giving of his time to serve as panelist and facilitator. In the summer of 2021, he represented the U.S. at the 37th AITA/IATA World Congress in Monaco. Steven is the Executive Director for the Florida Theatre Conference (a non-profit theatre arts education program) and Founder/Artistic Director of Actors' Warehouse in Gainesville, Florida.



Rebecca Fry

Shawnee, Oklahoma/Region VI

Rebecca has been involved in community theatre for over 25 years acting, directing, managing the box office, sewing costumes, and volunteering countless hours. She currently serves as

the Managing Director of Shawnee Little Theatre (SLT) in Shawnee, Oklahoma. She believes her community is richer thanks to community theatre, and that it is important to work together to bring quality theatre to our neighbors. Rebecca has a passion to spread the love of theatre, especially to youth. She helped organize and direct Kid's Camps at SLT and was the Speech/Drama teacher at Shawnee Middle School before her retirement.



Kristofer Geddie

Venice, Florida/Region IVB

Kris trekked to Florida 11 years ago to play "Coalhouse Walker" in *Ragtime* at Venice Theatre, and never left. He is currently the Director of Diversity and General Manager and in the

final semester of graduate school at Goucher College for a Masters in Arts Administration. Prior to coming to Venice, Kris had been seen performing on stages around the world. Kris serves on the Ambassador Circle for Embracing our Differences, the EDI council for SETC, is the treasurer of the Florida Theatre Conference, and is thrilled to serve as a current board member of the Friends of the Venice Public Library and American Association of Community Theatre.



Chris Hamby

Peoria, Arizona/Region VIII

Chris is an award-winning director and the Artistic Director for TheaterWorks in Peoria, Arizona. He has worked with many theater companies throughout his home state.

He is a past President and board member for the arizoni Theatre Awards of Excellence. He is an alum of the American Express Leadership Academy and the ANIMATION program with the Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia. Chris was awarded the Governor's Arts Award in the Artist category for his body of work in 2020. Additionally, he was recently named the Home Town Hero-Trailblazer for his accomplishments in the City of Peoria, Arizona.



Scot MacDonald

Valparaiso, Indiana/Region III

Scot has served in many capacities with Valparaiso's Memorial Opera House both on and off stage. Serving first as a volunteer (2006), then Box Office Manager (2012) and

Artistic Director (2013); in 2016 Scot stepped into the role of Executive Director. Working in partnership with the leaders of Porter County and Memorial Opera House Foundation, staff, and volunteers, Scot has helped establish quality, diversity, and community engagement as core values of the Opera House.



Dorinda Toner

Portland, Oregon/Region IX

Dorinda Toner has been performing on stages across North America for over 36 years. She studied Theater/Directing at University in her native country where she

is also a multi-album Canadian Recording Artist. A prolific director, she has won several awards for her work and is delighted to have contributed both as a guest columnist for AACT's *Spotlight* magazine and as a panelist for AACT's virtual Roundtables. Most recently she co-facilitated AACT's virtual Community Theatre Management Conference for the second year in a row. Dorinda has served on several nonprofit boards and is currently the Vice President of PATA (Portland Area Theatre Alliance). She is an award-winning director and actress and enjoys intimacy coaching for stage actors. Dorinda believes strongly that community theatre changes lives. She has been the Producing Artistic Director of Twilight Theater Company in Portland, Oregon since May, 2016.

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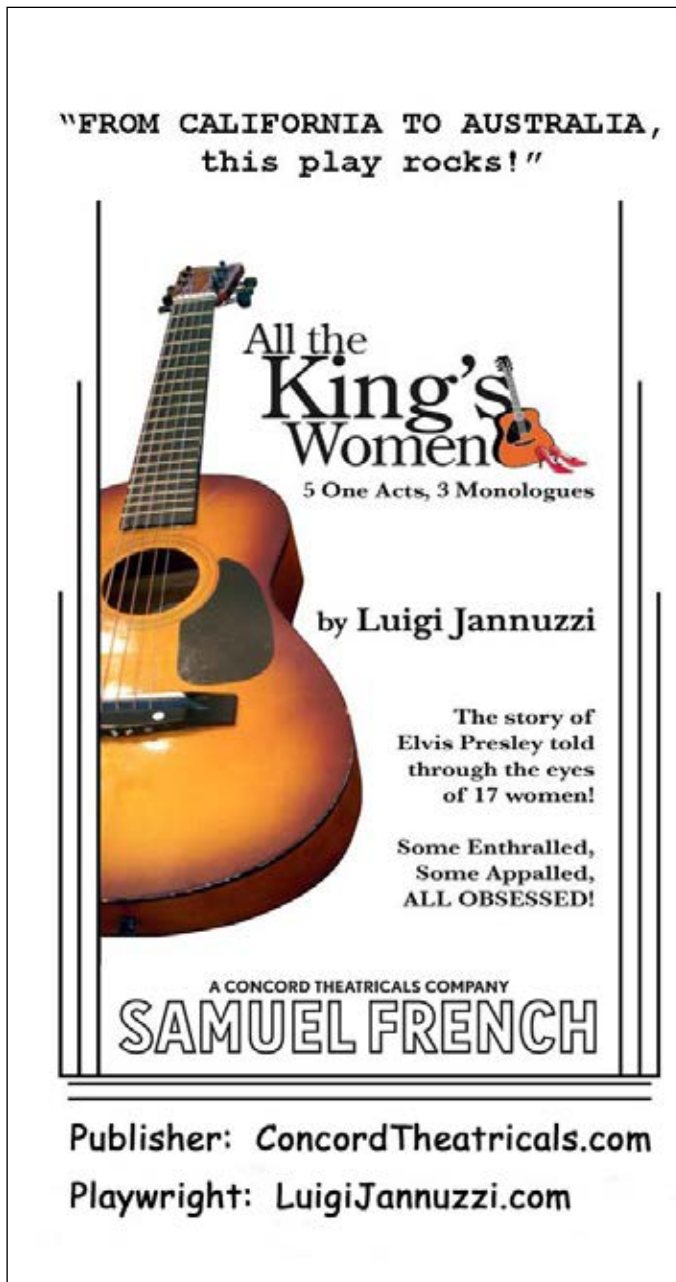
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New Roles

The **Manatee Performing Arts Center** in Bradenton, Florida, welcomes **Caren Brady** as its Costume Designer.



Caren Brady
Costume Designer

Caren grew up in the Cincinnati area. She pursued Fashion Merchandising at Bluffton University, where she created the self-designed major of Costume Design, and costumed several shows, including *Kiss Me, Kate*, *The Mikado*, and *She Loves Me*. After college, she purchased a costume company, and over the next 12 years, built her business and costumed many shows, which led to her working with Cincinnati Landmark Productions. After a fire destroyed her building and inventory, she went to work for the company as their resident costumer, remaining there for 13 years.

Caren will spend the summer at Manatee Performing Arts Center getting the shop in shape, reinvigorating volunteers, and expanding the number of people building costumes for the upcoming season and beyond.

Market House Theatre in Paducah, Kentucky, welcomes several new staff members since August 2021.



Jerome Veit
Technical Director

Jerome graduated from Southern Illinois University (SIU) with a degree in theatre, specializing in technical direction. While at SIU, he designed sound for several shows, including *The Lion*, *The Witch*, and *The Wardrobe*, *Pippin*, and *Punk Rock*. In his final year, he was technical director for *To Kill a Mockingbird* and was Assistant Technical Director for *Sunday in the Park with George*. Jerome spent three summers working at McLeod Summer Playhouse as Carpenter, Lead Carpenter, and Sound Designer, working on *Sister Act*, *Mamma Mia*, *9 to 5*, *Gypsy*, and eight others. Jerome has been participating in theater for over 15 years and has worked on over 40 productions.



Brendan Corbett
Master Carpenter/Resident Technician

Brendan is a recent graduate of Berry College in Georgia. He is excited to join the Market House team. He has previously worked at Des Moines Metro Opera and Porthouse Theatre in Ohio.

continued on next page

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Charlotte Campbell

Costume Director

Charlotte attended the University of Louisville, pursuing a “sensible” major (read: not theatre). While there, performed in and costumed shows around the city. Since graduation, Charlotte has gained over a decade of professional experience performing and costuming at theatres in Colorado, California, Vermont, Florida, Indiana, Washington D.C., and her home state of Kentucky. For the past two years, she has served as the Head Costumer of *The Stephen Foster Story* in Bardstown, Kentucky.



Caleb Buford

Marketing Director

Caleb has dedicated himself to creating and developing ways to share the power of the arts and arts education with the community through engaging content and effective media.

His work has been featured in many local publications, including the *Paducah Sun* and *Vue Magazine*, as well as organizations like the Merryman House Domestic Crisis Center. “The arts are for everyone,” he explains. “Art provides an opportunity for individuals to explore the world, society, and personally reflect. Market House Theatre works to make the arts accessible to all, which drives me to continue to be a part of their mission.” Caleb is an Eagle Scout and an alum of West Kentucky Community and Technical College (WKCTC). He recently earned a B.A. in Communication Studies from Northern Kentucky University (NKU).



Alexandria Brue

Stage Manager

Alexandria is a 2020 graduate of Southern Illinois University Carbondale with a Bachelor of Arts in Theatre, with a focus in stage management and props. She has worked various jobs in theatre including stage management, props work, scenic painting and carpentry, and electrics. Some of her recent credits include *Mississippi Goddamn*, *Torch Song Trilogy*, and *Days of Rage* at Playhouse on the Square in Memphis, Tennessee. Some of her favorite stage management credits include *Sunday in the Park with George*, *The 39 Steps*, and *Million Dollar Quartet*.

Market House Theatre is also excited to welcome the following part-time staff members:



Morgan Powell Bryant

Bookkeeper

With over 15 years of accounting and business expertise, Morgan has a passion for helping small businesses grow and be profitable. She is a graduate of Kentucky’s Murray State University with a Bachelor’s degree in Business, with a major in Accounting.



Joshua Parrott

Box Office Assistant

Joshua is joining the Market House Theatre family. He is a graduate of Elon University’s B.F.A. Music Theatre and B.A. Arts Administration programs.

Barn Lot Theater in Edmonton, Kentucky, is moving in new directions with major staffing changes and its first 10-show season in 42 years, according to Executive Director Brandon Kyle Hadley, who this year celebrated 10 years at Barn Lot Theater. The theatre has now welcomed the following 2021 and 2022 hires:



Amy Ballard
Executive Assistant



Kyrie-Inn Blue
Development Director



Johnathan Bryant
Auction Barn Manager



Teresa “TK” Kitchens
Office Manager



Kenneth Scheller
Technical Director



Crystal Napier
Maintenance Director



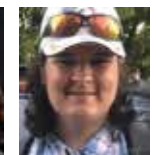
Joseph McDowell
Artistic Associate



Heather Haley
Fundraising Associate



Katelyn Bailey
Intern



Randall Brown
Intern

Congratulations to all those with new roles! It is wonderful to see so many additions our member theatres are making to their staff. If you have someone in a new role at your theatre, email info@aact.org to have your theatre and new staff featured in *Spotlight*.

Spotlight On Discounter



InstantEncore helps arts organizations engage and retain audiences by delivering “world-class patron experiences powered by today’s technology.”

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bit.ly/AACT-InsideGuide
- Grand Rapids Civic Theatre’s recent digital program for *Kinky Boots*:
bit.ly/GRCT-KinkyBoots

EarlLewinPlaywright.com

PREVIEW

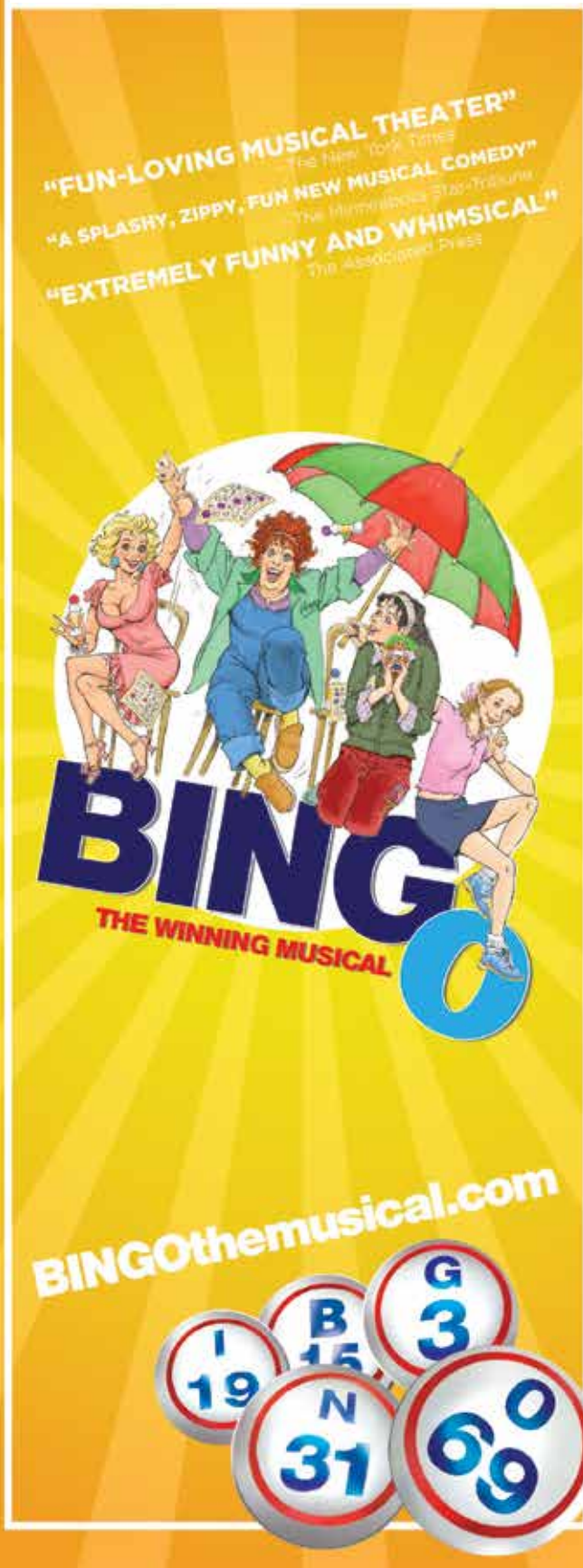
A collection of original contemporary American plays produced at community theatres since 2016.

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Opportunities and Resources

Listings do not imply AACT endorsement



The theme of the 2022 Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE) Conference is "Rehearsing the Possible: Practicing Reporative Creativity." The conference includes a wide range of discussions, workshops, and key-note speakers that are all designed to move you forward.

July 28 – 31, 2022 – Detroit, Michigan
athe.org/page/21conf_home



The annual Educational Theatre Association (EdTA) National Conference hosts 500+ participants. The event includes keynote speakers, workshops, networking, and professional development intensives.

Sept. 28 – Oct. 2, 2022 – Los Angeles, California
tec.schooltheatre.org/index.cfm

"Entertaining and frightening — and fun playing with convention"

ALEX ROE

Artistic Director, Metropolitan Playhouse, NY

A marriage in tremors, a dreamland waking up.
 Ann and Jerold take turns on a stage full of props reenacting favorite scenes — until outcomes turn dark. Set in the shadows of a seaside amusement park during the Great Depression and war years.

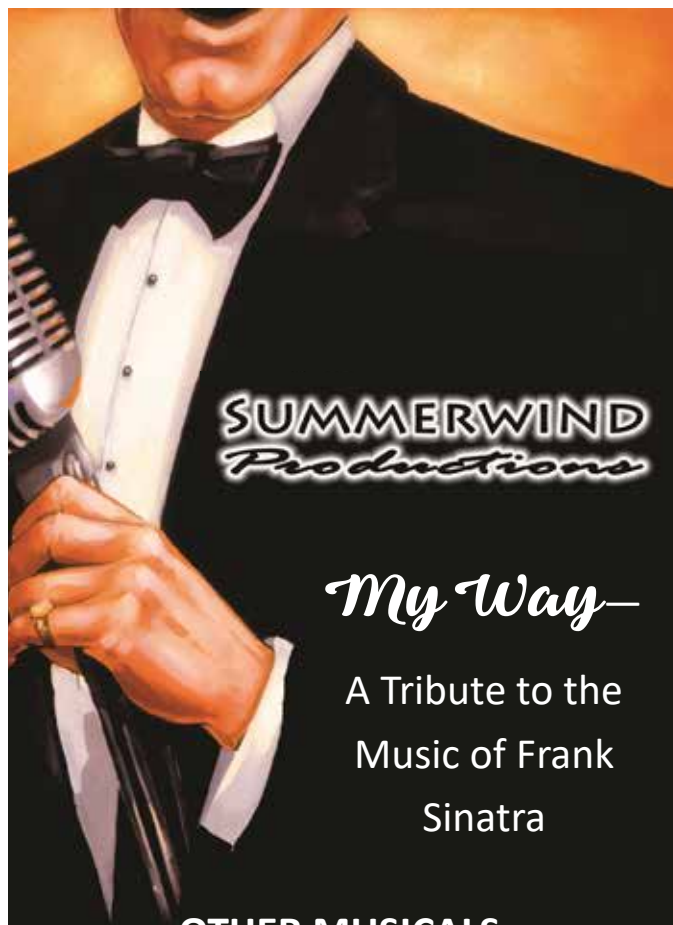
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FIRE IN THE FOG

A PLAY IN TWO ACTS BY **AUGUST BELDEN**

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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:
summerwindproductions.com

Web Power

Whether you are a playwright or a theatre company looking to encourage new works, AACTivity is here to help.

Through AACTivity's online features, AACT-member playwrights provide complete information about their scripts, including plot summary, cast breakdown, technical requirements, and production history, plus a bio and contact information. AACTivity Playwrights can enter, edit, and delete information about their plays at any time, at their convenience. To become part of AACTivity, visit aact.org/aactivity (you must be signed into view), and follow the instructions under "Want an AACTivity Account?"

All AACTivity Playwright listings are public, allowing theatres to browse through all the plays, or zero in on categories like Comedy, Comedy-Drama, Drama, Musical, and Other. Along with AACT NewPlayFest, AACTivity is designed to promote awareness and access to scripts that might otherwise be overlooked. AACTivity Playwright listings can be found on the Play Sources page at aact.org/sources.

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



Artie's Advocacy Tip

Shuttered Venues Operator Grant (SVOG) Update Administered by the Small Business Administration (SBA)

More than \$14.5 billion in COVID-19 economic relief has been awarded to over 13,000 performing arts venues and organizations, movie theaters, talent representatives, producers, and museums.

SBA Website Resources For SVOG Grantees

The SBA has updated their website for grantees with a section on Manage your SVOG grant (sba.gov). It is full of helpful information including:

- Guidance documents and FAQs
- Informational Sessions and other assistive aids
- How to spend SVOG award funds
- How to respond to the Final Budget Action item
- How to respond to the Expense Report Action item
- Audit requirements
- Additional information on grant closeout process
- Get technical support with the SVOG portal

Calendar of Events

Dates	Event	State	City	Contact ph #	Contact email	Web Site
Aug 3-6	Colorado State Festival	CO	Northglenn		info@cctcfestival.com	cctcfestival.org/
Aug 19-21	Florida State Festival	FL	Winter Haven	941-584-0639	kristofer@flatheatre.org	flatheatre.org
Aug 26-28	New Hampshire State Festival	NH	Concord	603-228-2793	fpierce1804@hotmail.com	facebook.com/groups/nhtth

Advertisers

<i>A Night at Gatsby's</i>	18	Kenneth Jones, Playwright	27
<i>Bingo The Winning Musical</i>	31	<i>Hollywood, Nebraska</i>	
Classics On Stage	27	Luigi Jannuzzi, Playwright	24
Concord Theatricals	10	<i>All the King's Women</i>	
<i>Our Town</i>		McGee Entertainment	17
Dieli Stage Works	32	<i>Grits: The Musical</i>	
<i>Fire in the Fog</i>		Pioneer Drama Service	25
Disney Theatrical Licensing	6	<i>Monster In Me</i>	
<i>Newsies Jr.</i>		<i>Spreading It Around</i>	27
Dramatic Publishing	5	Stage Rights	2
<i>Casserole, Proprioception</i>		<i>The Marvelous Wonderettes</i>	
Earl Lewin Plays	31	Subplot Studio	26
Eldridge Plays & Musicals	25	Summerwind Productions	32
<i>Nellie the Musical</i>		<i>My Way</i>	
<i>Harris Cashes Out!</i>	34	TRW Plays	9
Heuer Publishing	3	TRW	23
Free Reads for AACT Members		<i>The Color Purple and More</i>	
Heuer Publishing	35	Thomas Hischak, Playwright	29
<i>The Day Before Christmas</i>		World Classics On Stage	
Historical Emporium	29	USITT	33
<i>Judy Garland, World's Greatest Entertainer</i>	13		

Harris Cashes Out!

by Londos D'Arrigo

writer for JOAN RIVERS, PHYLLIS DILLER and LILY TOMLIN

**Another hilarious, proven comedy from
the author of *SPREADING IT AROUND***

Reviews and photos: www.londos.net

Publisher: www.canadianplayoutlet.com



THE DAY BEFORE Christmas

BOOK AND STORY BY *Ken Jones*

MUSIC BY *Jamey Strawn*

LYRICS BY *Christine Jones*




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2022 WEBINARS

AACT is excited to introduce a newly curated collection of virtual educational programs.

Each program offers a unique format, designed
to benefit theatre organizations and individual artists across the nation.



Roundtables

Free, monthly, panel-based
discussions for AACT Members.

On the Road to AACTFest, July 19
Audience Enrichment, Aug 16
Accessibility Toolkit, Sept 20
Season Selection, Oct 18
Board Development, Nov 15



Virtual Masterclasses

In-depth explorations of specific
skills or topics, presented by
experts. Bimonthly.

\$15 for AACT members

\$25 for non-members

Marketing 101, Aug 4

Big Designs/Tiny Budgets, Oct 6

Volunteer Recruitment, Retention,
and Recognition, Dec 1



Industry Connections

30-minute presentations from
major theatre resource providers
showcasing their services and
support for theatre-makers.

Subplot Studios, Aug 10

Music Theatre International (MTI), Sept 10

Broadway Media, Oct 12

Plus New

Script Club

(beginning in September)

Schedules and topics are subject to change.
For complete information, visit

aact.org/webinars

