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**Aurora Players • PO Box 206 • East Aurora, NY 14052**

**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](http://auroraplayers.org).



## AP ONLINE

Looking for an easy way to purchase tickets securely and find out more about Aurora Players? Our website, [auroraplayers.org](http://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](mailto: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](mailto:info@auroraplayers.org).

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



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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 Galuski

"Aurora Players gave me a purpose and a sense of belonging when I needed it most."  
Dori Shear McGowan, volunteer since 2012

"It's never too late to start being artistic - even for a retired civil engineer!"  
Randy West,  
volunteer since 2023

"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

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

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**2005** The Roycrofters-At-Large  
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**2007** Aurora Paint Pot

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Warning, Matt Robel

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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

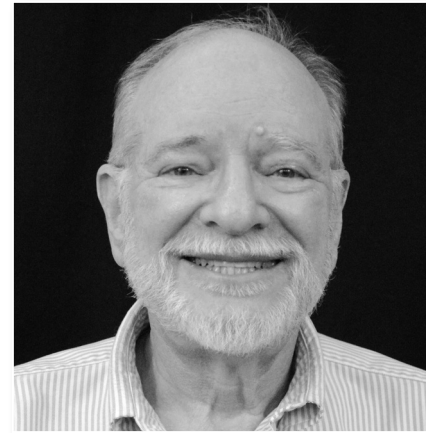
refreshment stand, and put the house back in order after the performance by flipping seats up, collecting programs and generally picking up the theater.

★ 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*

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



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

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](http://auroraplayers.org) or email us at [info@auroraplayers.org](mailto: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](mailto: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](http://www.auroraplayers.org)

*Thank you for your continued support!*

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## THEATRE IN HAMLIN PARK

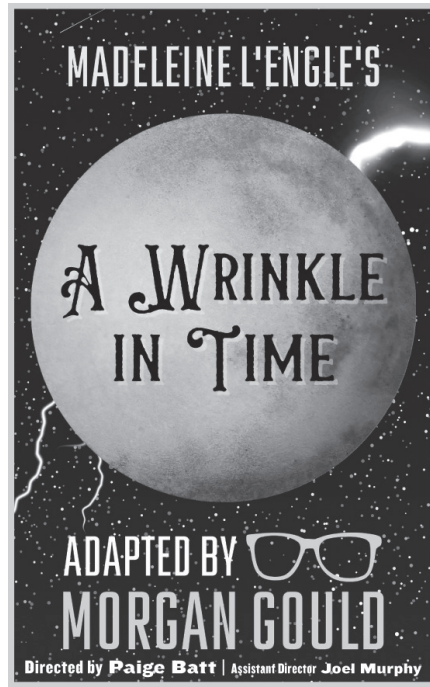
### Theatre In Hamlin Park's 5th Production: **A WRINKLE IN TIME**

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). ■



**AURORA 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 *Humbert*. 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](http://auroraplayers.org) or email at [info@auroraplayers.org](mailto: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.

## 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

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! ■

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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Rails!**



# **KEN LUDWIG'S LEND ME A TENOR**

Directed by **MARK ECKSTEIN**

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR **MARY ECKSTEIN**

COSTUMES BY **KIMBERLY HICKS**

Originally Produced by the American Stage Festival

**Stay For A Director  
Talk-Back Session After the  
Sunday, June 8 Performance!**

**JUNE 06-08 | 13-15 | 20-22**

**Roycroft Pavilion :: 166 South Grove Street :: EA/NY**

Ken Ludwig's Lend Me a Tenor is presented by arrangement with Concord Theatricals on behalf of Samuel French, Inc.  
[www.concordtheatricals.com](http://www.concordtheatricals.com)



## 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**

**Thank you for joining us** as we wrap up our 2024–25 season with the uproarious Ken Ludwig comedy **Lend Me a Tenor**. As Mr. Ludwig's first play, **Lend Me a Tenor** won two Tony Awards and was hailed by The Washington Post as "one of the classic comedies of the 20th century." It's the perfect show to bring our season to a close with plenty of laughter and merriment!

**We're so grateful** to everyone who shared this season with us—whether you were in the audience, on stage, or behind the scenes, your presence made every moment more special. And the excitement doesn't stop here!

**This summer, we're looking forward** to a lively lineup of events. Our ProjectSTAGE program will offer three enriching sessions for young performers. We hope you'll join us to celebrate their hard work as they bring their new skills to life on stage after two weeks of learning and fun!

**We're also excited to present our THP production of *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane*** this July and August—an imaginative, heartfelt story for audiences of all ages. It's a free outdoor show under the stars at the north end of Hamlin Park—a perfect way to enjoy live theatre in the summer!

**Behind the scenes**, we're getting ready for the future with some exciting updates, including seat replacements in our historic Pavilion theater. We're also hard at work preparing an exciting 2025–26 season featuring the evocative musical **The Bridges of Madison County**, Ken Ludwig's thrilling adaptation of Agatha Christie's **Murder on the Orient Express**, and the imaginative and romantic **Shakespeare in Love**. Season ticket packages are on sale now!

**Thank you for being part of the Aurora Players family.** Enjoy the show. We can't wait to see you again soon!



**Sincerely,**

Tim Musial

President, Aurora Players Board of Directors

## The Cast (In Order of Appearance)

Maggie .....	LIZ DOLE
Max .....	NICK BENSTEAD
Saunders .....	MARC RUFFINO
Tito Merelli .....	BENJAMIN DAVIS
Maria Merelli .....	ISABELLE BENSTEAD
Bellhop .....	MICHAEL NOWICKI
Diana .....	JUSTINE GERACE
Julia .....	TARA POTZLER

## Setting

The action takes place in a hotel suite in Cleveland, Ohio

## Time: 1934

### Act 1

**Scene 1** – Early afternoon on a Saturday in September

**Scene 2** – Four hours later

### Act 2

**Scene 1** – That night, about eleven o'clock pm

**Scene 2** – Fifteen minutes later

## Intermission and Recording Policy

There will be one 20-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 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

I was first exposed to *Lend Me a Tenor* in 1993, when I was still a tenor, and played the role of Tito Merelli—"Il Stupendo." Written in 1985 by the prolific Ken Ludwig (*Moon Over Buffalo*, *My One and Only*, *Murder on*



*the Orient Express*, etc.), he originally chose Giuseppe Verdi's *Otello* as the opera, presumably because the character Othello was a Moor, and was always portrayed in dark makeup, thus facilitating the mistaken identities. When I proposed the show, there was some concern about this, even though Tito would have been an actor portraying a character who was in brownface, and it would be historically accurate for Tito to be made up as such. Luckily it became moot, because in 2019 Mr. Ludwig revised the script, and substituted *Pagliacci* for *Otello*.

The performance you are about to see (or are already seeing, if you're reading this at intermission) is the product of collaboration between myself and the cast. From the beginning, the cast made suggestions and improvements. They have worked so very hard, and overcome a number of obstacles. Their understanding, flexibility, and humor helped turn a potentially disappointing experience into one of joy and satisfaction. I am proud of this cast, and proud of this production.

I owe no less to the production crew. Set designer Randy West, set decorator Julie Dana, builder extraordinaire Tim Musial, lights and sound by Lowell Sylwester, costumes by Kim Hicks, marketing guru Laurie Oravec, my incredibly competent stage manager Erin Francis, and my superb associate director Mary Eckstein; and all those individuals listed in the program, space for whom I've not been allotted.

I hope you enjoy watching the show as much as we've enjoyed doing it.

– **Mark Eckstein**, Director

## Production Crews

Director.....	MARK ECKSTEIN
Associate Director.....	MARY ECKSTEIN
Producer.....	PATRICIA HOEFLER
Assistant Producer.....	GEORGE LAMBERT
Stage Manager.....	ERIN FRANCIS
Assistant Stage Managers.....	BETHANY FRANCIS, DARLENE SCHMIGIEL
Costumes.....	KIMBERLY HICKS, Lydia Pikul
Set Design.....	RANDY WEST
Set Construction.....	TIM MUSIAL, Rubie Belle, Matt Bohlen, John Dana, Mark Eckstein, Christopher Estabrook, George Lambert, Susan Musial, Mac Musial, Randy West, Ben Petryszak, E. Roger Stephenson, Lowell Sylwester
Set Decoration.....	JULIE DANA
Set Painting.....	JULIE DANA, Mark Eckstein, Erin Francis, Bethany Francis, Lindsay Harris, Patricia Hoefler, Susan Musial, Firefly Weber
Propmaster.....	RENEÉ RONAN
Proprentice.....	Cathy Schrader
Lighting & Sound Design/Technician.....	LOWELL SYLWESTER
Hair.....	DANIELLE GLYNN, Jessica Rasp
Makeup.....	JESSICA RASP, Paige Tomlinson
Vocal Coach.....	BOB SOWYRDA
Tech Day Lunch.....	MARY ECKSTEIN
Marketing.....	LAURIE ORAVEC, Mary Loliger, Katrina Mae Leuzinger-Owens, Tim Musial, Johnny Woods
Program.....	LAUREN MESMER, Tim Musial
Flyer, Program Cover.....	TIM MUSIAL
Photography.....	DORI SHEAR-MCGOWAN
Promotional Videos.....	LAURIE ORAVEC, JEFF WICK, Tim Musial
Front of House Coordinator.....	MARK ECKSTEIN
House Managers, Box Office/Intermission Concierge, Ushers/Refreshment Stand.....	Gail Ruth Arthurs, Matt Bohlen, Rebecca Caufield, Melissa Cumming, Brendan Cunningham, Lynn Fischer, Danielle Glynn, Kimberly Hicks, Edwin Heary, Patricia Hoefler, Natalie Jones, Johanna Kull, Cher Mackiewicz, Jeff Maris, Amy Sue Matthews, Ginny Miori, Ellen Moomaw, Denise Mosser, Susan Musial, Tim Musial, Firefly Noel, Laurie Oravec, Lydia Pikul, Jessica Rasp, Mary Ann Reisdorf, Luann Robertz, Cathy Schrader, Christine Serra, Gail Stengel, E. Roger Stephenson, Melissa Willey; Others not available at press time

## Who's Who



**Mark Eckstein – Director** – He has performed, directed, produced, stage managed, and designed and run sound for various Aurora Players shows; served five years on the Board of Directors; served on various committees; and coordinates the “front of house” volunteers for performances—house managers, box office, concession stand, and ushers (including his 92-year-old mother). His favorite roles include Fagin in *Oliver!*, Pontius Pilate in *Jesus Christ, Superstar*, Alfred P. Dolittle in *My Fair Lady*, and John Adams in *1776*—none of which he has ever performed. He thanks his wife Mary, “who knows me and loves me anyway.”



**Mary Eckstein – Associate Director** – Mary has been active in community theater since 1978. She has worked with theater groups in Wyoming, Livingston, Genesee, Allegany and Erie counties. Mary’s first love is to be on stage, but as a veteran of community theater, has performed in several capacities including directing, choreographing, costuming, backstage hand, as well as administrative and committee work. Mary is pleased to be working on *Lend Me a Tenor* with her “other half,” Mark Eckstein, to help him bring the show to life.



**Benjamin Davis – Tito Merelli** – Ben is very excited to be on stage at Aurora Players again this season, this time as Il Stupendo! After a long time away from the theater community, he recently returned to the stage in the role of Captain Arthur Keller in Aurora Players’ production of *The Miracle Worker*. Next season, Ben will next make his directorial debut at Aurora Players with the spring production of Agatha Christie’s *Murder on the Orient Express*. He is also Music Director for *The Bridges of Madison County* coming this fall. Favorite past roles include Arnold Wiggins (*The Boys Next Door*), Captain Corcoran (*H.M.S. Pinafore*) and Scarecrow/Hunk (*The Wizard of Oz*). Ben has been a music teacher in WNY for 25 years, 20 of them right here in East Aurora.



**Isabelle Benstead – Maria** – Isabelle is so excited to be playing the role of Maria in this production of *Lend Me A Tenor*. Some of her recent credits are: *The Miracle Worker* (Annie) with the Aurora Players, *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!



**Justine Gerace – Diana** – Justine is excited to be on the Aurora Players stage for a second time after previously appearing as Mary Bennet (*Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*). Justine is thrilled to be doing theatre in WNY after achieving her BFA in Theatre from The New School of Drama. She would like to thank her family for always supporting her in all her endeavors.

## Who's Who



**Liz Dole – Maggie** – Liz is excited to make her debut on the Aurora Players stage. After portraying Sally Bowles in *Cabaret* last year she got the bug to appear on the boards again. Usually she is on camera having appeared in several commercials and films. This February she portrayed Laura Alessi in the SAG feature film *One of the Good Ones*. Recently she became a member of the Greg Robbin’s stunt team and is looking forward to using her high fall skills and being set on fire again. When she isn’t busy pretending to be someone else you can find Liz teaching art. She would like to thank her husband Derek, two amazing kids Eliana and Ransom for being patient and supportive of another one of mom’s crazy ideas.



**Marc Ruffino – Saunders** – Theater addict for 25+ years, Marc has been moonlighting as an English teacher since 1995 and high school director since 2000. His Aurora Players debut in 2013 had him plotting murder as Tony Wendice in *Dial M For Murder* – and he’s been hooked ever since! Since then, Marc has performed in numerous plays for AP including *Towards Zero*, *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, and *Bus Stop*. With three acting awards under his belt (*Grease*, *Present Laughter*, *Amateurs*) and performances across Western New York stages, including Lancaster Opera House, Desiderio’s Dinner Theatre, and Shakespeare in Delaware Park, Marc recently switched seats to direct 2023’s laugh-riot *One Man, Two Guvnors*. Coming in 2026: his take on *Shakespeare in Love*! Endless thanks to director Mark Eckstein, his hilarious castmates, and especially to his wife, Amy, who lovingly tolerates his theater obsession.



**Mike Nowicki – Bellhop** – Mike retired from work at M&T Bank several years ago, and now volunteers for theater to keep busy. He has worked with Aurora Players since 1987. Audiences may recognize him from past AP shows, including his last show, *Amateurs*, as well as *Run For Your Wife*, *Terra Nova*, *Three Murders And It’s Only Monday*, and *Guys And Dolls*. He has also performed with Lancaster Regional Players, Mobile Theater, Arcade & Attica Railroad, Niagara Clipper, Old Red Mill, and ART and Ujima in downtown Buffalo. His last stage performance was with ACTS in *Nana Does Vegas*. When he is not acting, he is enjoying his retirement and playing pickleball.



**Nick Benstead – Max** – Nick is thrilled to be making his Aurora Players onstage debut as Max! Previously, he acted as the Assistant Director/Production Stage Manager for *The Miracle Worker* at Aurora Players, as well as starred as the leading roles of the past 5 shows at Springville Center for the Arts: *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Two by Two*, *The Addams Family*, *The Sound of Music*, and *The Music Man*. Nick currently teaches ELA at WNY Maritime Charter School. Previously, he was the 10th grade ELA teacher and Drama Club Advisor at Royalton-Hartland High School. He would like to thank Mark for the wonderful opportunity to bring Max to life, as well as his wife, Isabelle, for convincing him to audition for such a fun show.



## Who's Who



**Tara Potzler – Julia** – Tara is happy to be back on the Aurora stage and was last seen as Mrs. Baker in *Butterflies are Free*. She has appeared in a number of other Aurora productions: *Rumors*, *Present Laughter*, *Cat On a Hot Tin Roof*, and *Dangerous Liaisons*. She has worked throughout Western New York in shows such as *Plaza Suite*, *Bad Seed*, *Proof*, and *Moon Over Buffalo*. A big thanks to everyone for their support!



**Erin Francis – Stage Manager** – Erin has worked behind the scenes with Aurora Players for 17 years. Previous to that she had no theatre experience whatsoever. Since getting involved, she has Stage Managed 21 shows, done set decoration, props, lighting, ushering, house managing, and much more. She has headed the props and furniture committee, the summer picnic committee and has been producing ProjectSTAGE – AP's summer children's theatre program – for the last 6 years. There is so much more to theatre than acting and Erin loves just being involved. Her favorite part is meeting so many talented people and helping them create something truly wonderful to share with others.



**Kim Hicks – Costumes** – When Kim moved back to EA in 1996, she responded to a request for volunteers to help with costumes for the show *The Music Man*. She had previously worked for a pattern company and was currently self-employed doing custom sewing and alterations. She enjoyed the creativity and camaraderie of theatre and has been involved with Aurora Players ever since. She's designed costumes for almost 40 shows and assisted with costuming nearly that many more. Her long-time love of vintage clothing has recently led her to take on the maintenance of the garment collection for the Aurora Historical Society. She looks forward to many more years working with AP and encourages anyone who is interested in helping to sew and create costumes to please come and join us!

## Support Theatre's Future!



Aurora Players Summer Program, ProjectSTAGE, is a two-week program for students entering grades 4–12 in the fall of the school year following the program. It is divided into three separate "Acts" to split up the age groups. Each program runs weekdays from 9 am – 1 pm with a performance the final Friday and Saturday evenings at 7 pm. Although the program is only two weeks, the kids put on a full production at the end.

**ProjectSTAGE 2025 Shows are July 11-12, July 25-26, and August 8-9. Please join us!**

## 2024-2025 Board of Directors

President..... Tim Musial  
 Vice President ..... Patricia Hoefler  
 Recording Secretary ..... Rebecca Caufield  
 Members-at-Large ..... George Lambert, Kimberly McAtee,  
 Gail Stengel, E. Roger Stephenson  
 Treasurer..... Lowell Sylwester

Aurora Players Board meetings are held monthly.

All are welcome to attend general membership meetings:  
 November 13, 2025 (7:00pm at the historic Roycroft Pavilion).

Aurora Players is a member of American Association of Community Theatre (AACT),  
 The American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP),  
 Broadcast Music, Inc. (BMI),  
 Greater East Aurora Chamber of Commerce (GEACC),  
 Theatre Association of New York State (TANYS), and  
 Western New York Association of Community Theaters (WNY ACTS!).

## Special Thanks

AP Voicemail Volunteers, Aurora Theater, Bee Newspapers,  
 East Aurora Advertiser/Arcade-Warsaw Herald Courier,  
 Greater East Aurora Chamber of Commerce, Elma Press, Rachelle Francis,  
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## Committee Chairs

### STANDING COMMITTEES

Costume Loft .....	Kim Hicks, Nancy Johnson
Facility .....	Lowell Sylwester
Finance .....	Gail Stengel
Front of House .....	Mark Eckstein
Fundraising .....	Board
Historian .....	Kim Hicks, Dori Shear-McGowan
Marketing .....	Laurie Oravec
Membership .....	Jason Gonser, Christie Koester-Welsby
Nominating .....	Pat Hoefler
Playbill .....	Kelly Campbell, Tim Musial
Play Reading .....	Mary Eckstein
Props and Set Furnishings .....	Tara Potzler, Reneé Ronan
Publicity and Public Relations .....	Laurie Oravec, Patricia Hoefler
Readers Theater .....	Catherine Burkhart, Jeff Maris, Karen Phillips
Scholarship Program .....	Rebecca Caufield, E. Roger Stephenson
SRO Editor .....	Rebecca Caufield
Volunteerism .....	Tim Musial, Laurie Oravec
Web Masters .....	Katrina Mae Leuzinger-Owens, Tim Musial, Laurie Oravec

### EVENTS

Banquet 2025.....	Rebecca Caufield
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### AD HOC COMMITTEES AND APPOINTMENTS

GEACC Business & Tourism Council .....	Laurie Oravec
Graphics .....	Tim Musial, Lauren Mesmer
ProjectSTAGE .....	Erin Francis
Script Library.....	Play Reading Committee, Rebecca Caufield, Kim Hicks
Strategic Planning.....	Board
Theatre in Hamlin Park .....	Justyne Harris
Theater Seating Replacement Working Group .....	Bruce Oravec

### 2024-25 PRODUCERS

<i>James &amp; The Giant Peach</i> .....	Sofia Kull, Laurie Oravec
<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 committee members for their volunteerism, their continued efforts, and their never-ending support of Aurora Players.*

**VOLUNTEER COMMITTEE CHAIRS ARE KEY TO AP's SUCCESS**

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## Donors

*We gratefully acknowledge the following donors  
for their additional support of Aurora Players.*

Bernard Calkins	Ruthie Consiglio	Lynn Fischer
Michael Casacci	Melissa Cumming	John Hughes
Rebecca and Karen Caufield	Paul Dugas	Patricia Kopf

## In Appreciation

We gratefully acknowledge our Patrons, Members, Season Ticket holders, and Donors and sincerely thank them for their continued support. For information on becoming a Patron, joining Aurora Players, purchasing season tickets and gift cards, or donating to Aurora Players, please visit our Box Office during intermission or pick up a brochure in the lobby.

## Meet The Playwright

**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. His musical, *Crazy For You*, finished a recent run 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](http://www.kenludwig.com).  
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## Season Ticket Packages :: Patron Packages :: Membership

### FLEXIBLE SEASON TICKET PACKAGES

Aurora Players season tickets packages are available for sale through October 31, 2025.

*Season tickets holders enjoy the following benefits:*

**SAVE OVER 15%** – A season ticket package of three tickets costs just \$50 – that's a savings of \$10 for three adult tickets.

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### BECOME AN AURORA PLAYERS PATRON

Revenues from ticket sales and concessions cover just the cost to produce shows, pay utilities, insurance and other ongoing expenses. Patron donations enable us to upgrade equipment, pay for special projects, offer community programs, and improve our beautiful space here at the historic Roycroft Pavilion Theater.

Patrons receive at least three season ticket packages, access to discounted tickets, and grateful acknowledgements on our patron plaques in the theater lobby and all programs.

Recent patron donations have allowed us to purchase a new sound system for Theatre in Hamlin Park, a laptop for the box office, and new copier. Our current wish list includes painting the outside of the building and completing renovations behind the stage.

*Perhaps you can help us reach this year's goals!*

**Patron Packages** start at \$250 and are partially tax-deductible (net of season ticket value). More information at [www.auroraplayers.org](http://www.auroraplayers.org) or please call our box office at 716-687-6727. We'd love to hear from you!

### AURORA PLAYERS MEMBERSHIP

Members of Aurora Players elect our Board of Directors and vote on important matters such as changes in the corporate Bylaws and Financial Policy. You can become a member with an annual donation of as little as \$20.00 for a single membership (\$15 for students) or \$30 for families. *Members enjoy the following benefits:*

**EARLY ACCESS** – Secure your seats before ticket sales open to the general public.

**QUARTERLY E-NEWSLETTER** – Stay in the loop on the latest Aurora Players news and special events.

**DIRECT NOTICE** – Be among the first to know about auditions, shows, special meetings and other important information via email.

**SOCIALIZE!** – Join fellow members for at least two membership meetings per year and the annual banquet in September.

Annual memberships expire on September 30th of each year.



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Through a generous donation from The Scott Bieler Family Foundation, we are preparing to install brand-new seating in our auditorium – and we're inviting you to become a visible part of this exciting transformation.



With a gift of \$300, you can purchase an engraved brass commemorative plaque that will be displayed for the next ten years – the equivalent of \$30 per year – on the seat of your choice. Whether you choose to honor a loved one, celebrate your own passion for the arts, or leave a message of inspiration for others, your plaque will be a meaningful tribute and a proud part of our theater's history.

All of the proceeds from your donation will support other improvements to our theater home, including fresh paint, newly refinished floors, and new carpeting. Within a week of purchasing your seat plaque, a volunteer from Aurora Players will contact you to discuss which seat you would like to choose for your commemorative message(s) and to confirm your engraving. Seats will be allocated on a first come, first served basis in order to be fair to all.

Join us in shaping the future of our theater – one seat, one memory at a time.

**Your donation may be tax-deductible; please consult your tax advisor. Aurora Players is a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.**

**Please note: Individual show seating is not guaranteed in seats bearing your plaque(s).**

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<b>1998</b>	Melanie Desiderio Audrey Dillon Bill Erdley Bill Estabrook Ann Mosner Jim Mosner Richard Rathbun Bob Steck Carol Steck Sylvia Troust	<b>2018</b>	Margaret Brunson
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<b>2000</b>	Julia Ciesinski Gary Cunningham	<b>2023</b>	Catherine Burkhart Alli Pelletreau
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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

A 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](http://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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## ACCEPTING THE AWARD...

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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