

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2025

PROLOGUE



WHERE THE MOUNTAIN MEETS THE SEA

Written by **JEFF AUGUSTIN**
Music by **THE BENGSONS**

Lyrical storytelling and live folk music weave an emotional father-son tale.

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MC and Tom Brennan and
The David C. Herriman Fund of Greater
Cincinnati Foundation present

MYTHIC

Book and Lyrics by **MARCUS STEVENS**
Music and Orchestrations by **ORAN ELDOR**
By Special Arrangement with **SHO PRODUCTIONS /**
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A new pop-rock musical
comedy with Broadway
ambitions.



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ABOUT PROLOGUE

PROLOGUE is the pre-show publication of Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park. It is published as a service to Playhouse season ticket holders, donors and others.

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HONORING A LEGACY: DAVID HERRIMAN'S ENDURING IMPACT

By Mary Kay Koehler



David C. Herriman and Broadway actor Ben Eakeley.

For over four decades, David Herriman dedicated his time, vision and unwavering support to the Playhouse as the longest-serving member of our Board of Trustees. He later became one of a handful of Emeritus Trustees, a title that reflected his unmatched commitment and leadership. His 40 years of service left an indelible mark not only on our institution but on the broader Cincinnati arts community. According to Osborn Family Producing Artistic Director Blake Robison, "In many ways, David was the Patron Saint of the Arts in Cincinnati for decades, supporting all the major organizations and emerging ones too." Though David is no longer with us, his passion continues to resonate through the organizations he championed and the lives he touched.

David's love of theatre blossomed early when he played King Richard in *Robin Hood* during high school, sparking a lifelong devotion to the stage. That early spark grew into a deep and lasting passion, particularly for musicals. He sponsored them frequently at the Playhouse and delighted in hosting the casts for lavish parties at his home overlooking the river in Covington, creating unforgettable memories for artists and patrons alike.



David C. Herriman as King Richard in *Robin Hood*.

Today, his legacy lives on most vividly through the ongoing generosity of his foundation. Recently, the Playhouse was honored to receive a transformative \$150,000 award from The David C. Herriman Fund of Greater Cincinnati Foundation to support the upcoming production of *Mythic*, a fresh new musical that marks its U.S. premiere on our stage.

A bold, Broadway-bound work, its realization requires an extraordinary level of investment. Without the Fund's pivotal support, bringing *Mythic* to life would not be possible. The Fund's contribution has been instrumental in allowing us to move forward with confidence, assembling world-class talent, including the brilliant Kathleen Marshall — a three-time Tony Award winner known for her innovative direction and choreography — and production values worthy of this premiere.

In supporting *Mythic*, The David C. Herriman Fund not only honors the visionary spirit David embodied but also ensures that our theatre continues to push creative boundaries and deliver unforgettable experiences to our audiences. It is a powerful reminder that the arts thrive when passion is matched with generosity, and David exemplified both throughout his life.

As the curtain rises on *Mythic*, we do so in tribute to a man whose commitment to theatre was as enduring as it was inspiring. His legacy lives on in every note, every scene and every standing ovation. We are profoundly grateful to David Herriman and to the Fund that bears his name for making this extraordinary production possible.

OFF THE HILL TOURING PLAY

ZOMBIE THOUGHTS

By JENNIFER A. KOKAI

and OLIVER GREY KOKAI-MEANS

Directed by KATIE GIFFORD-BASKERVILLE

SEPT. 16 - NOV. 9, 2025



GET READY TO LEVEL UP! By Tessa D'Errico

The world of video games and theatre collide in the Playhouse's fall Off the Hill Touring Play, *Zombie Thoughts*. This groundbreaking show turns anxiety management into an epic video-game-style journey. As audiences travel through the game's "levels," they help protagonist Sam defeat monsters and overcome anxious thoughts with the help of their loyal sidekick, Pig.

"Using video game obstacles as stand-ins for anxious thoughts gives kids helpful techniques for moving through big feelings in a language they can relate to," director Katie Gifford-Baskerville said.

Recommended for children in third grade and up, *Zombie Thoughts* is fully interactive from the start, allowing the audience to assign the roles to the game's "avatars"—the two actors in the show—and determine the order of the scenes by choosing what the characters will face in the game first. In this way, audience members make crucial decisions that shape Sam and Pig's journey. This unique format requires the actors and production team to prepare for every possible combination of choices. The structure fully invests young audiences and gives them control in Sam's journey to fight anxious thoughts. Each interactive moment is carefully crafted to help young audiences understand and cope with anxiety in a supportive and engaging manner.

"The play doesn't lecture children about their feelings," Gifford-Baskerville explained, "but invites them to explore emotional challenges through a medium they love...the video game world of the play."

The script's accuracy in depicting Generalized Anxiety Disorder has been vetted by a licensed therapist and approaches emotional learning in a realistic way. *Zombie Thoughts* serves as an entry way into talking about Generalized Anxiety Disorder in kids by representing a kid's perspective on anxiety to show adults how to help. Mother and son playwriting duo Jennifer A. Kokai and Oliver Grey Kokai-Means worked together on the script to create a story about anxiety that is educational and entertaining. Their writing process started when Oliver was 9 years old and was struggling to attend school with anxiety.

"Sometimes our feelings are overwhelming, and we don't know how to process them. *Zombie Thoughts* offers a playful, engaging way to understand these complex emotions."

— Katie Gifford-Baskerville

Oliver has said, "I hope that kids who see the play understand that those people with anxiety aren't just scared, they're scared in a way they can't help, and you shouldn't make fun of these people for being scared because they can't help it."

It was Oliver's idea to base the play in the world of a video game to show audiences that, like the characters in a video game, when we struggle to cope with anxious thoughts, we get the chance to try again.

Parents and educators will appreciate the play's thoughtful approach to these topics. The play doesn't promise that anxious

thoughts will magically go away but instead provides young audiences with a tool kit for understanding and managing overwhelming feelings. It creates a safe and fun environment for discussing anxiety, removing the stigma and fear often associated with these conversations. Children will not only have fun interacting with Sam and Pig's adventure, but they'll also learn valuable life skills as well.

"This is the play I wish I had seen as a kid," Gifford-Baskerville said. "Sometimes our feelings are overwhelming, and we don't know how to process them. *Zombie Thoughts* offers a playful, engaging way to understand these complex emotions."

Zombie Thoughts transforms anxiety from a scary monster into a challenge that can be understood and managed — one interactive performance at a time. The tour will be featured at area schools and community centers this fall. Get ready to play, laugh and learn!

OFF THE HILL IS MADE POSSIBLE WITH SUPPORT FROM

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Visit cincyplay.com for the performance schedule.

WHERE THE MOUNTAIN MEETS THE SEA

Written by JEFF AUGUSTIN

Music by THE BENGSONS

Directed by TIMOTHY DOUGLAS

Rosenthal Shelterhouse Theatre

AUG. 30 – SEPT. 28, 2025



HUMANITY. MELODY. STORYTELLING. By Russell Florence Jr.

The intimate and powerful tale of an estranged father and son drives the narrative allure of Haitian American playwright and television writer Jeff Augustin's play with music *Where the Mountain Meets the Sea*.

The engaging, monologue-driven story depicts fascinating parallel journeys on different timelines. After he learns of his father's death, Jonah, a child of Haitian immigrants living proudly as a gay man in Los Angeles, recreates the cross-country road trip his parents took across the U.S. before his birth. As Jonah's trip unfolds through new discoveries, including new love, his father, Jean, shares compelling insights into his journey from Haiti to Miami in search of a better life.

Augustin's reverence for his family's oral storytelling traditions factors heavily into his work and particularly *Where the Mountain Meets the Sea*, which was selected for the 2020 Humana Festival of New American Plays in Louisville, Kentucky, and later had an off-Broadway run at Manhattan Theatre Club.

Augustin embraces the strengths of unique stories that have been passed down to him and continue to influence him. "I grew up listening to magical and fantastical stories, many based on Haitian folklore and vodou figures," Augustin said in a statement on his website. "I never knew what was real or supernatural, or if the supernatural was just as real as I. In these stories, characters were constantly running from their family and their land in search for a new identity. But in a world where spirits and God guide life, these characters were bound to their destinies. These oral and mythical traditions have heavily influenced my writing. The otherworldliness, the power of language, the poetry and rhythm are all integral ingredients in my work."

The Playhouse production will be directed by returning favorite Timothy Douglas, who staged *Primary Trust* last season and helmed *Where the Mountain Meets the Sea*'s 2024 Washington, D.C., area premiere at Signature Theatre in Arlington, Virginia. Douglas is particularly moved by the central relationship at the heart of the story on a deeply personal level.

"The theme that resonates the most for me is the father of a particular generation confronting a gay son, something he didn't want to have to deal

with and never really did," Douglas said. "While I maintained a respectful, interactive and warm relationship with my father throughout his life, he never really was able to fully take me in and, as a result, I was never more fully able to share my life with him. The journey of Black father Jean and Black queer son Jonah finding each other through this lyrical piece very fluidly, adds fluidity to how I reflect upon my father specifically and then my relationship with my father. It softens my life journey by way of my creative journey."

Augustin's palpable storytelling is accented by the beautifully contemplative indie folk music by The Bengsons, a married composing and performing duo based in New York City. Winners of the Jonathan Larson and Richard Rodgers Awards, their theatre work includes *Hundred Days*, and *Sovereignty Hymns*, and they are also known for their viral hit, "The Keep Going Song." Three of their singles were also featured on FOX's reality TV competition show *So You Think You Can Dance*.

"The Bengsons are incredible," said Rob Morrison, reprising his duties as musician and music director having served in both capacities for the aforementioned D.C. premiere. "Musically, their writing is always surprising. They also know how to tell a story, and they tell it in a very honest way that's from the heart."

Morrison is also impressed by the emotional scope of the script and songs. Augustin's depth complemented by The Bengsons poetry creates a universal experience he's confident will connect with Playhouse audiences.

"This story is about humanity — seeing humanity in your parents, family, children or somebody you've had a difficult, complex or complicated relationship with," Morrison said. "And maybe you'll learn something about somebody you thought you knew which will hopefully add an openness or curiosity. Maybe the story I told myself about a certain person wasn't entirely true? And having done the show at the Signature in a smaller space which shares a similar size to the [Rosenthal Shelterhouse], almost every night there was nary a dry eye in the house by the end of the show. This show is universal."

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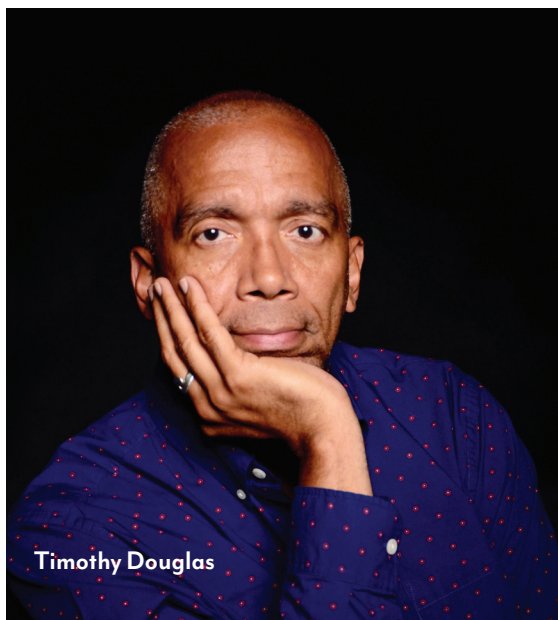
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AUTHENTICITY OF EXPRESSION: AN INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR TIMOTHY DOUGLAS

By Russell Florence Jr.



Director Timothy Douglas returns to the Playhouse to stage *Where the Mountain Meets the Sea*, Jeff Augustin's intimate account of acceptance, empathy, memory, relationship and time. In this interview, he reflects on the vividness of the characters, context, music and themes.

Playwright Jeff Augustin describes the setting of the piece as "a space of possibility." As director, what does that description inspire or spark for you?

It says to me that the piece feels so personal and has a kind of authenticity of expression that, with the narrative, there wants to be a free and non-binding of the expression of the spoken word and sentiment. So, the writer refrains from providing too much structure. My job as director for this theatrical piece is to create just enough framing or scaffolding so that the space can still live, breathe and radiate freely but has enough structure that an audience is able to follow the narrative as well as the performers. It sparks only inspiration within the challenge but it's why I do this.

What appeals to you the most about Jean? What appeals to you the most about Jonah?

I think for both of them it's another classic example, theatrically told, that these two are so much alike and don't even know it. What appeals to me about both is their willingness to give over to speaking to (and) defining what remains what's unknown about the other person.

How does the music drive the storytelling? Is there a particular song or lyric that particularly resonates for you?

I would say the music buoys the storytelling in the way the board supports the surfer as they catch the wave. This whole piece is a vibe like a wave and our job presenting and creating it for the audience is to ride the wave. And the lyric that resonates for me is "the space that you occupy in my heart didn't go away the day that you died."

In what ways do the music and musicians merge with the actors to tell this story?

Because of the freedom and looseness of structure provided by the piece itself, structure is given by the performers, and the delivery system is the text and the music. So there really is no way to separate them. They merge holistically.

How is directing a play with music different than directing a straight play? How is a play with music different than a musical?

In my directing journey, the directing of musicals came later. And all I knew was to direct (musicals) like a play. So, the music becomes a character in the play or the same way that the staging of a play has to interweave with the scenic, costume and sound design. It's just about the weaving and how music gets woven. But in terms of direction ultimately there is no difference — I direct everything exactly the same way. A play with music just means that instead of the music being a major character in the journey, it's a minor character in the journey. And a minor keyed piece of music is no less impactful than a major keyed piece of music — it just hits differently.

What do you hope audiences take away from the experience?

I hope they see and feel themselves within and along the journey of this piece.

SPECIAL EVENTS: ENHANCE YOUR EXPERIENCE

PRIDE AFFINITY NIGHT

Wednesday, Sept. 3, 2025

Dive deeper into the play and connect with your community at our Pride Affinity night. Enjoy a pre-show conversation beginning at 6:30 p.m. exploring LGBTQIA+ themes in the play, then stick around after the show to mingle at our cash bar. No reservations are needed for the pre- and post-show events.

PLAYHOUSE PERSPECTIVES

Cultural Duality: Living and Thriving Between Two Worlds

Monday, Sept. 15 at 7 p.m. at the Playhouse

Living and thriving in a country that is not your place of origin can mean existing in a space of cultural duality — embracing the opportunities and challenges of your new country while staying rooted in the traditions, language and beliefs of your home culture. Join us for a panel discussion with members of our community who, like the character of Jean, live this dual experience. This event is FREE, but reservations are requested.

Playhouse Perspectives is made possible thanks to a generous grant from Roderick and Barbara Barr.

HUES COMMUNITY NIGHT

Friday, Sept. 19, 2025

Join Black influencers, leaders and tastemakers for an evening of entertainment that highlights Black voices and stories. The night begins with a pre-show reception from 6–7 p.m. with light snacks and special drink prices. After the performance, stay for an Art Talk with members of the artistic team. This special evening recognizes African Professionals Network for its impactful work in the community.

For more information or reservations, visit cincyplay.com or call 513-421-3888.

CONTENT ADVISORY

Where the Mountain Meets the Sea is recommended for older teenagers and adults. As a father and son detail their separate cross country journeys, they recall experiences that include descriptions of sexual activity and mature themes involving health complications, grief and sexual identity (with the use of one derogatory slur).

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Cincinnati Foundation present
MYTHIC

Book and Lyrics by **MARCUS STEVENS**
Music and Orchestrations by **ORAN ELDOR**
By Special Arrangement with **SHO PRODUCTIONS /**
SHOSHANA KOVAC PARETS
Directed and Choreographed by **KATHLEEN MARSHALL**

Moe and Jack's Place — The Rouse Theatre
SEPT. 20 – OCT. 19, 2025



A SHOW OF MYTHIC PROPORTIONS By Tatiana Godfrey

How well versed are you on Ancient Greek mythology? The first show this season in Moe and Jack's Place – The Rouse Theatre is the pop rock musical *Mythic*. It's based on an Ancient Greek myth, the story of Demeter and Persephone. If you're not familiar with this specific myth, there are spoiler alerts ahead! Persephone is the daughter of the harvest goddess, Demeter. When Persephone ends up chillin' with Hades in the Underworld, Demeter's grief causes the earth to grow barren until her daughter returns. Eventually, a compromise is reached: Persephone will spend part of the year with Hades in the Underworld and part of the year with her mother on Earth, explaining the cycle of the seasons.

Even though we're delving into the myths of Ancient Greece, don't expect a Classical tragedy on an Oedipal or Antigonesque scale. With the book and lyrics by Marcus Stevens and a rock-forward score by Oran Eldor, *Mythic* gives the ancient story of Persephone and Demeter a fresh twist, reimagining the gods as social influencers, power-hungry politicians and high-profile celebrities. The vibes are more romantic musical comedy than Greek tragedy. Under the direction and choreography of three-time Tony Award-winner Kathleen Marshall, this production promises to leave audiences dancing their way out of the theatre.

When describing the musical, Marshall said, "It is all kinds of pop and rock, and each character has their own distinctive sort of sound and musical journey. I was thinking about it, and you know how sometimes in magazines, they'll have celebrities. 'They're just like us!' Like, here are celebrities at the grocery store and at the car wash, and I think it's sort of like the Greek gods. They're just like us. They may be gods, but they have the same sort of conflicts and problems and jealousies and troubles, and they're trying to work everything out in their relationships, just like anybody else."

In addition to its high-energy score and reimagining of these characters, *Mythic* explores the emotional heart of a mother-daughter relationship strained by change and growing independence. Demeter and

Persephone's bond, rooted in love but complicated by control, rebellion and transformation, anchors the story beneath all the glamor and glitter. The show's clever juxtaposition of the epic and the everyday invites audiences to find themselves in the characters, whether it's Persephone seeking freedom, Demeter struggling to let go, or Hades discovering a softer side. It is mythology reimagined not only for the TikTok generation, but for anyone who's ever had to renegotiate love, family or destiny.

Like the production of *Rutka* last season, *Mythic* is a musical that is on the path to Broadway. After its 2018 debut at London's Charing Cross Theatre, *Mythic* made the leap across the Atlantic with a celebrated run at the Segal Centre for Performing Arts in Montreal. The 2019 Canadian production played to packed houses and extended its run due to popular demand. Now, *Mythic* arrives to make its U.S. premiere in Cincinnati with a brand-new production, featuring new staging and a new design team. With this premiere, the producers are eyeing a future Broadway run, hoping to introduce Persephone's story to an even wider audience.

You could say the design team for this production is legendary in its own right, featuring some of Broadway's best, each with an impressive resumé. Set design is by David Korins, whose many credits include *Hamilton*; costume design by Linda Cho, known for her work on *Anastasia*; lighting design by Kenneth Posner, celebrated for *Wicked*; and sound design by John Shivers, acclaimed for *Kinky Boots*.

As the Playhouse kicks off its Rouse Theatre season with *Mythic*, this production arrives at just the right moment, offering a fresh, fun, vibrant take on an ancient story that feels both timely and timeless. In an era where audiences are drawn to stories that challenge traditional narratives, *Mythic* invites us to rethink not only the gods and myths but also the power dynamics that shape our own lives. Whether you're a longtime fan of Greek myths or discovering Persephone and Demeter for the first time, *Mythic* is a dazzling reminder that even the oldest stories still have something new to say.

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DEMETER? I DON'T EVEN KNOW HER! AN INTERVIEW WITH KATHLEEN MARSHALL

By Tatiana Godfrey



Kathleen Marshall

each other. On the one hand, you have [Demeter,] a parent who is very protective, and [on the other hand, Persephone,] a daughter who wants to break away from her protective mother. Then you have [Aphrodite] who is trying to please her father [Zeus], wants her father's approval and attention, and that father is threatened by the success of his daughter. So, it's all of that conflict. There's a lyric in the opening number. Oh, I hope I quote this correctly. "We've learned from ancient lore: Family is love and war." Right? So, the ancient Greek myths teach us about the conflict among families.

how they perceive themselves. And you know, once you've been given a label, whether it's that you're the bad guy, or you're the cool dude, or you're the party girl, or you're the rebel, or shy, whatever it is, it's those labels [that] can be very sticky and very hard to get away from, because people expect you to behave that way. I think that part of it is that these characters have been labeled with something that's not necessarily the full acknowledgement of who they are. So, part of the journey of the musical is these characters discovering who else they are and how, really, they're much more than what their one-line label is.

The Playhouse is describing this show as being "on the path to Broadway." Can you talk about where *Mythic* is right now in the process and what plans might exist for its future?

Well, we don't know yet. I mean, I think what's so wonderful is that Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park is such a beautiful theatre. I mean, the facilities are great. The footprint of the stage is great. The scene shop, the costume shop, the technical ability of the theatre is really incredible to support new work. And I think, like a lot of musicals where this is the first U.S. production, we have commercial producers attached and we're hoping that there's a path beyond Cincinnati. But we don't know what that is yet, and in a way, you can't know until you know what your show is. But I think this is a show that has the potential to have really broad appeal, and that it's a fantastic score. It's really recognizable characters and recognizable in terms of its human experience. I think people can sort of relate to and recognize the dilemmas and the challenges that these characters face.

After seeing *Mythic*, what conversations or feelings do you hope audiences leave the theatre with?

I think anybody would love it. But I think it's especially a wonderful opportunity for families, and families of teens and tweens, because I think it might open up a conversation about expectations and relationships between parents and children, and communication between parents and children.

At the helm of the Playhouse's production of *Mythic* is none other than Kathleen Marshall, one of the most celebrated directors and choreographers working in musical theatre today. A nine-time nominee, three-time Tony Award winner, Marshall is known for her dynamic revivals of Broadway classics like *Anything Goes*, *The Pajama Game* and *Wonderful Town*, as well as for her ability to craft stylish, emotionally grounded productions that sparkle with wit and movement. Her name brings instant credibility and excitement to any project — and with *Mythic*, she turns her attention to a new musical: a contemporary, pop-fueled myth that lets her flex both her comedic instincts and choreographic flair. She sat down with us to give some insights into the production. The interview has been edited for brevity and clarity.

***Mythic* has had a production in London and in Montreal before making its way to the U.S. How and when did you become attached to *Mythic* on its journey?**

I was actually, originally, supposed to direct the production in London. And then due to scheduling conflicts I had to drop out. So, I've been a fan of *Mythic* for a long time, and a fan of [the writers] Marcus and Oran for a long time, so I'm thrilled to be able to do the U.S. premiere of *Mythic*.

It's not a spoiler to say this musical is based on the ancient Greek myth of Persephone and Demeter. Other than this basic plotline, what would you say *Mythic* is about?

I think it's really about family, parents and children, and family of all kinds, and how families love each other, but they are also conflict with

The style of music in *Mythic* seems different than the musicals you're primarily well known for directing and choreographing. How does the style of music influence your approach to choreography or visual storytelling?

Well, first of all, we have an A-list design team. We have just the best. We've got: David Korins on the set, Linda Cho doing the costumes, Ken Posner with lights and John Shivers with sound. We've got this top-notch design team and a great music team. So, I think it's going to look very contemporary and cool and hip, and not necessarily literal. Even though it's Greek gods, you're not going to be seeing columns and pediments and Grecian urns with a frieze on it. I think it's the sense that the gods, their stories, are timeless, right? They're timeless fables and so giving it this contemporary edge in terms of how the characters talk, how they move, how they sing, how they behave, how they dress, I think, is the way to connect it to a modern audience.

Characters like Hades and Persephone are well known in culture, with many different actors that have famously portrayed both. How do these iterations of Hades and Persephone compare to others we might know and love?

I think of this more as the origin story of Persephone and Hades and Demeter, and how they came to be. As opposed to a lot of times when you see Hades, [he's] just a one-dimensional bad guy. When you were saying, "What is this about?" Besides just these classic Greek myths, it's also about how people are perceived and

CONTENT ADVISORY

Mythic is recommended for ages 11 and up. In this fresh retelling of the myth of Persephone and Demeter, Mount Olympus is likened to Hollywood, so the characters behave as such, using some adult language, making suggestive innuendos and partying.



SPECIAL EVENTS: ENHANCE YOUR EXPERIENCE OF *MYTHIC*

WINE PAIRING DINNER

Friday, Sept. 26 | Thursday, Oct. 2 | Saturday, Oct. 11 | Wednesday, Oct. 15

Join us for an evening where storytelling meets fine wine. Enjoy a curated wine pairing dinner from 6–7 p.m. where we pair four delicious courses that complement every sip. Mingle with fellow theatre lovers, indulge your palate, and enjoy community and connection. It's a celebration of everything we love — exceptional performances, exquisite wines, delicious food and memorable moments. Cheers to a night to remember!

Cost is \$75 per person, per event, which includes the wine tasting and the dinner catered by SeasonedDish. Tickets to the performance are not included and must be purchased separately. Reservation required 10 days prior to the event.

SOLO NIGHT

Friday, Oct. 17, 2025

Attend the theatre solo, but not alone! Join us for our SOLO NIGHT. It's a meet-up with others who share a love of theatre but may not always know someone with the same interests to come along. Join us from 6–7 p.m. for a pre-show reception with other solos that includes drink specials and light snacks and costs \$10 with your purchased show ticket. Come as strangers, leave as friends!

If you are a season ticket holder or already purchased a ticket to attend alone, consider exchanging to join the pre-show meet-up for \$10.

PRIDE TEA DANCE

Sunday, Oct. 19, 2025

Join us for this special PRIDE celebration! Socialize with friends and allies before the 2 p.m. performance, then enjoy the new pop-rock musical in Moe and Jack's Place – The Rouse Theatre. After the show, join the Tea Dance to celebrate the LGBTQIA+ community. Details and prices are available on cincyplay.com.

For more information or tickets to these special events, visit cincyplay.com or call **513-421-3888**.