

OCT. 2025 – FEB. 2026

PROLOGUE



THE HEART SELLERS

By LLOYD SUH

In this moving new comedy, Asian immigrants Luna and Jane find friendship while preparing a turkey for their first American Thanksgiving in 1973.

FRIENDSHIP AND SISTERHOOD

Fifth Third Bank presents

LOUISA MAY ALCOTT'S LITTLE WOMEN

Adapted by LAUREN M. GUNDERSON
From the novel by LOUISA MAY ALCOTT

Experience the classic novel you adore as it's being written in this playful and theatrical new adaptation that puts the author in the spotlight.



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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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Season presented by



2025-26 Rosenthal Shelterhouse Theatre Season presented by
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HONORING THE MEMORY AND LEGACY OF LINDA HELDMAN GREENBERG

Devoted volunteer, passionate arts advocate and beloved member of the Playhouse family

Linda Heldman Greenberg's life was a radiant testament to art, generosity and community. A beloved mother, devoted wife, adored grandmother, cherished friend and a true pillar of Cincinnati, Linda enriched every space she entered with warmth and purpose. Through her vision and service, she left a legacy that will continue to inspire and uplift for generations to come.

Her lifelong passion for theatre began in 1966, when her mother first took her and her sister to see *The Fantasticks*. Linda often recalled the magic of that night — the intimacy of live performance, the closeness between actors and audience, and the shared sense of community. That moment sparked a devotion to the arts that became a defining thread of her life.

With her husband, Gary, Linda became a Playhouse subscriber in 1978, beginning a remarkable journey of more than four decades. Together, they built not only a personal tradition of theatre-going but also a deep commitment to sustaining and growing the Playhouse itself. Linda gave generously of her time, insight and leadership, weaving her family's story into the very fabric of the institution.

Her service was extraordinary. She guided the Playhouse as a Trustee, championed women's philanthropy as a founding member of the Leading Ladies, supported artistic excellence through the Artistic Director's Circle, and sponsored numerous productions, including last season's *Rutka* and this season's *Because You're Mine* and *Mythic*. She also shaped the future of the theatre as a key leader on the Capital Campaign Cabinet, and her dedication helped bring to life the new mainstage theatre complex — a testament to her love for the art form.

Linda's own words captured the heart of her commitment: "I want to ensure that the Playhouse continues to thrill, entertain and teach generations of audiences to come. It is the community experience that only happens with live performances, which I value."

Her generosity and devotion remind us of the power of one life to transform many. Linda's legacy is written in many seasons of unforgettable performances and the joy, inspiration and sense of belonging she created for others.

We celebrate Linda with profound gratitude, respect and love — honoring a life that continues to shine through the Playhouse, her family, her friends and the community she so deeply cherished.



Linda Heldman Greenberg



Linda and Gary Greenberg present

BECAUSE YOU'RE MINE

Created by MATT CUSACK and ALLISON KELLY

Rosenthal Shelterhouse Theatre

DEC. 3 – 23, 2025

DUETS THAT DEFINE LOVE

By Mya Gibson

This holiday season, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park invites you to celebrate the holidays in more than one way. For those who cherish tradition, *A Christmas Carol* returns to Moe and Jack's Place – The Rouse Theatre. And for those looking for something musical, *Because You're Mine*, a heartfelt tribute to the great loves and love songs of country music, takes the Rosenthal Shelterhouse stage. Created by Matt Cusak and Allison Kelly, who were last seen at the Playhouse in the 2023 production of *Ring of Fire: The Music of Johnny Cash*, this new show shines the spotlight on legendary duets of country icons such as Johnny Cash and June Carter, George Jones and Tammy Wynette, Conway Twitty and Loretta Lynn and more. Cusak will perform in the upcoming production with Erica Swindle.

We asked the co-creators about the inspiration behind the music and the making of *Because You're Mine*.

What is your personal connection to country music?

Allison Kelly: Growing up in rural Ohio, country music has always felt like home to me. I remember listening to Patsy Cline and George Jones with my grandma, and of course in the '90s, I'd listen to Shania and The Chicks. I learned to play the banjo on my mom's front porch and still get some friends together to play bluegrass every time I go home to visit.

Matt Cusak: Even though I grew up in New Jersey, the first cassette tape I owned was Alan Jackson's "Don't Rock the Juke Box." I think it was a hand-me-down from my brother. Then I went to school for jazz and fell in love with complicated music. Now that I've come back to it, I've not only found beauty in its simplicity, but I've also discovered Western swing which brings it all together — great story songs with fun chord changes and a style of crooning that doesn't get enough attention. The Tennessee Ernie Fords of the world need more love!

What is your favorite song in the show and what do you love about it?

A: It's really fun to sing songs that folks will know: "Jackson," "I Will Always Love You," "Help Me Make It Through the Night." These songs can really take you back to a certain special time in your life. But we also love to introduce the audiences to new music. There's a poem Johnny Cash wrote called "To June This Morning" that Kacey Musgraves and Ruston Kelly set music to, and it's so beautiful and simple. Hearing from Johnny Cash, a person we feel like we know so well, in a new way is really thrilling.

M: "I'll Never be Free" by Tennessee Ernie Ford and Kay Starr. It's sung in harmony for basically the whole tune, and it sits in a great spot for both voices. Plus, it's got that great Western swing crooning feel going on that I could live in all day.

What has the reaction been like from people who have seen the show so far?

A: One of our favorite things that has been said to us after the show is, "I didn't think I liked country music! But I liked every song you played!" The



show is intimate; there are just two of us on stage with six instruments and no backing tracks. With that setup, you really hear the lyrics and the musicianship. These songs have stood the test of time; all you need, as they say, is three chords and the truth.

How do you see *Because You're Mine* fitting into the spirit of the holiday season?

A: This music is about being together with the ones that you love most and appreciating the simple things of life. I think the music we play about love and family will be a great addition to your holiday playlists!

M: That said, we might be adding extra holiday cheer into the show to make the run extra special!

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CONTENT ADVISORY
Because You're Mine is recommended for ages 13 and up. This celebration of romance and love songs includes some mature themes as they relate to the adult relationships.

ALSO PLAYING THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

FIRST® first financial bank presents
A CHRISTMAS CAROL

By CHARLES DICKENS
Adapted and Originally Directed by BLAKE ROBISON
Directed by BRIDGET LEAK

Moe and Jack's Place — The Rouse Theatre
NOV. 21 – DEC. 28, 2025

The holiday story you love unfolds with dazzling set, costume and lighting designs to create a magical experience for your family!

THE HEART SELLERS

By LLOYD SUH

Directed by DESDEMONA CHIANG

Rosenthal Shelterhouse Theatre

OCT. 25 – NOV. 23, 2025

A SEAT AT THE TABLE

By Tatiana Godfrey



Thanksgiving Day, 1973: in a modest American apartment, two women who hardly know each other attempt the impossible — cooking a frozen turkey in two hours. Luna, from the Philippines, and Jane, from Korea, are both new to the country, both married to overworked medical residents, and both left alone on a holiday that loudly insists on togetherness. What begins as a desperate culinary experiment spirals into an evening of wine, disco daydreams and Disneyland fantasies.

In Lloyd Suh's *The Heart Sellers*, those playful beginnings grow into something sharper and more resonant: a funny, tender, deeply human story about friendship, identity, and the small ways immigrants carve out belonging in a country that so often overlooks them.

The title points back to a 1965 piece of legislation that quietly reshaped the nation. Sponsored by Senator Philip A. Hart of Michigan and Representative Emanuel Celler of New York, the Hart–Celler Act swept aside America's old immigration quotas based on national origin. In their place came a framework that prioritized highly skilled workers and gave preference to those with family already in the U.S. The effects were immediate: immigration nearly doubled, with almost half a million people arriving annually in the years that followed. Luna and Jane, fictional though they are, step onto American soil thanks to this very law, their lives woven into its legacy.

For director Desdemona Chiang, this history is not just backdrop but personal memory. Her own mother emigrated from Taiwan in the wake of Hart–Celler, and those stories helped her imagine what life might have been like for characters such as Luna and Jane. Chiang also invited her cast to draw from their families:

"The actors, in particular, asked their moms about what it was like coming here. Because for most immigrant kids, you kind of forget, because we're so self-absorbed and we're so interested in our own identity here, you

kind of forget that our parents had an entire life before you existed. The entire version of themselves that they left behind in order to reinvent who they are, to make it work in this country."

That process of remembering and reimagining is at the beating heart of *The Heart Sellers*. Though set in the midst of the political upheavals of the Nixon presidency, Suh doesn't deliver a history lesson. Instead, he narrows the focus to a single evening in a single apartment. We watch Luna and Jane's tentative friendship unfold in real time — through halting conversation,

sudden bursts of laughter, and the awkward intimacy of two strangers willing to take a chance on connection. It's a portrait of bravery measured not only in miles crossed but in doors opened.

Even the title carries quiet irony. Hart–Celler widened America's doors, but it also reinforced the idea of immigrants as commodities — valued first for their skills, labor or potential economic contributions. That theme resonates with audiences who saw Suh's *The Chinese Lady*, produced in the Rosenthal Shelterhouse during the 2022–2023 season. In that earlier work, Suh told the story of Afong Moy, believed to be the first Chinese woman in the U.S., placed on display for curious American audiences in the 19th century. If *The Chinese Lady* exposes how Asian bodies were exoticized and commodified in public spectacle,

The Heart Sellers finds its power in the private sphere, asking what it means to claim joy, dignity and friendship in everyday life.

Together, the plays highlight Suh's gift: tracing the tension between how America sees its immigrants and how immigrants see themselves, while mining the humor and resilience found in that space.

In the end, *The Heart Sellers* poses a simple but urgent question: who sits at our tables, and who waits outside the door? It reminds us that the American story has always been one of arrivals, reinventions and patchwork traditions stitched together from many homes. And it offers, in Luna and Jane, a vision of belonging that transcends culture and language — a reminder that sometimes, even an undercooked turkey can mark the beginning of a feast.

**"A stunning comedy...
I would sign up for a
whole season of shows
about Luna and Jane...
Breathtaking."**

— *The Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*

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LET'S TALK TURKEY

By Tatiana Godfrey

On Thanksgiving night in 1973, two recent Asian immigrants cross paths and forge an unlikely friendship in Lloyd Suh's *The Heart Sellers*. Under the direction of Desdemona Chiang, whose work bridges both theatre and television, the play explores themes of connection, identity and the immigrant experience with warmth and nuance. In this interview, Chiang shares her vision for the production and reflects on why Suh's story resonates today. (Edited for clarity and brevity.)

How would you describe this play to somebody who hasn't heard of it?

It's like a buddy love story between two Asian immigrant women, set in 1973, on the evening of Thanksgiving, when they're dealing with feelings of homesickness and belonging. It's my very short log line for the show.

When you first read or encountered this play, what are some of the first thoughts, images or ideas that came to you?

I will just preface by saying that it's really hard to talk about this play without talking about my mom. My mom is living in LA; she's very happily adjusted now. But every time I've talked about this play with a designer who is of Asian descent, at some point their mom, or our moms, kind of come into the conversation. So, when I first read this, I was reminded of a story that my mom told me about her time in America.

My parents came to the U.S. in '79 or '80 because of Hart-Celler. They came here on a student visa to study at Cal State Fullerton in Southern California. Because they were also middle-class immigrants looking for a better life, leaving a country that was kind of questionable. Because at the time we thought Taiwan (I'm from Taiwan) might be in trouble with China, and there might be some kind of Communist takeover.

My mom spent the first year in America pretty homesick, and there was a particular noodle dish that she was really homesick for. It's a dish called zha jiang mian, and it's essentially like a meat sauce with fermented beans on wheat noodles. It's delicious. It's like Taiwanese street food. And, so, she was asking around her friends at school if there was a place in America that would serve this meat sauce with noodle dish. And her friends all said, "Yeah, there's this great place if you want meat sauce and noodles, there's this place called Denny's."

And my mom was like, "Okay, I'm gonna go to this place called Denny's," and she went there and she sat down, and she asked the waitress, "Can I get your noodle and meat sauce dish?" And the waitress brought her a plate of spaghetti. Spaghetti is nothing like zha jiang mian. And, so, my mom saw the dish, and she started to cry.

I know, it was so sad. She ate this Denny's spaghetti by herself, homesick for something that was maybe close enough to what she remembered from home. So, when I read *The Heart Sellers*, I [thought] if my mom had a Jane or a Luna, that moment might have been a little less [terrible]. You know what I mean?

That's the first thing I thought of when I read the play. I was like, "Oh, the noodle story my mom told me." Now my mom is, like, whatever about spaghetti. But there's something about just her being in a strange place, wanting something as simple as the flavor of something that was home.

This inevitability of talking about your mothers with designers. How does that feeling, that history, translate into what it might actually look and sound like on stage?

I think when it came down to the props, the details, the kinds of clothes they would wear, a lot of that came from talking to our moms. Like looking at photos of our parents: what did they wear, the details of what would be in Luna's apartment. If the set was essentially — if you think back to your first year at college — all you brought was a suitcase. And you moved into this dorm that [had] modular furniture, before IKEA was IKEA, there was dorm furniture, right? So, it had a very, corporate-like, institutional feel, except for the two or three bits and bobs you brought from home. And those were the things that took on a lot of value.



Desdemona Chiang

SPECIAL EVENTS: ENHANCE YOUR EXPERIENCE



Debra Hildebrand demonstrating how to make a convincing stage cocktail that looks like the real thing. Photo by Mikki Shaffner.

EXPERT EXPERIENCES:

Food for Thought with Debra Hildebrand

Monday, November 10

"That looks delicious! But can you eat it?"

If you're curious about how stage magic is made, join us to gain hands-on insight into the artistry and problem-solving that go into creating convincing food props using unexpected materials — like in our production of *The Heart Sellers*.

Debra Hildebrand, the longtime Rosenthal Shelterhouse Properties Running Crew Lead, will share the secrets, techniques and creativity behind crafting realistic fake food props in this hands-on, 90-minute class.

The class runs from 7 – 8:30 p.m., and the cost is \$30.

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

CONTENT ADVISORY

The Heart Sellers is recommended for older teenagers and adults. New to America, two women spend Thanksgiving together sharing their hopes, dreams and a bottle (maybe two) of wine. Using some adult language, their conversation includes the Asian immigrant experience and communism, as well as several references to the male anatomy.

 **FIFTH THIRD** presents

LOUISA MAY ALCOTT'S LITTLE WOMEN

Adapted by **LAUREN M. GUNDERSON**

From the novel by **LOUISA MAY ALCOTT**

Directed by **JOANIE SCHULTZ**

Co-produced with **PORTLAND CENTER STAGE**

Moe and Jack's Place – The Rouse Theatre

JAN. 17 – FEB. 15, 2026



THE ENDURING TRUTH OF *LITTLE WOMEN* By Tessa D'Errico

Are you an Amy, Beth, Jo or Meg? Or maybe you're a Laurie or a Marmee! No matter which character you see yourself in, this playful and theatrical new adaptation of *Little Women* will captivate those who are familiar with the story as well as a new generation of theatregoers.

Headstrong heroine Jo March and her family have charmed audiences for generations. This classic coming-of-age drama has been a cultural mainstay and cornerstone of American literature since the novel was originally published in 1868, inspiring countless adaptations in all forms including movies, television shows, a ballet, an opera and a musical. Now, acclaimed playwright Lauren M. Gunderson has created a fresh stage adaptation that blurs the lines between heroine and author. The script opens with Louisa May Alcott working on the manuscript that eventually became *Little Women*, and audiences will see Louisa and her real-life family transform on stage into the quick-witted Jo, responsible Meg, gentle Beth and spirited Amy that we all know and love. This unique take includes direct quotes from Alcott's text — allowing characters on stage to speak and think in the same language as the characters in the novel.

Gunderson is one of America's most produced playwrights, known for her hit plays that often put spirited, courageous women center stage. Playhouse audiences may remember Gunderson's work from *The Revolutionists* and *Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*.

"Lauren's adaptation honors the beauty and longing of Alcott's novel while also digging into its urgency: these women's courage, their frustrations, their hunger for more," Associate Artistic Director and *Little Women* Director Joanie Schultz said about the script.

As with any adaptation, the biggest challenge isn't just to retell a beloved story, but to make it feel dynamic and relevant to today's audience.

"The challenge, and the gift, is letting go of what we think we know about *Little Women*," Schultz said. "We all have images of these characters from past adaptations, but my job is to find the truth of who they are right

now, with this cast, in this space. That means making bold, specific choices that allow these people to feel fully alive, not frozen in someone else's vision."

This production is a co-production, a special partnership between two theatres working on a single play, with Portland Center Stage in Oregon, featuring actors from both cities. The show will make its way to Cincinnati

after starting in Portland, proving that this story not only appeals to multiple generations, but also appeals to multiple audiences on different sides of the U.S.

Louisa May Alcott's Little Women allows the audience to remember the resonance of the themes in the original and examine how they are still relevant to us today.

"This story speaks to longing — for independence, belonging, purpose, love — things that never stop being relevant," Schultz said. "Louisa's courage to write this novel, to create art from her life, paved the way for me to be here now: directing this play, owning my home, living an independent life as a woman and an artist. Through her words, her family becomes our

family and reminds us of the shoulders we stand on. When I'm working on this play, I can almost feel them there — Louisa and her family — their voices, their hopes, their persistence, echoing through the story."

**"Lauren's adaptation
honors the beauty and
longing of Alcott's novel
while also digging into
its urgency."**

—Director Joanie Schultz

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FIFTH THIRD

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ADAPTING A CLASSIC

By Tessa D'Errico

Associate Artistic Director Joanie Schultz will bring *Louisa May Alcott's Little Women* to the stage. In this interview, she gives some thoughts on the production and why this classic story has endured through time.

What about this script excites you as a director?

It's very focused on the humanity of the characters — all while getting into the major plot points of this thick novel. As a director, it's a challenging piece: it takes a lot of imagination to go all the places they go with them, and to move the play along while also leaving space for these complex women to breathe.

This play is an adaptation of the novel "as it's being written." How is this different from other adaptations? What should audiences expect to see?

Lauren Gunderson calls this play *Louisa May Alcott's Little Women* for a reason. It unfolds as if Louisa is writing the novel in real time. This makes the piece feel even more immediate and frames it in Louisa's assignment and intentions with the piece. We see her struggle with her writing, and then we see the result: what her writing does not just for her but her family. And within that, we watch these characters, based on her real family, make choices, wrestle with their dreams, and shape their futures in the moment on stage. Expect a production that blurs time, where past and present exist together, and where these women feel startlingly alive.

Have you always loved *Little Women*?

I came to it later in life, which maybe makes my connection fresher to it now. I wasn't one of those kids who wore out their copy, but as an adult, I've come



Joanie Schultz

to see how radical and deeply human this story is. Louisa May Alcott wrote these women with such compassion and honesty. They aren't archetypes. They're contradictions, which makes them relatable and timeless.

Are you an Amy, Beth, Jo or Meg?

Honestly? I'm a little of all of them. I have Jo's restless creativity, Amy's ambition, Beth's quiet sensitivity and Meg's longing for stability. That's part of the genius of this story: there's no single way to be a "Little Woman." We contain multitudes, and Louisa gives us permission to be all of them at once.

This is a co-production — how do you approach directing a piece for two different cities, spaces and audiences?

It's truly a gift to collaborate with our friends at Portland Center Stage, where I've worked before and where I've fallen in love with the people and the artistry of that community. One of the most exciting parts of this production is that our cast is from both communities — three actors from Cincinnati and three from Portland (and one from Kansas City) — which makes this a genuine collaboration between the two cities. The heart of the story stays constant, but each space asks something unique of us. I love that adaptability; it keeps the production alive.

What experiences or feelings do you hope audiences leave the theatre with?

I hope they leave feeling connected — to themselves, to each other, and to the women who came before us. I hope they see their own contradictions reflected onstage and feel permission to dream bigger, to love harder, to live more fully. And I hope, like Louisa intended, they leave believing that art and love are acts of daring... and that both can change the world.

MEET THE CAST



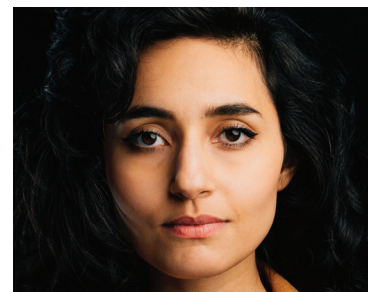
Beasley as Louisa / Jo



Hannah Fawcett as Meg



Brianna Woods as Beth



Sammy Rat Rios as Amy



Connan Morrissey as Marmee / Aunt March



Rocco Weyer as Laurie



Kieran Cronin
as John / Mr. Laurence / Mr. March / Friedrich

CONTENT ADVISORY

Little Women is recommended for ages 11 and up. Following the events of the novel, the play features sisterly bonds, friendships, romances and losses as the March sisters come of age in Civil War-era Massachusetts. There are brief instances of mild onstage violence and some mature themes.



SPECIAL EVENTS

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

MID-SEASON PREVIEW WITH BLAKE ROBISON AND JOANIE SCHULTZ

Monday, January 12 at 7 p.m. | Joseph-Beth Booksellers, 2692 Madison Road

Enjoy a lively conversation and hear inside information about the behind-the-scenes magic that will bring our winter and spring productions to life on stage. FREE.

ENHANCE YOUR EXPERIENCE OF *LOUISA MAY ALCOTT'S LITTLE WOMEN*

BONBONERIE AFTERNOON TEA

Saturdays, Jan. 24, Jan. 31 and Feb. 7

Join us for a delightful afternoon tea experience from 12:30 – 1:30 p.m., prior to the 2 p.m. matinee, featuring an array of handcrafted delicacies paired with three signature teas. Cost is \$35 for adults and \$24 for children 12 and under, which doesn't include tickets to the play (sold separately). Reservation required.

SOLO NIGHT

Tuesday, Feb. 3

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. Enjoy a pre-show reception from 6-7 p.m. with other solos that includes drink specials and light snacks and costs \$10 with your purchased ticket to the show. Come as strangers, leave as friends!

READ BETWEEN THE WINES BOOK CLUB

Thursday, Feb. 12

Join us in reading and discussing *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott at our pre-show Read Between the Wines Book Club. Enjoy wine, hors d'oeuvres and a fun book discussion facilitated by a member of the Playhouse artistic staff. Doors open at 6 p.m., and the discussion runs 6:15 – 7 p.m. in the Kaplan Lobby. Cost is \$25 per person, which includes the hors d'oeuvres, two glasses of wine and doesn't include a ticket to the play (sold separately). You don't have to attend the play that evening to join the Book Club!

TEEN DAY

Saturday, January 25

Teens will channel their inner Jo March as they craft a monologue rooted in their own experiences and imagination. This dynamic personal monologue writing workshop will be led by Beasley, the actor who plays Jo in Playhouse's production. The cost is \$25 for teens for the workshop and a ticket to the performance.

EXPERT EXPERIENCES: THE ART OF ADAPTATION WITH TATIANA GODFREY

Monday, January 26

In the theatre world, adaptation is the process of reinterpreting a work of art into a piece of theatre. Join Playhouse Literary Manager Tatiana Godfrey to explore the concept of adaptation in reference to our production of *Louisa May Alcott's Little Women* and try your hand at writing your own adaptation in this 90-minute class. Cost is \$30.