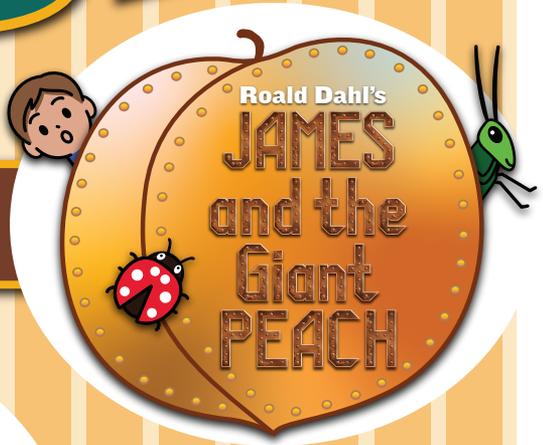




2024-25 Season

PLAYBILL

October 2024



BY WILLIAM GIBSON
THE MIRACLE WORKER



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**RESERVATIONS/INFORMATION:
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Aurora Players is a member of the Greater East Aurora Chamber of Commerce (GEACC), American Association of Community Theatre (AACT), Theatre Association of New York State (TANYS), Western New York Alliance of Community Theaters (WNY ACTS!), and The American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP).



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PARTICIPATION

Aurora Players is a non-profit organization and all work (technical support, actors, administration) is performed entirely by volunteers. Auditions for every production are open to members and non-members alike. Aurora Players encourages anyone interested to get involved, either on-stage or backstage. It's a great opportunity for families, no experience is necessary, and all are welcome! Visit our website for more information on membership, shows, and events: auroraplayers.org.



AP ONLINE

Looking for an easy way to purchase tickets securely and find out more about Aurora Players? Our website, auroraplayers.org, contains information on this season's shows, including photos and videos, auditions, volunteer opportunities (both for shows and to work on committees) and much more. Be sure to bookmark the site and stop back often to stay informed about new opportunities and events.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the organization is to create interest in and foster enthusiasm for the dramatic arts; to provide a medium of expression for those who love the theatre; and to be the means of bringing together in organized activities all those whose interest centers around drama.

DONATIONS

Our Pavilion is over 100 years old and anyone who has lived in an older home knows the project list never ends, but available funds, labor, and time usually do. If you – or someone you know – have resources, talents, or ideas that could help Aurora Players, please contact us at info@auroraplayers.org.

Your help will be greatly appreciated!

Our website is managed by Ian and Gina Ronan. Questions, comments and suggestions should be sent to info@auroraplayers.org.

Be sure to follow Aurora Players on **Facebook and Instagram**.



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Looking for a distinctive gift idea? Aurora Players Gift Cards, starting at \$20 and valid for one year from the date of issue, are available on our website: auroraplayers.org. Perfect for birthdays, holidays, "thank yous" or any occasion, our gift cards will give someone you care about a memorable experience at Aurora Players.



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 find out how you can help us thrive!**

"When I volunteer here, I get to meet so many cool people who want to bring another world to life on the stage just like we, and seeing the audience enjoy the finished product is its own reward!"

Quinn Gabuski

"It's never too late to start being artistic - even for a retired civil engineer!"

*Randy West,
 volunteer since 2023*

"Aurora Players gave me a purpose and a sense of belonging when I needed it most."

*Dori Shear McGowan,
 volunteer since 2012*

"I volunteered for AP because of my love of theater and music. Everyone has been super nice and welcoming, and I have made many new friends, even though I'm a little shy."

I am very happy to be involved!"
*Neal Bachman,
 volunteer since Spring 2024*



AP volunteers enjoyed getting together in April 2024 for a movie night and refreshments at the Aurora Theater & Popcorn Shop.

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PARTNERS IN SUCCESS

Aurora Players established the Community Partner Award in 2000 to recognize the contributions made on our behalf by local companies and organizations, and to demonstrate our appreciation for their enduring efforts and continued participation in our activities. The award has been conferred upon the following partners:

2000	Elma Press	2012	Allstate Insurance
2001	Aurora Answering Service	2013	Visual Impact Signs
2002	East Aurora Advertiser	2014	Warning Electrical Services
2003	Village of East Aurora	2015	Robert Sowyrda – “The Piano Man”
2004	Fisher-Price	2017	Elma Press
2005	The Roycrofters-At-Large Association	2018	East Aurora Cooperative Market
2006	Fontanese Folts Aubrecht Ernst, Architects	2019	Nativity Lutheran Church
2007	Aurora Paint Pot	2023	Andrews’ Barber Parlor
2008	Warning & Robel - Keith Warning, Matt Robel	2024	East Aurora UPS Store #5490
2010	Five Star Bank		
2011	Roycroft Campus Corporation		



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Our Houses, in the Middle of our Theater!

by Christie Koester Welsby

According to Shakespeare, “All the world’s a stage.” But here at Aurora Players, we know that it takes a lot more than just what’s seen on stage to have successful productions. What happens before, during and after a show offstage is just as important as the amazing work done by our actors on stage. The world of theater is broken into two areas: Front of House and Back of House. These areas are not necessarily based on their physical location within the theater, but based on their duties within the theater. Back of House (BoH) refers to the part of the theater that is not open to the public and is used by technicians or actors. Back of House roles include the actors, stage managers, lighting/sound crew, stage crew, makeup and hair crews. Back of House describes the talent that is only seen on stage, or may not be seen at all. Front of house (FoH) is the part of the theater that is used and seen by the audience. As Aurora Players patrons, you are likely familiar with our beautiful Front of House areas, such as our lobby, box office, refreshment stand and theater. Let’s get to know the friendly faces that keep our Front of House working smoothly.

We are fortunate to have had **Mark Eckstein** as our Front of House Coordinator for the past three years. The FoH Coordinator is the person in charge of all our Front of House staff. Mark got his start with Aurora Players in the fall of 2007 when he played Mr. Bumble in *Oliver!* Before that, his first impression of our organization was seeing *A Little Night Music* in 2003 and thinking, “Wow! This is community theater?” Like so many of the talented people involved with AP, in addition to Front of House Coordinator, Mark has held many roles within the organization including actor, director, stage manager, sound designer/technician, set building/painting, producer, member of our Board of Directors and a member of various other committees.

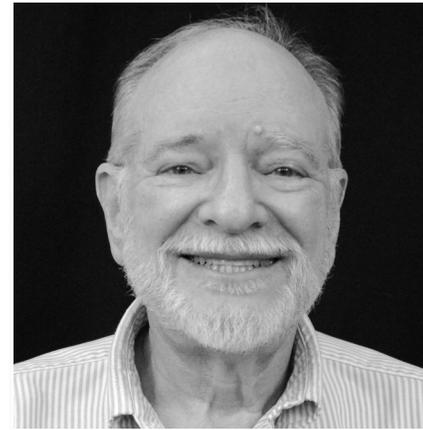
When the Front of House Coordinator position became available, Mark stepped in to lead. “It was an opportunity to do some more new things with the group. I like to learn new things, and see if I make old things run more efficiently,” shares Mark.

As our fearless Front of House leader, Mark coordinates the people in these positions:

★ **USHERS** help the patrons find their seats, hand out programs, enforce the safety and fire regulations, staff and clean the

refreshment stand, and put the house back in order after the performance by flipping seats up, collecting programs and generally picking up the theater.

- ★ The **IN-HOUSE USHER** does what the other ushers do, except they never leave the theater during the show (the in-house usher is often seated in seat J1). They control the entry and seating of latecomers, maintain order in the unlikely event of an evacuation and assist in any medical or other emergencies.
- ★ The **BOX OFFICE** has two people working within it. The **BOX OFFICE LEAD** prints the tickets, matches the tickets to the list of tickets sold, sells tickets to walk-up customers and answers Box Office telephone. The **BOX OFFICE ASSISTANT** organizes the pre-printed tickets, hands them to customers at the Will Call window and helps the lead as necessary.
- ★ The **CONCIERGE** sits in the Box Office during intermission and answers questions about Aurora Players, season information, memberships, volunteer opportunities, etc.
- ★ Last but not least, the **HOUSE MANAGER** oversees all front of house staff for a particular performance. On the day of a show,



Mark Eckstein *Front of House Coordinator*



Jeff Maris *Front of House/Back of House Volunteer*

the House Manager carries most of the Front of House workload. They typically arrive up 1-1/2 to 2 hours before the performance. Before the show begins, they check in with the stage manager, ensure the cleanliness of all public areas, stock up programs and refreshments, meet with ushers and review procedures, open the house for seating, check in with the box office for tickets not picked up and close the house for the start of the show. During Act 1 of the show, they prepare the refreshments, cash out the box office, check all the public areas for cleanliness and supplies. During intermission, they help sell refreshments, back up the concierge if necessary, and handle patrons’ questions and concerns. During Act 2, they clean the refreshment stand, complete the inventory sheet, cash out the refreshment stand and check all the public areas for cleanliness and supplies. After the show, they check all the public areas for cleanliness and supplies, straighten out the house, dismiss the ushers and check out with the stage manager. On the day of a show, our House Managers are incredibly vital to the performance’s success.

Another person active in AP in both Front of House and Back of House roles is **Jeff Maris**. Jeff has been with AP for 15 years and he first performed with AP in *Born Yesterday* in 2008. You may also recognize Jeff from his Back of House roles as Senex in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* and Sid Sorokin in *The Pajama Game*. Jeff has held

many Front of House positions, including usher and house manager, and he is currently a member of the playreading committee. His first Front of House role was ushering for *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* in 2008. “My first impression (of AP) was that the group was very welcoming to newcomers. Still is!” shares Jeff.

As you can imagine, while working in the Back of House takes a lot of talent, working in the Front of House also has its share of challenges. The gift of improv and thinking on your feet can be helpful in both places. Some memorable Front of House experiences have included dropping 150 tickets on the box office floor, realizing that the ticketing computer was missing from the box office before a show, and playing Candy Land in the refreshment stand. And during a musical, there may or may not be lip-syncing and dancing along with the cast in the box office/refreshment stand. Maybe. ■

Do you love theater, but perhaps don’t relish the thought of acting on stage or working in Back of House? AP always welcomes newcomers to our group in any role. A great way to start with us is to usher for a show. Prospective volunteers can visit our website at auroraplayers.org or email us at info@auroraplayers.org.

Thank you for your support of Aurora Players. We’re so glad you’re here, and we’d love to have you join us. Jeff Maris is right: we are so welcoming of newcomers and we are better together. Front or Back of House, all are welcome.



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Aurora Players offers Sponsorship Packages that provide your business with increased exposure in the community through multiple marketing opportunities.

Becoming a Sponsor and/or Playbill advertiser is a great way to show your support for the arts in East Aurora and to reach our theater patrons — not only within East Aurora, but from the surrounding towns as well. Our thousands of patrons include theater lovers from all of Erie County and beyond.

When audience members see your ad in the Playbill, it creates a positive impression of your business. It demonstrates that you're an involved and supportive member of the community!

Besides promoting your business, a sponsorship or Playbill advertisement provides many other benefits to you and the community:

- It enhances your image by connecting with people when they are enjoying a theatrical experience that truly engages them..
- Many of our patrons explore the Village of East Aurora as part of their visit, often shopping and dining either before or after a performance. A sponsorship or advertisement will keep your organization top-of-mind.
- Your support helps to fund our youth programs, including the Annual Youth Scholarship and our ProjectSTAGE summer education and mentoring program.
- Through your support, Aurora Players productions attract visitors to East Aurora and enhance the image of our community's charming, artistic and creative heritage.

Please e-mail Kelly Campbell, Fundraising Chair, at kanncampbell@gmail.com or call us at (716) 687-6727 to discuss your sponsorship options today! More information is also available at www.auroraplayers.org

Thank you for your continued support!

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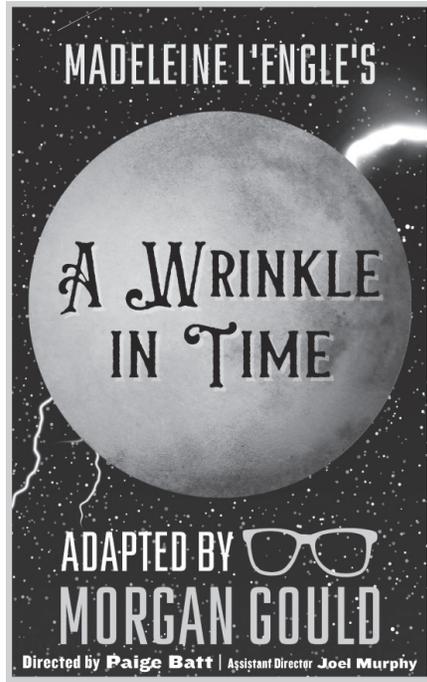
Theatre In Hamlin Park's 5th Production: A WRINKLE IN TIME

by Paige Batt, Director

When I was asked to direct for Theatre in Hamlin Park, I knew I wanted a few things to be a priority in this production: accessibility, a family atmosphere, and a show that spoke to both our youth and the adults in our audience. What better show to choose, then, than *A Wrinkle in Time*?

The process itself of putting together such an impactful show was not without its challenges. We had to contend with Mother Nature in our outdoor space, and while she smiled on us during many of our rehearsals, we were rained upon a few times as well! The production team conceptualized and brought to life not only new lighting, but worked on improvements to our curtain system – and even tackled the task of bringing projections to the outdoor stage. There were times when our budget (and patience) was tested, but I can say with confidence that these efforts paid off. The technical elements we were able to bring to the show elevated the experience to a whole new level.

Many friends and fellow directors shared wisdom with me going into this, my directorial debut. One piece of advice I



took to heart from the get-go was this: your casting process is half the battle. There are challenges to mounting a show in the summer – who wants to give up their free time in Buffalo's only truly nice season? I feel very fortunate that we ended up with the cast we have – these actors have given so much of their time, energy, and dedication to making this show not only a success on the stage, but a pleasure to direct as well.

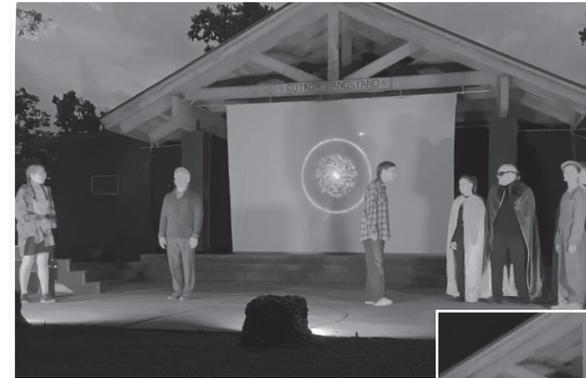
This is a story that resonates with so many for a multitude of reasons. Our kids can see themselves in the characters, and we adults can draw real life lessons from what the characters show us.

Especially in today's society, and with the proliferation of social media, there is

so much focus placed on how we perceive ourselves and how others view us, as well. While the show is family friendly, we're also confronted with the impacts of bullying, the reality of feeling inadequate or insecure in our own selves, and the fear of "what if I'm not enough?" *A Wrinkle in Time* teaches us that it's okay to feel inadequate, but that we can turn our weaknesses into strengths – and that those we love and trust will be there to lift us up in the midst of our trials. It shows us how important it is to identify and employ our strengths to reach our goals and, ultimately, that it's communication and kindness that will empower us to reach those goals. That, and love (of course). ■



AVRORA PLAYERS THEATRE IN HAMLIN PARK



Scenes from Theatre in Hamlin Park production of *A Wrinkle in Time* which featured updated set infrastructure and special effects for the sci-fi adventure story.



KEEP THE FOOTLIGHTS GLOWING

For over 90 years, Aurora Players has been a significant part of the cultural wealth of East Aurora and Western New York communities. Our patrons tell us they return again and again because Players' productions offer opportunities to share the many worlds of theatre and enjoy the characters that inhabit those worlds. To many of our members, the historic Roycroft Pavilion is the place to support artistic creativity and be creative.

You can help to keep the footlights of our beloved theater glowing and assist members of our community to continue the mission of Aurora Players:

"To create interest in, and foster enthusiasm for, the study of the dramatic arts."



Please consider remembering
AURORA PLAYERS
in your will or estate plans.

Planning for your future can be a very personal and private decision. Many of our friends and patrons share the desire to guarantee our future as a vital part of the community and have already made this decision to continue their generosity to Aurora Players beyond their lifetime.

Leaving a gift to Aurora Players in your will or estate plan is very simple. We encourage you to speak with your own attorney or financial advisor during your planning if you are interested.

It can be as easy as stating the following:

"I give, devise, and bequeath to the Aurora Players, Inc. - federal tax identification number 16-6052466, a non-profit organization having an office at P.O. Box 206, East Aurora, New York 14052, the following..."

Your support makes our work possible today and for years to come.
Thank you for your generosity.

2024 Roberta Rathbun Scholarship Winner

by Rebecca J. Caufield



In June, the Aurora Players Board of Directors awarded the Roberta Rathbun Scholarship for Theatrical Arts to Elspeth Kain of Orchard Park. A 2024 graduate of Orchard Park High School, Ms. Kain will attend Oberlin College where she will pursue a degree in Theater. Ms. Kain performed at Orchard Park High School throughout her high school years including roles in *Beowulf and the Bard*, *Joseph and The Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, and *Humbug*. Outside of school she performed with Lancaster Opera House, serving as an understudy for characters Sally Bean and Loretta in *Rehearsal for Murder* and with First Look Buffalo Theater Company, working on multiple projects including *Girlaxy Wars*, *The Guidebook*, and

The Day I Learned to Fly. As of her 2023 audition, she was the youngest actor ever cast in a production at First Look, a testament to her talent.

Long term, Ms. Kain says, "I can confidently say that I couldn't imagine my future without acting. My goal is to continue to pursue theatre through the study of works and performance at Oberlin College. I want to start tackling more mature and dramatic roles and be able to work one-on-one with professors who care as much as I do while giving me the resources to establish a more in-depth analysis of the characters and themes of a play. Theatre is a part of who I am, and I will continue to have it in my life any way I can. Receiving the Roberta Rathbun Scholarship for Theatrical Arts [is] such a gift. I will use it to help further my education and bring back what I learned to perform in the Western New York community." ■

The Roberta Rathbun Scholarship is a \$1,000 award given to a graduating senior in Western New York who wants to pursue a college degree in a theater-related major at an accredited institution of higher learning. If you know a 2025 high school senior who would like to apply, please visit auroraplayers.org or email at info@auroraplayers.org.



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A Note from ProjectSTAGE Producer *Erin Francis*

When my youngest daughter joined the ProjectSTAGE program in 2013, I volunteered to help out with the Act 1 session she was in. Back then, I never would have guessed the passion I would develop for this program. I have seen it make such a difference in the lives of so many children and each year I come away so proud of each and every student. It opens children's eyes to a new community— one that you don't have to be an athlete to be a part of, one that not only accepts being strange and goofy, but actually encourages it.

At the start of every year, I receive information letters about the students and the first-year letters are all so similar. Parents warn me the children are shy, quiet, and hard to get them out of their shell. Many of these children have never been on a stage before. Many have trouble making friends. But always, by the end of the two weeks of ProjectSTAGE, these students are running, screaming, and playing with new friends who are so much like them. They boldly get on the stage in front of the audience and say their lines for all to hear. Then, they go backstage and high five their new friends while laughing, jumping and being so proud of themselves.

It makes me so happy to see their excitement and love for theatre.

ProjectSTAGE teaches so many amazing things. Not only does it let a child's imagination and creativity go wild making props and designing costumes and sets, but it also lets them explore so many levels of human interaction and communication. It teaches them empathy, teamwork, self-expression, focus, problem solving, flexibility, independence - the list just goes on and on. Each year, I watch these children grow so much in just the short time I am with them.



I am so happy to see this program truly come back to life this year. ProjectSTAGE is a program of progression. Once the children are in it, they almost always come back year after year. Not having the program for two years due to COVID hit it hard. Not to mention we recently lost some of our best directors. But this year, with Kim McAtee directing Act 1 and Molly Conrad directing Act 2, it was truly back to the amazing program it once was. I can't wait to see what next year brings! ■

ACT 1 - THE THIRTY-THREE LITTLE PIGS

This year ACT 1 put on the play *"The Thirty-Three Little Pigs"* by Brian D. Taylor. Children from Grades 4-6 took to the stage in adorable pig and wolf ears and put on a show to amuse all. When the Big Bad Wolf came to the Pig's meadow, each pig had to use their individual talents to misdirect and try to get rid of the wolf. With characters such as Pirate Pig, French Pig, Tree Pig, Ninja Pig, Opera Pig, Dinosaur Pig and more, that wolf didn't stand a chance.

A Note from ACT 1 Director *Kim McAtee*

I thought I was finished with ProjectSTAGE when I finished it up in 2019. I had participated in it as a student when I was in high school, my own children made it a focus of every year from the time they were eligible to do it until they left for college, AND I produced and directed the program for years.

This year brought a new transition to my life; I retired from teaching after 36 years. I didn't feel completely ready to be done working with children

though. I truly believe that things happen for a reason and I am thrilled that ProjectSTAGE made a fresh entrance into my life.

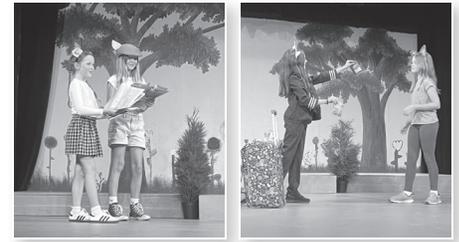
It is amazing to me that a group of 9-12 year olds can pull together a really good show in two very short weeks. I am extremely proud of what this year's Act 1 group of children achieved—many of whom had never been in a play before! They made new friends, strengthened bonds already formed and built their self-confidence immeasurably, all

while managing the huge task of getting a play ready to be performed.

Thank you to Erin Francis, who I couldn't have done this without (nor would I want to) and to our teenagers who came each morning with eagerness and talent to work with the kids.

Thank you to Tom Durham who taught me most of what I know about directing a play—especially with this many students! He is the model that I always think of when I direct a play. I am grateful for his skill and his friendship.

Lastly, thank you to my husband, Sean, who reminds me every day what fun it is to go through life with a person who encourages you to do what you love. ■



ACT 2 - WHOLE LATTE LOVE

ACT 2 presented the play *"Whole Latte Love"* by Todd Wallinger. In this play, children from grades 7-9 got to really explore character development. The small coffee shop, "Whole Latte Love," sells only plain black coffee. However, the shop's slogan, "Where there's magic in every cup," isn't just a slogan. The owner truly puts magic in her coffees and each coffee has a different effect on the people who drink it. Some people feel younger, some more calm, some even fall in love. But when the coffee types get mixed up by a new server, things get pretty complicated and hysterical.

A Note from ACT 2 Director *Molly Conrad*

I love theatre and think it can be an incredibly valuable tool to not only express creativity, but to build confidence, adaptability, as well as life-long friendships. I really enjoyed working with the kids in ProjectStage. It was an exciting challenge to help realize a production in such a short time.

The cast and crew all worked hard and did their part—it can be incredibly fulfilling to help make a story come to life. I'm grateful for the opportunity to pursue my passion in directing and the arts in a warm environment such as Aurora Players. ■





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BY WILLIAM
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A Message from AP's President



“I regard the theater as the greatest of all art forms, the most immediate way in which a human being can share with another the sense of what it is to be a human being.”

– Oscar Wilde

Welcome to Aurora Players!

We are excited to open the curtain on a remarkable and poignant drama, filled with inspiration and unforgettable moments on stage.

Thank you for joining us as we embark on this exciting journey through our second offering for the season!

The Miracle Worker is a powerful and uplifting drama that tells the story of Helen Keller and her remarkable teacher, Annie Sullivan. Making it all the more incredible is the fact that this play represents historical events and figures. That certainly lends a gravitas to its emotional impact.

We hope you'll join us in June as we close the season with **Lend Me a Tenor**, a fast-paced, hilarious farce that will leave you in stitches.

Whether you're a long-time supporter or visiting for the first time, we are honored to have you with us. We invite you to sit back, relax, and immerse yourself in the magic of live theater. Here's to another season of outstanding performances, brought to you by our talented casts and crews.

Enjoy the show!



Sincerely,

Tim Musial

President, Aurora Players Board of Directors

The Cast (In Order of Appearance)

Kate Keller	JENNIFER GRZESKIEWICZ
A Doctor	CHUCK SLISZ
Captain Keller	BENJAMIN DAVIS
Helen	EMERSON DISCH, NATALIE PLOTKIN
Martha	CAMDEN PARZY-SANDERS
Percy	OLIVER PARZY-SANDERS
Aunt Ev	SUSAN MUSIAL
James	MATTHEW TOURIS
Anagnos	CHUCK SLISZ
Annie Sullivan	ISABELLE BENSTEAD
Viney	CAROLINE PARZY-SANDERS
Blind Girls/Voices/Spectres	DAKOTA FULLER, DANA FULLER, EMILY QUINN, AURORA REA, ROSALIE STEPHENS, FIREFLY WEBER

Setting

Time: The 1880s

Place: In and around the Keller household in Tuscomb, Alabama; also, briefly, the Perkins Institution for the Blind in Boston, Massachusetts

Ashokan Farewell is used by permission of Broadcast Music, Inc. (BMI)

Intermission and Recording Policy

There will be one 15-minute intermission between Act One and Act Two.

As a courtesy to the actors and audience members, and in compliance with Aurora Players policy and its contractual obligations, we ask that you do not use [flash] cameras, audio recording, and video recording devices during the performance.

THE VIDEOTAPING OR MAKING OF ELECTRONIC OR OTHER AUDIO AND/OR VISUAL RECORDINGS OF THIS PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTING RECORDINGS OR STREAMS IN ANY MEDIUM, INCLUDING THE INTERNET, IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED, A VIOLATION OF THE AUTHOR(S)'S RIGHTS AND ACTIONABLE UNDER UNITED STATES COPYRIGHT LAW. FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE VISIT: <https://concordtheatricals.com/resources/protecting-artists>

Director's Note

When author William Gibson wrote the script for his production of *The Miracle Worker*, he included in a series of production notes for those who would produce his drama about Helen Keller and her “teacher” Annie Sullivan, a specific analysis of the set he envisioned for the show which he called “Notes on Staging.”

“The convention of the staging,” he penned, “is one of cutting through time and space, and its essential qualities are fluidity and spatial counterpoint. To this end, the less set there is, the better; in a literal set, the fluidity will seem merely episodic. The stage should therefore be free, airy, unencumbered by walls.” He wanted, it seems, merely the framework of the Keller homestead with only a barely functional, unadorned shell of a real house of the post-Civil War era. He continued in this important paragraph of description, “Apart from certain practical items – such as the pump, a window to climb out of, doors to be locked – locales should be only skeletal suggestions, and the movement from one to another should be accomplished by little more than lights.” He wanted it to seem dreamlike.

“Little more than lights.” As a playwright, Gibson left behind the tangible reality that guided the contemporary set designers of his era and proposed counting on little more than lights to guide the audience into and around the skeletal images and the shadows of memories that make up the environment of Annie Sullivan’s and Helen Keller’s respective early lives. He superimposes on the memories of Annie’s days growing up in the absence of parents and the terrible conditions of the almshouse to eventually being first in her class and candidate to be offered to the Keller family in far-away Tuscumbia, Alabama to “teach” Helen Keller, a child who was without a way to escape the prison of her dark silence.

Little more than lights of hope and intention were available, and the story at its inception is full of darkness. But Annie refuses to be defeated and to give up. History bears witness that this story is only the beginning of two lives working against all odds to belong and to contribute. Mark Twain was right: Helen Keller’s story was a miracle, and Annie Sullivan was the miracle worker. We are privileged to bring you one of the most inspiring stories of the American theater. We hope you will enjoy seeing and hearing it as much as we have enjoyed preparing it for the Aurora Players’ stage and for each of you. Thank you for joining us.

– Don Wesley

Production Crews

Director	DON WESLEY*
Assistant Director	NICK BENSTEAD
Producers	TIM MUSIAL, AMY SUE MATTHEWS
Helens Coach	ISABELLE BENSTEAD
Production Stage Manager, Stage Crew	NICK BENSTEAD, Cast
Production Assistant Stage Manager	LILY SINGBUSH
Costumes	SHERRY BLIGH, JUDY KEELE
Set Design/Construction	BILL MCGIRR
Set Crew	BILL MCGIRR, Marc Consler, Kevin Kujawa, Charles Lambert
Set Decoration	Judy Keele, Tim Musial, Kevin Kujawa, Bill McGirr
Set Painting	BILL MCGIRR, Kevin Kujawa, Susan Musial, Tim Musial, Sharon B. Reid
Props	LILY SINGBUSH, Nick Benstead, Benjamin Davis, Judy Keele, Kevin Kujawa, Tim Musial, Caroline Parzy-Sanders
Lighting & Sound Design/Technician	KEVIN KUJAWA
Hair/Makeup	JANE HERETH, Cast
Fight Choreography	ISABELLE BENSTEAD
Tech Day Lunch	AMY SUE MATTHEWS
Marketing	LAURIE ORAVEC, Patricia Hoefler, Mary Loliger, Katrina Mae Leuzinger-Owens, Tim Musial, Ian Ronan, Johnny Woods
Program	TIM MUSIAL
Flyer, Program Cover	TIM MUSIAL
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Photography	DORI SHEAR-MCGOWAN
Promotional Videos	AMY SUE MATTHEWS, TIM MUSIAL, LAURIE ORAVEC, JEFF WICK
Company Advisor and Confectioner	MARK TOURIS

*Associate Member: Stage Directors and Choreographers Society

Who's Who



Don Wesley – Director – Don has been directing and serving as an acting coach in school and community theatre for most of his adult life while also serving as a high school theater and English teacher and school administrator. He finds it almost impossible to name a favorite show; he just loves the work. He recently directed a sold out production of **Fiddler on the Roof** for the Springville Center for the Arts. Equally comfortable at the helm of both plays and musicals, he has directed over fifty shows, several of them multiple times. He is delighted to be directing **The Miracle Worker** for Aurora Players. He wishes to thank the audience and the fantastic support team provided by the Players as well as the skilled and talented actors and technicians who worked to bring this show to the public in one of the most longstanding programs of community theatre in Western New York. It is an honor to be here.



Nick Benstead – Assistant Director/Production Stage Manager – Nick is thrilled to be the Assistant Director/Production Stage Manager for this production. He has worked with Don Wesley for 5 years as an actor, and this is his first production as a member of the production team. He recently performed as Tevye in **Fiddler on the Roof** at Springville Center for the Arts, and hopes he can translate his onstage skill to the backstage world. Nick teaches ELA at WNY Maritime Charter School, and recently married Isabelle (Wray) Benstead (Annie Sullivan).



Isabelle Benstead – Annie Sullivan – Isabelle is so excited to be playing the role of Annie Sullivan in this production of **The Miracle Worker**. Some of her recent credits are: **Fiddler on the Roof** (Tzeitel), **Two by Two** (Leah), **Addams Family** (Morticia), and **Carrie** (Margaret) with the Springville Center for the Arts. Also **Peter and the Starcatcher** (Gremplin) with Niagara University Theater. Offstage credits: **Coraline** (Vocal Director) at Teals Niagara Theater. **Footloose Jr.** (Director), **SpongeBob** (Director/Vocal), and **Junie B Jones** (Director/Choreographer) at Mel's School of Music and Theatre. Isabelle would like to thank her new husband for always being there and supporting her! She would also like to thank Don Wesley for giving her this opportunity to tell such a wonderful story!



Benjamin Davis – Captain Keller – Benjamin Davis is excited to be onstage at Aurora Players for the first time. Favorite past roles include Arnold Wiggins (**The Boys Next Door**), Scarecrow/Hunk (**The Wizard of Oz**), Captain Corcoran (**H.M.S. Pinafore**) and Prospero (**The Tempest**). Next season, Ben will be directing **Murder on the Orient Express** for Aurora Players. He has been a music teacher for 25 years,

20 of them here in East Aurora.



Emerson Disch – Helen Keller – Emerson is thrilled to make her debut on the Aurora Players' stage after performing in **The Wizard of Oz** (Nikko/Ensemble), **The Night Before Christmas**, and **A Christmas Story** (Helen Weathers) at Lancaster Opera House. This spring, she can be seen in **Cheaper by the Dozen** (Ernestine) at the Niagara Arts and Cultural Center. Previous roles include **The Lion King** (Timon), **Finding Nemo** (Dory), **The Cat in the Hat** (Thing 1), **Frozen** (Anna), **Shrek the Musical** (Donkey), **Seussical** (Cat in the Hat) and **Annie** (Molly). Emerson plays piano, guitar and flute, and sings with the Buffalo Niagara Youth Chorus. She also enjoys spending time at the barn with her horse, June. Emerson is incredibly grateful to her music and theater teachers for their continuous support and encouragement.

Who's Who



Dakota Fuller – Blind Girls/Voices/Spectres – Dakota is looking forward to performing in front of AP audiences in her first Aurora Players production. A seventh-grade student at East Aurora Middle School, Dakota can relate to Helen's situation, since she wears bilateral hearing aids to help with her deafness. She likes the challenge of playing many voices and characters and getting to know the other young actresses she works with onstage and backstage. Dakota served as voice interpreter for St. Mary's School for the Deaf production of **Moana, Jr** in 2023.



Dana Fuller – Blind Girls/Voices/Spectres – Dana is excited to be in her first Aurora Players production and to work with the other young actresses portraying various characters and voices. A fifth-grader at The Mandala School in East Aurora, Dana finds that she can relate to many of the challenges Helen faced, since she herself is hard of hearing and wears bilateral hearing aids. She was a voice interpreter for the 2023 production of **Moana, Jr** at St. Mary's School for the Deaf.



Jennifer Grzeskiewicz – Kate Keller – Jennifer is excited to be returning to the Aurora Players stage, for the third time as "Kate Keller" in this production of **The Miracle Worker**. She previously appeared in **James & The Giant Peach** and **The Jungle Book** and is thrilled to showcase her talents again. Jennifer loves animals and demonstrates that passion through her work as a vet assistant at her local veterinary hospital, as a dog walker at her local kennel, and by volunteering at a maternity shelter near her home. When she isn't on stage, Jennifer enjoys spending time with her rescue dog, Elmer, reading books, and going on adventurous outings with friends. She would like to thank her family for always supporting her dreams and the director, Don, for giving her a chance to perform in such an inspirational production. Jennifer is thankful to work alongside such an amazing cast and crew.



Susan Musial – Aunt Ev – As an AP Life Member, Sue has enjoyed over 40 years with Aurora Players, starting as a kid in AP's ProjectSTAGE summer programs. She has served in a variety of committees across the organization including her favorite, costuming. Sue was last seen on the Pavilion stage as the cigarette-dangling spiritualist housekeeper Miss Erikson in **Present Laughter**. Her extensive acting credits include **You Can't Take It With You** in 1991 and 2013, and award-winning performances in **The Lion In Winter** (Lead Actress), **Lost In Yonkers** (Supporting Actress), and **Crimes Of The Heart** (Lead Actress). Accompanied in theatrical pursuits by her husband, Tim, and their children Victor and Macallister, her family has a strong interest in performing arts all across the region. They are proud supporters because it promotes creativity and connection, and enriches lives by fostering social-emotional understanding – benefitting the community in ways no other medium can. Following a long career working several roles with diverse families and children across WNY, Sue is employed as a UPK paraprofessional at Parkdale Elementary School. Acting meets her desire to make new friends while playing dress-up and make-believe, so Sue is enjoying the camaraderie of this cast and crew for their varied ages, experience, and considerable outside talents.

Who's Who



Camden Parzy-Sanders – Percy – Camden attends Cheektowaga Middle School. He is excited to be onstage with the many talented actors in *The Miracle Worker*. Other stage credits include Jason in *Falsettos*, Scar in *The Lion King Jr*, Maui in *Moana Jr*, *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* (Ralph Herdman), *The Night Before Christmas*, *Cheaper by the Dozen*, *Nuncrackers*, and *The Audition*.

Stage acting is not the only acting he has done. Camden has also appeared in several films including the Hulu original *It's a Wonderful Binge*. When not acting he also enjoys modeling, and has been featured in many print ads and runway shows. Camden attended IMTA in 2024 and took home the Actor of the year award as well as many other awards. Camden takes acting, voice, and modeling classes at Personal Best Talent. Camden is represented by Stewart Talent.



Caroline Parzy-Sanders – Viney – Caroline is excited to be performing in this awesome production. Although this is her first time with Aurora Players, she has been performing and directing in the WNY area for many years. Most recently she was seen in *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*, playing Grace. Other favorite roles include Mother in *Cheaper by the Dozen*, Amelia in *Desdemona: a Play about a Handkerchief* (Artie Nominated), multiple roles in *Hamlet*, the Fairy Godmother in *Cinderella*, Judas in *Jesus Christ Superstar*, and dozens more. She also directs for many local companies, as well as Cheektowaga Middle School. Caroline is a teaching artist with CARE in several WNY school districts and teaches acting and voice at Personal Best Talent. She is excited to share the stage with her own children!



Oliver Parzy-Sanders – Martha – Oliver is a Buffalo native who is 11 years old. They are no stranger to the stage, having performed in their first show, *A Christmas Carol*, at Alleyway Theatre at just 4 years of age. Oliver is thrilled to be joining this cast of *The Miracle Worker*. Other past credits include Young Lola in *Kinky Boots* (x2), Young Simba in *Lion King Jr*, Jake in *The Night Before Christmas*, Gladys in *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*, Hei Hei in *Moana Jr*, *Cheaper by the Dozen*, as well as many other productions. Oliver has also filmed several movies, television commercials, and music videos. They also love to work with Dramatic Solutions as an actor doing patient simulations. Oliver studies voice and acting at Personal Best Talent. Ollie attended IMTA in 2022 and brought home Actor of the year and top Child Model of the year. They are represented by Stewart Talent.



Nadia Plotkin – Helen Keller – Nadia is making her Aurora Players debut, and she is so excited to be part of this wonderful community; playing Helen Keller has been a dream come true. A third-grade student, she loves to act and sing. She has appeared in musicals with the Academy of Theatre Arts in Williamsville; her favorite role there is Peter Pan. Nadia appeared in a commercial for Tops Markets and was in a short film in New York City last year. An avid chess player, Nadia took fifth at the National Scholastic Chess Competition last year and won the New York Girls State Championship for her division. Nadia would like to thank her Mom, her Dad, her sister, Arya, and her four (yes, 4!) cats.

Who's Who



Emily Quinn – Blind Girls/Voices(Jimmy)/Spectres – Hi, I'm Emily Quinn and I am playing a blind child and Jimmy in this show. I love performing in theatre and want to work on Broadway when I grow up! I have gotten the opportunity to perform in shows such as *Little Mermaid* (Frontier Middle School), *Frozen* (Frontier Middle school), and *Junie B. Jones* (Mel's School of Music and Theatre). I have had the chance to work in film with *Ombis 2*, *Alien Awakening*. A student at Frontier Middle School, I dance competitively at Future Dance. I love to sing and dance all the time and that's what takes up most of my free time. I am also a Junior-level Girl Scout. This show has been a great adventure for me as an actress and it is an amazing learning experience!



Aurora Rea – Blind Girls/Voices/Spectres – Aurora is very excited to be a part of *The Miracle Worker* at Aurora Players. She has recently done *Moana Jr*. as Gramma Tala and before that *Annie Jr*. as Star-to-Be, both at Queen of Heaven School. Aurora currently goes to Orchard Park High School and has participated in multiple Shea's theatre camps.



Rosalie Stephens – Blind Girls/Voices/Spectres – Rosalie Stephens is a zealous young performer who feels at home on stage. Most recently, she was cast as Ethel Rogers in *And Then There Were None* by Agatha Christie at West Seneca Christian School. Her favorite roles to play so far have been Little Anna in *Frozen, Jr*, and Junie B. Jones in *Junie B. Jones, The Musical*. Rosalie loves to sing and spends many weekends performing with Bello Music Studio. She looks forward to singing the national anthem at a Bison's game with the Bello Bella's this summer! She is homeschooled and is in her eighth-grade year. After high school, Rosalie dreams of being accepted into the Sight and Sound Conservatory Program and performing on their stage as her future career. You can follow her adventures in theatre on Instagram @therosaliestephens.



Matthew Touris – James Keller – Matthew is excited to be making his Aurora Players debut as James Keller in this production of *The Miracle Worker*. After spending much time away from the stage after high school, Matthew returned to the stage under Don Wesley's direction as Mal in *The Addams Family*. This reignited Matthew's passion for the stage, and since then has been seen as Ham in *Two by Two*, and most recently Assistant Director/Stage Manager for *Fiddler On The Roof*. Matthew would like to thank Don Wesley – as well as his parents and sister – for continuing to believe in him, for pushing him back into acting, and motivating him to seize every opportunity to work on the stage. He also wants to thank his cast mates of *The Miracle Worker* for their hard work and camaraderie throughout the production. Every company Matthew works with is special to him, this one especially so because of the gravity of the story that is being told. God is Good.

Who's Who



Firefly Weber – Blind Girls/Voices/Spectres – I never worked in theatre before I started volunteering for Aurora Players and I began to really enjoy it. I once played a dog in a production called **Annie** at St. Mary's School for the Deaf when I was younger, but never acted in any roles like the ones I am portraying in this production. I love doing theatre; this is my very first role in an Aurora Players show and I'm excited to start my journey as an actor. Firefly can often be found working backstage, helping with set painting and construction, and ushering for shows.

Kevin Kujawa – Lighting/Sound Tech – I am grateful for the chance to work with Aurora Players, which is a new venue for me (so many new “toys” to play with). As a denizen of Springville Center for the Arts for the last 15 years, I have done Lights/Sound for nine musicals, 25 plays and shows, and four **“Evenings of One Acts.”** Of these, I've worked with Don on six musicals and a drama. We are happy to have Kevin bring his extensive lighting and sound experience to bear on this production for AP.

Lily Singbush – Assistant Production Stage Manager/Props – Lily is excited to make her debut as assistant production stage manager with Aurora Players. Previous credits include **Fiddler on the Roof** (assistant stage manager, Springville Center for the Arts). She graduated with her Bachelors in Religion from Hartwick College in 2020. She is currently a milkshake master/certified trainer at Chick-fil-A.

Meet The Playwright

William Gibson (November 13, 1914 – November 25, 2008) was an American playwright and novelist. He won the Tony Award for Best Play for **The Miracle Worker** in 1959, which he later adapted for a film version in 1962.

Gibson made his Broadway debut with **Two for the Seesaw** in 1958, a critically acclaimed two-character play, which starred Henry Fonda and, in her own Broadway debut, Anne Bancroft. It was directed by Arthur Penn. His most famous play is **The Miracle Worker** (1959), the story of Helen Keller's childhood education, which won him the Tony Award for Best Play after he adapted it from his original 1957 telefilm script. He adapted the work again for the 1962 film version, receiving an Academy Award nomination for Best Adapted Screenplay. Arthur Penn directed both the stage and film versions.

His other works include **Dinny and the Witches** (1948, revised 1961); the book for the musical version of Clifford Odets' **Golden Boy** (1964), which earned him yet another Tony nomination; **A Mass for the Dead** (1968), an autobiographical family chronicle; **A Cry of Players** (1968), a speculative account of the life of young William Shakespeare (with Anne Bancroft starring for Gibson, this time as Shakespeare's wife, Anne Hathaway); **American Primitive** (1969), a verse play adapted from the letters of John and Abigail Adams, premiered at Williamstown Theatre Festival, directed by Frank Langella and starring Anne Bancroft; **Goodly Creatures** (1980), about Puritan dissident Anne Hutchinson; and **Monday After the Miracle** (1982), a continuation of the Helen Keller story. His ill-received **Golda** (1977), a work about Golda Meir became so popular in its revised version, titled **Golda's Balcony** (2003), that it set a record as the longest-running one-woman play in Broadway history on January 2, 2005.

– Excerpted from Wikipedia

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Aurora Players Board meetings are held monthly.

All are welcome to attend general membership meetings:
April 10, 2025 (7:00pm at the historic Roycroft Pavilion).

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EVENTS

Banquet 2025	Rebecca Caufield
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<i>Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberly</i>	Christie Koester Welsby, E. Roger Stephenson
<i>The Miracle Worker</i>	Amy Sue Matthews, Tim Musial
<i>Lend Me a Tenor</i>	Patricia Hoefler, George Lambert
<i>ProjectSTAGE</i>	Erin Francis
<i>Theatre in Hamlin Park</i>	Justyne Harris

We would like to thank all of these members for their volunteerism, their continued efforts, and their never-ending support of Aurora Players.

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Autographs



The Miracle Worker

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AVRORA PLAYERS PRESENTS OUR 2024-25 SEASON



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Choreography by
Rebecca Runge
Music Direction
Bob Sowyrda

Onstage: October 11-13, 18-20, and 25-27, 2024



Directed by
Don Wesley

Onstage: March 28-30, April 4-6, and 11-13, 2025



Directed by
Mark Eckstein

Onstage: June 6-8, 13-15, and 20-22, 2025

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MEET THIS SEASON'S PLAYWRIGHTS...

James and the Giant Peach

Book by Timothy Allen McDonald
Music and Lyrics by
Benj Pasek and Justin Paul

Roald Dahl's *James and the Giant Peach* is now a musical for the whole family to enjoy! Featuring a wickedly tuneful score by the Tony Award-nominated team of Pasek and Paul (*Dogfight* and *A Christmas Story the Musical*) and a curiously quirky book by Timothy Allen McDonald (Roald Dahl's *Willy Wonka*, *The Musical Adventures of Flat Stanley*), critics rave: *James and the Giant Peach* is a "masterpeach!"

When James is sent by his conniving aunts to chop down their old fruit tree, he discovers a magic potion that results in a tremendous peach... and launches a journey of enormous proportions. Suddenly, James finds himself in the center of the gigantic peach, among human-sized insects with equally oversized personalities, but after it falls from the tree and rolls into the ocean, the group faces hunger, sharks and plenty of disagreements. Thanks to James' quick wit and creative thinking, the residents learn to live and work together as a family. The dangerous voyage is a success, but the adventure takes a whole new twist once they land on the Empire State Building.

A delightfully offbeat adaptation of the classic Roald Dahl adventure, the creative possibilities with *James and the Giant Peach* are endless. Actors will love playing the outlandish characters and performing brand new material from one of Broadway's hottest duos.

Timothy Allen McDonald is an award-winning playwright (Roald Dahl's *Willy Wonka*, *The Musical Adventures of Flat Stanley*, Jim Henson's *Emmet Otter*, Roald Dahl's *James and the Giant Peach*) adaptor of over 65 musicals (highlights include *Guys and Dolls JR.*, *Getting to Know...The Sound of Music*, *The*

Wizard of Oz YPE, and *Les Miserables* School Edition). McDonald is also an accomplished director (*Dear Edwina* produced by multi-Tony award winner Daryl Roth, and *The Phantom Tollbooth* at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts) and a leading authority on musical theater education. In 1996 McDonald was recruited by Freddie Gershon to develop Music Theatre International's Education Division, working side-by-side with theatrical greats including Cameron Mackintosh, Stephen Sondheim, Arthur Laurents, Stephen Flaherty, Lynn Ahrens, Stephen Schwartz, and Sheldon Harnick to create age-appropriate adaptations of musicals. In 1997 McDonald founded iTheatrics to continue and expand the work he began at MTI by developing educational musical theatre adaptations and resources for Tams-Witmark, Rodgers and Hammerstein and Samuel French. McDonald is the founder of the Junior Theater Festival, the world's largest festival exclusively dedicated to young people performing musical theater which is held annually in Atlanta, GA over the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday weekend. Believing that every child everywhere should have access to quality arts programs, Tim has developed several nationwide initiatives which build sustainable musical theater programs in underserved schools. These programs include NBC's Smash Make A Musical, Educational Theatre Association's JumpStart Theater, New York City's Department of Education's Shubert Foundation/MTI Broadway Junior Program and The President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities' Turnaround Arts Initiative. Tim has had the unique honor of seeing Roald Dahl's *Willy Wonka* performed at the White House for President and Mrs. Bush and directing Sarah Jessica Parker and a troupe of the most wonderful girls at the first ever White House Talent Show for President and Mrs. Obama. For more information check out iTheatrics.com.

Oscar, Grammy, Tony, and Golden Globe Award-winning songwriters **Benj Pasek** and **Justin Paul** are best known for their work on *Dear Evan Hansen*, *La La Land*, and *The Greatest Showman*. Their songs "City of Stars"

and “Audition (The Fools Who Dream)” from *La La Land* (with collaborator Justin Hurwitz) were both nominated for the Academy Award for Best Original Song, and “City of Stars” garnered both the Academy Award and Golden Globe for Best Original Song in a Motion Picture. Pasek & Paul won the 2018 Golden Globe for Best Original Song for “This Is Me” from *The Greatest Showman*, which was also nominated for the 2018 Academy Award for Best Original Song and most recently for the 2019 Grammy Award for Best Song Written for Visual Media. Upcoming projects include the live-action movie musicals *Aladdin* and *Snow White* at Disney, and an original animated musical at Fox Animation/Blue Sky Studios.

On Broadway they composed the score for the six-time Tony Award-winning *Dear Evan Hansen*, their highly acclaimed original musical for which they received an Obie Award, a Drama Desk Award, and the Tony Award for Best Score.

Their albums for *Dear Evan Hansen*, *La La Land*, and *The Greatest Showman* appeared in the top 10 of the Billboard 200, the latter of which held the #1 spot for multiple weeks in a row. The *Dear Evan Hansen* Original Broadway Cast Recording won the 2018 Grammy Award for Best Musical Theater Album, and *The Greatest Showman* Original Motion Picture Soundtrack won the 2019 Grammy Award for Best Compilation Soundtrack for Visual Media, is certified Platinum in over a dozen countries, including Double Platinum in the US, Australia, and Taiwan, Triple Platinum in Ireland and Singapore, and Quadruple Platinum in the UK and Korea.

Pasek & Paul had their Broadway debut in 2012 with their Tony-nominated score for the Broadway musical *A Christmas Story*, an adaptation of the classic holiday film, further adapted into a live telecast for FOX in 2017. Their new song written for the telecast, “In the Market for a Miracle,” was nominated for the 2018 Emmy for Outstanding Original Music and Lyrics. In 2013, they contributed several songs to NBC’s *Smash*, and received great acclaim for their musical *Dogfight* which was awarded Off-Broadway’s highest honor, the Lucille Lortel Award for Best New Musical. Their earlier

theater credits include the children’s musical *James and the Giant Peach* and the popular song cycle *Edges*. Pasek and Paul went on to receive a Daytime Emmy Award nomination for Outstanding Special Class - Short Format Daytime Program for the song “Unlimited,” featured in an Old Navy YouTube campaign. In 2017, the songwriting duo composed a song for the CW’s musical episode of *The Flash*, and also wrote “Get Back Up Again” for the DreamWorks animated film *Trolls*. Among their numerous honors, in 2007 they became the youngest winners ever of the famed Jonathan Larson Award for most promising musical theater songwriters.

Both are graduates of the University of Michigan Musical Theatre Program and currently serve on the Board of Directors for the Dramatists Guild Foundation. ■

(courtesy of *Musical Theatre International*)

Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley

By *Lauren Gunderson*
and *Margot Melcon*

As sequel to Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* set two years after the novel ends, *Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley* continues the story, only this time with bookish middle-sister Mary as its unlikely heroine. Mary is growing tired of her role as dutiful middle sister in the face of her siblings’ romantic escapades. When the family gathers for Christmas at Pemberley, an unexpected guest sparks Mary’s hopes for independence, an intellectual match, and possibly even love.

This play is part of the Pemberley trilogy, along with *The Wickhams: Christmas at Pemberley* and *Georgiana and Kitty: Christmas at Pemberley*.

Lauren Gunderson is one of the most produced playwrights in America since 2015,

topping the list thrice including 2022–2023. She is a two-time winner of the Harold and Mimi Steinberg/ATCA New Play Award for *I AND YOU* and *THE BOOK OF WILL*, the winner of the Lanford Wilson Award and the Otis Guernsey New Voices Award, a finalist for the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, the Arthur L. Weissberger Award, and John Gassner Award for Playwriting. Her musical adaptation of *THE TIME TRAVELLER’S WIFE* premiered on the West End in late 2023. *REVOLUTIONARY WOMEN*, her new anthology of five plays, was published by Bloomsbury in 2023. She studied Southern Literature and Drama at Emory University, and Dramatic Writing at NYU’s Tisch School of the Arts where she was a Reynolds Fellow in Social Entrepreneurship. Her play *THE CATASTROPHIST*, about her husband virologist Nathan Wolfe, premiered digitally in January 2021 and is now in *The COVID Art Capsule* in the Library of Congress. She co-authored the *MISS BENNET* trilogy with Margot Melcon. *THE HALF-LIFE OF MARIE CURIE* premiered Off-Broadway and at Audible.com. Her work is published at Playscripts (*I AND YOU*; *EXIT PURSUED BY A BEAR*; *THE TAMING*; and *TOIL AND TROUBLE*), Dramatists Play Service (*THE REVOLUTIONISTS*; *THE BOOK OF WILL*; *SILENT SKY*; *BAUER*; *NATURAL SHOCKS*; *THE WICKHAMS*; *MISS BENNET*; and *GEORGIANA AND KITTY*), and Samuel French (*EMILIE*). Her picture book, *DR WONDERFUL: BLAST OFF TO THE MOON* is available from Two Lions/Amazon. She is the bookwriter for musicals with Dave Stewart and Joss Stone (*THE TIME TRAVELER’S WIFE*), Ari Afsar (*JEANNETTE* and *I AND YOU*), Jorjah Kwamé (*SINISTER*), Kira Stone (*BUILT FOR THIS*) and Kait Kerrigan and Bree Lowdermilk (*JUSTICE* and *EARTHRISE*). She is a board member of The Playwrights Foundation, and a member of the Aspen Institute Science and Society cohort.

Margot Melcon is an artist, arts administrator and writer and co-wrote the Christmas at Pemberley trilogy (*Miss Bennet*, *The Wickhams*, and *Georgiana and Kitty*) with Lauren Gunderson. She was the Director of New

Play Development at Marin Theatre Company for seven years, where she dramaturged over 30 productions—including six world premieres—and administered the company’s two annual new play prizes and commissioning program. She has developed plays with TheatreWorks, Bay Area Playwrights Festival, Crowded Fire Theater, Shotgun Players, Berkeley Rep’s Ground Floor, the Kennedy Center, the New Harmony Project, and The Playwrights’ Center in Minneapolis. She currently manages arts and culture grantmaking at the Zellerbach Family Foundation. Margot is a graduate of California State University, Chico, and lives in San Francisco with her family. ■

(courtesy of *Dramatists Play Service*)

The Miracle Worker

By *William Gibson*

Immortalized on screen by Anne Bancroft and Patty Duke, this Tony Award-winning play is the story of Annie Sullivan and her student, Helen Keller, who lost her sight and hearing at the age of 19 months. With compassion, humor and dramatic tension, *The Miracle Worker* explores the volatile relationship between a lonely teacher and her headstrong charge.

Trapped in a secret, silent world, unable to communicate, young Helen is violent and spoiled, treated by her family as subhuman. Only Annie sees a mind and spirit waiting to be rescued from Helen’s dark, tortured silence. After scenes of intense physical and emotional struggle, Helen’s breakthrough finally arrives with the utterance of a single, glorious word: “water.”

(courtesy of *Concord Theatricals*)

William Gibson was born in 1914 in New York City. He wrote poetry, fiction, and scripts for stage, television, and films. His plays include *THE MIRACLE WORKER* (Tony Award, Best Play 1960), which was originally produced for TV’s “Playhouse 90”; *TWO FOR THE SEESAW*; *A CRY OF PLAYERS*; *GOLDA*; *THE BUTTERFINGERS* *ANGEL*; *MONDAY*



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AFTER THE MIRACLE; GOODLY CREATURES, and HANDY DANDY. He wrote a novel, "The Cobweb," as well as the musical version of Clifford Odets' GOLDEN BOY. His several books include "The Seesaw Log;" "A Mass for the Dead," a study of his family; and a volume of poetry entitled "Winter Crook." Mr. Gibson's book "A Season in Heaven," takes a look at metaphysics and the creative process, and his book "Shakespeare's Game" was a critical study. He was married to the psychoanalyst Margaret Brenman-Gibson, whose biography, "Clifford Odets, American Playwright," appeared in 1982. ■

(courtesy of Dramatists Play Service)

Ken Ludwig's *Lend Me a Tenor*

By Ken Ludwig

Winner of 3 Tony Awards and 4 Drama Desk Awards, *Lend Me A Tenor* is set in September 1934. Saunders, the general manager of the Cleveland Grand Opera Company, is primed to welcome world-famous singer Tito Merelli, known as Il Stupendo, the greatest tenor of his generation, to appear for one night only as the star of the opera. Tito arrives late, and through a hilarious series of mishaps, he is given a double dose of tranquilizers and passes out. His pulse is so low that Saunders and his assistant Max believe he's dead - and in a frantic attempt to salvage the evening, Saunders persuades Max to get into Merelli's costume and fool the audience into thinking he's Il Stupendo. Max succeeds and lives up to his idol, but Merelli regains consciousness and gets into the identical costume, ready to perform. Now two opera singers are running around in the same costume and two women are running around in lingerie, each thinking she is with Il Stupendo. A sensation on Broadway and in London's West End, this madcap, screwball comedy is guaranteed to leave audiences teary-eyed with laughter.

Ken Ludwig has had six productions on Broadway and eight in London's West End.

His 34 plays and musicals are staged around the world and throughout the United States every night of the year.

His first play, *Lend Me a Tenor*, won two Tony Awards and was called "one of the classic comedies of the 20th century" by The Washington Post. *Crazy For You* is currently running on London's West End. It was previously on Broadway for five years, on the West End for three, and won the Tony and Olivier Awards for Best Musical.

In addition, he has won the Edwin Forrest Award for Contributions to the American Theatre, two Laurence Olivier Awards, two Helen Hayes Awards, the Charles MacArthur Award and the Edgar Award for Best Mystery of the Year. His other plays include *Moon Over Buffalo*, *Leading Ladies*, *Baskerville*, *Sherwood*, *Twentieth Century*, *Dear Jack*, *Dear Louise*, *A Fox on the Fairway*, *A Comedy of Tenors*, *The Game's Afoot*, *Shakespeare in Hollywood* and *Murder on the Orient Express*. They have starred, among others, Alec Baldwin, Carol Burnett, Kristen Bell, Tony Shaloub, Joan Collins and Henry Goodman.

His book *How to Teach Your Children Shakespeare*, published by Penguin Random House, won the Falstaff Award for Best Shakespeare Book of the Year, and his essays on theatre are published in the Yale Review. He gives the Annual Ken Ludwig Playwriting Scholarship at the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival, and he served on the Board of Governors for the Folger Shakespeare Library for ten years. His first opera, *Tenor Overboard*, opened at the Glimmerglass Festival in July 2022. His most recent world premieres were *Lend Me A Soprano* and *Moriarty*, and his newest plays and musicals include *Pride and Prejudice Part 2: Napoleon at Pemberley* and *Lady Molly of Scotland Yard*.

His plays include commissions from the Agatha Christie Estate, the Royal Shakespeare Company, The Old Globe Theatre, and the Bristol Old Vic. For more information visit www.kenludwig.com. ■

(courtesy of Concord Theatricals)

Celebrating Tom & Pat Durham: *Pillars of the Theater Community*

By Patricia Hoefler

The Western New York theater community bids a heartfelt farewell to Tom and Pat Durham, whose recent move to Maine marks the end of an era for the Aurora Players of East Aurora and beyond. Their contributions to local theater have been nothing short of transformative, leaving an indelible mark on all who had the pleasure of working with them.

Tom Durham: *A Mentor and Visionary*

My introduction to Tom Durham was when he was head of the drama club at Iroquois High School, where he mentored countless students, including myself. My first role under his guidance was a non-speaking role of Flipote in *Tartuffe*, a role that taught me the invaluable lesson that there are no small roles in theater. I didn't think anyone would notice me, but Tom assured me they would, as he placed me upstage center; while the rest of the cast were placed in various poses around the stage, I was the first person the audience noticed as the curtains opened. This experience also taught me the importance of staging a scene with a tableau which created the appearance of a painting that would come to life.

Tom's involvement with the Aurora Players has been extensive. He has graced the stage in numerous productions with one of his most memorable performances being the role of Fagin in *Oliver!* I had the privilege of sharing the stage with him in *The Robber Bridegroom*, where he brought the character of Little Harp to life with his remarkable talent. Additionally, his famous (or infamous!) beard, kept a bit scruffy for this show, contributed to his portrayal of this irascible villain.

Tom is also widely recognized for his exceptional directing skills. Besides his work with Iroquois, he directed a number

of shows for Aurora Players as well as Springville Players. His recent direction of *Bright Star* in 2019 received widespread acclaim, showcasing his ability to bring out the best in his cast and crew. I watch his shows with keen interest in how the scenes are crafted and the characters are brought to life. As someone I considered my directing mentor, I always looked to him for his appraisal of my work and appreciated his input.

Pat Durham: *The Talented Artist*

Pat Durham's contributions to theater extend far beyond the stage. I was able to witness her expertise in costume design for *Tartuffe*, where her period costumes added a layer of depth and realism to the performance. She guided me when I assisted the costume crew for *110 in*



Photo courtesy of Catherine Burkhart

the Shade, and her work costuming *Hello Dolly!* was unparalleled.

Pat's artistic talents are not limited to costumes. Her work on the set of *She Loves Me*, which I directed, was nothing short of extraordinary. She transformed the stage into a beautiful perfumery, with walls painted to perfection, creating an immersive experience for the audience. Pat also painted the AP logo which adorns the lobby floor. Her creativity and dedication have left a lasting impression on everyone who has had the pleasure of working with her.

A Lasting Legacy

Tom and Pat Durham's move to Maine is a significant loss for the Western New York theater community, but their legacy will continue to inspire and influence future generations. Their passion, talent, and unwavering commitment to the arts have enriched the lives of many, and their absence will be deeply felt. ■

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We returned to the picturesque Suncliff On The Lake in Derby for the 2024 Aurora Players Banquet. A sunny, warm September day and shimmering Lake Erie once again provided a lovely background to celebrate the 2023-2024 season and recognize those who have made tremendous contributions to Aurora Players. Guests enjoyed visiting, delicious refreshments, and a thrilling game of trivia.



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