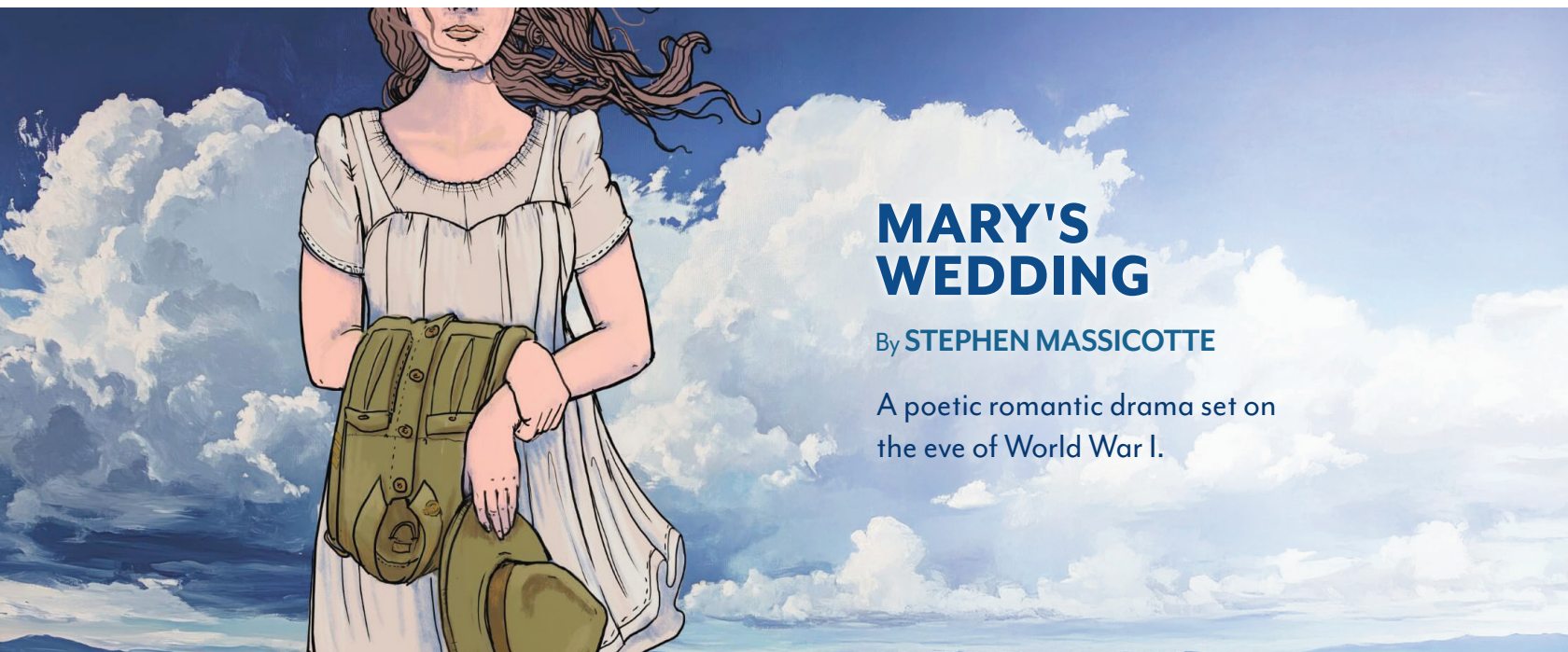


FEB. – MARCH 2026

PROLOGUE

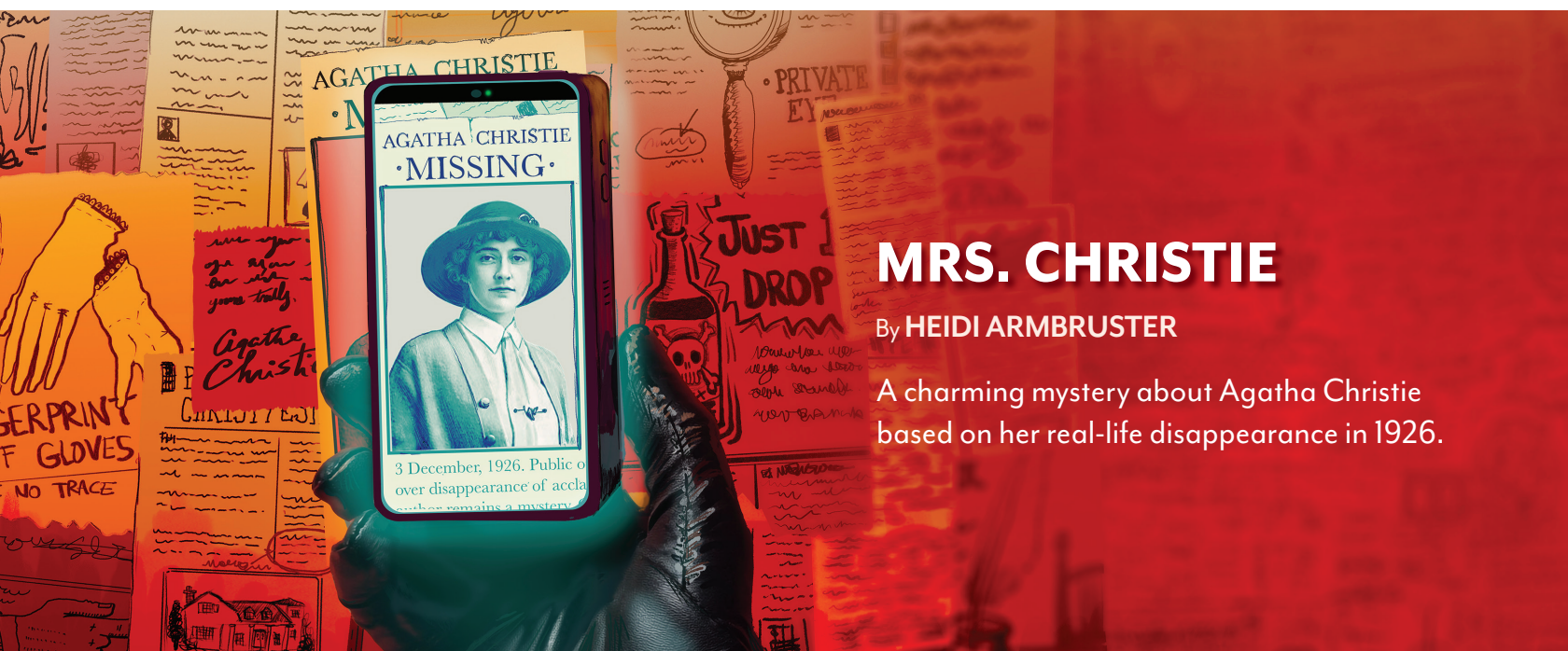


MARY'S WEDDING

By **STEPHEN MASSICOTTE**

A poetic romantic drama set on the eve of World War I.

A LYRICAL ROMANCE. A TIME-SPANNING MYSTERY



MRS. CHRISTIE

By **HEIDI ARMBRUSTER**

A charming mystery about Agatha Christie based on her real-life disappearance in 1926.

ALSO INSIDE: OFF THE HILL SERIES: *THE TORTOISE AND THE HARE*

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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.

Editor: Kathy Neus

Graphic Designer: Sean Martin

Contributing Writers: Lucy Broderick, Russell Florence Jr., Mya Gibson, Tatiana Godfrey, Jenny Powell

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Please send all inquiries, submissions and suggestions to:

PROLOGUE • Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park
962 Mt. Adams Circle • Cincinnati, OH 45202
Telephone: 513-345-2242 | Fax: 513-345-2254
Email: marketing@cincyplay.com

Website: www.cincyplay.com

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Season presented by



2025-26 Rosenthal Shelterhouse Theatre Season presented by
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Seasonal support provided by



A COMMUNITY OF WOMEN WHO MAKE THE PLAYHOUSE SHINE

By Lucy Broderick and Jenny Powell — Leading Ladies Co-Chairs, 2025-26 Season



Jenny Powell and Lucy Broderick.

Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park's Leading Ladies program is celebrating its 14th year, and as this year's co-chairs, we are thrilled to represent such a dynamic and diverse group of women who love and support the Playhouse. Together, we embody the diversity of our membership: one of us is a 14-year veteran whose love for the Playhouse has only deepened over time; the other is a young professional discovering the joy of engaging with theatre as an insider.

Leading Ladies is the preeminent and original women's arts group in our city, and we are proud to help it evolve and grow. Over the years, Leading Ladies members have helped bring many productions to life, created new opportunities for artists, and, along the way, learned how theatre is made.

What makes Leading Ladies truly unique is the incredible women you'll meet at our events. Our group includes members of all ages and backgrounds, from all corners of the region. Some bring extensive theatre knowledge, while others are just beginning their journey as Playhouse fans. Some Leading Ladies never miss a performance; others may only attend a few shows a year. No matter their level of involvement, all enjoy exclusive behind-the-scenes insights into how the Playhouse operates.

The chance to meet renowned members of the national theatre community in intimate settings draws many Leading Ladies to our group. Others cherish the opportunity to socialize and connect with new friends. Regardless of the reason for joining, every member takes pride in the philanthropic support Leading Ladies provides to the Playhouse. Our program offers essential funding for one major production each season — this year, we are honored to be the title sponsor for *Mrs. Christie*!

We invite you to join us. With several membership options, including our new Ingenue program for women under 40, there's a place for everyone. The Ingenue program is designed for younger women with busy schedules, offering a fantastic opportunity to meet new people, learn about the Playhouse, and participate in four unique social events each year.

Come be a part of the Leading Ladies and experience the arts, friendship, and impact — no matter your age, background, or experience. We can't wait to welcome you!

For more information, contact Individual Giving Manager Josh Senger at **513-977-2067** or visit cincyplay.com/support/leadingladies.

OFF THE HILL TOURING PLAY

THE TORTOISE AND THE HARE

WORLD PREMIERE

By DEONDRA KAMAU MEANS

Directed by PIPER N. DAVIS

FEB. 24 - MAY 3, 2026



WHAT IT REALLY MEANS TO WIN

By Mya Gibson

This lively new take on one of the world's most well-known fables, *The Tortoise and The Hare*, brings fresh energy and unexpected heart to a classic tale about what it truly means to "win." The production is part of the Off the Hill Touring Series, designed to reach families and audiences of all ages at community arts centers and other community venues throughout Greater Cincinnati.

At the start of the story, Tortoise and Hare couldn't be more different. Tortoise believes that slow and steady is the best way to succeed, while Hare is convinced that speed and confidence are all that matter. Their rivalry sets the stage for a journey that becomes far bigger than a race. When talking about his inspiration for reimagining the fable, Playwright Deondra Kamau Means said, "I've always loved fables because they carry wisdom in simple packages. But I wanted to expand this story beyond the old idea of 'slow and steady wins the race.'" Means' retelling widens the lens, transforming a familiar contest into a richer story about identity, teamwork, and personal growth.

As Tortoise and Hare confront obstacles along their path, they begin to realize that competition is only one part of the journey, and what matters most is how to learn from each other and show up for the people around them. Means hopes that these themes resonate long after the final moment of the play. "I hope young audiences walk away realizing that the real race isn't about speed — it's about self-awareness, respect, and perseverance," he said. By shifting the focus from winning at all costs to understanding one's own strengths, the story encourages children to see value in their own pace and their own process.

Much of Means' creative spark comes from longstanding traditions of storytelling. "I'm inspired by African and African American folklore — stories like *Anansi the Spider*, *Br'er Rabbit*, and other trickster tales that weave humor and wisdom together. Those stories teach through rhythm, repetition, and community and balance laughter with lessons. I try to bring that same spirit into my work — storytelling that's playful but purposeful, rooted in oral tradition and cultural pride," he said. This influence is clear throughout the play, where humor and music help young audiences engage with the characters' emotional journeys.

In shaping the personalities of Tortoise and Hare, Means aimed to create characters who feel familiar and represent people we might recognize in our own lives. "I wanted both characters to feel like people we all know. The Hare is confident, flashy, and full of bravado — but underneath, there's insecurity and a need to be seen. The Tortoise is steady, patient, and self-assured, yet sometimes underestimated."

Full of humor, energy, and heart, this new adaptation transforms a tale of rivalry into a story that reminds audiences that sometimes the best victories are the ones we share. While we may differ in pace, personality, and approach, those differences can guide us toward a deeper understanding of one another. Get ready to experience a modern twist on a timeless fable!

"... the real race isn't about speed — it's about self-awareness, respect and perseverance."

— Deondra Kamau Means

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MARY'S WEDDING

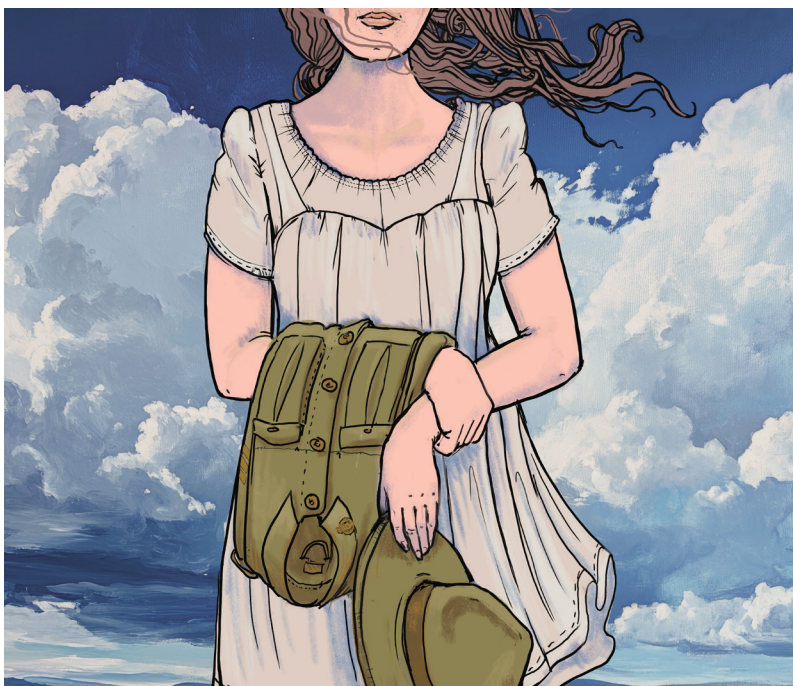
By STEPHEN MASSICOTTE

Directed by BLAKE ROBISON

ROSENTHAL SHELTERHOUSE THEATRE

FEB. 7 – MARCH 8, 2026

**INTIMATE. HEARTFELT.
TIMELESS.** By Russell Florence Jr.



Stephen Massicotte's poignant romantic drama *Mary's Wedding* is a beautifully engaging story of two young adults whose love is tested during World War I.

Set in 1914 Canada, *Mary's Wedding* concerns the titular young bride-to-be reminiscing about Charlie, the "dirty farm boy" she meets while sheltering during a summer thunderstorm.

Through interweaving scenes of time, dreams, and memory, their budding relationship is tenderly explored. However, the Great War threatens to impact their resilient bond, especially as Charlie goes off to fight in the trenches of France.

Originally produced in 2002 in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, *Mary's Wedding* won the 2000 Alberta Playwriting Competition and also received the 2002 Betty Mitchell Award for Best New Play and the 2003 Alberta Book Award for Drama.

Over the years critics have praised the play for its depth, poeticism, and tear-jerking essence. *Calgary Herald* particularly praised Massicotte's attention to detail and imagery:

"*Mary's Wedding* ... proves Massicotte is a gifted storyteller with an ear for detail and imagery... It was Massicotte's descriptive writing that allowed the audience to really lose themselves in the moment. There was nary a dry eye in the house by the time the actors took their final bows."

The Washington Times went so far as to consider the work emotionally on par with the characters of the legendary Emily Brontë. "Put[s] you in mind of the grand passion of Catherine and Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*, the vastness of their love mirroring the wild tangle of nature."

Blake Robison, Osborn Family Producing Artistic Director, directs the production. He fondly recalled an acclaimed staging of *Mary's Wedding* in Washington, D.C., from 20 years ago that still lingered on his mind.

"When I moved to Washington, D.C., in 2005, there was a fantastic production of the play running at a small company called Theater Alliance," Robison said. "It swept the Helen Hayes Awards that year, and everyone was talking about it. I must have logged it away in my brain as something I'd

like to make down the line. In my view, this is a perfect play for our Rosenthal Shelterhouse Theatre — intimate, heartfelt, timeless."

As he dove deeper into the script, he found the language thoroughly captivating. "I'm drawn to the imagery and poetic nature of the language," Robison said. "It matches the fluidity of Mary's dream."

As a two-hander, the play thrives on the sensibilities of the actors and the connection between them. In addition to Charlie's delicate balance of shy lover and tough soldier, the actress playing Mary doubles as Sergeant Flowers, offering an opportunity to showcase a colorful layer of versatility.

"The play is a tour-de-force for the woman playing Mary and Flowers," Robison said. "It's fun for the audience too — highly theatrical and occasionally comic. Charlie's challenge is to toggle between the Canadian prairie and the battlefield in France.

Together, the two actors create a mosaic of encounters and experiences for the audience to follow."

Robison is focusing on the play's imaginative qualities in his staging. He wants the audience to fully invest in the environmental magic that can occur with just a few changes of scenery or a simple shift in lighting or sound.

"The key thing to remember is that the entire play is a dream," he said. "We've created a barn-like environment on stage that can transform to other locations and other moments. With a shift of lighting and sound, we see Charlie and Mary riding a horse or we see them outside her mother's tea party, or we see Charlie on a boat to France. It's the best kind of theatre because it sparks the audience's imagination."

He also hopes audiences are moved by the play's touching reminder to savor special relationships of the heart.

"Life is made up of small, vivid moments. People and time move onward, so we should treasure those moments, even as they become distant memories."

**"This deeply romantic
dream-play goes
straight to the heart."**

— *The Seattle Times*

CONTENT ADVISORY

Mary's Wedding is recommended for ages 13 and up. Two characters fall in love against the backdrop of World War I, navigating their feelings across space and time. Using very mild adult language, their story includes depictions of war with some sound effects and descriptions of violence and death.

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LEADING *Ladies* presents

MRS. CHRISTIE

By HEIDI ARMBRUSTER

Directed by JOANIE SCHULTZ

Co-produced with MILWAUKEE REPERTORY THEATER

MOE AND JACK'S PLACE — THE ROUSE THEATRE

FEB. 28 – MARCH 29, 2026

UNRAVELING A LEGEND

By Tatiana Godfrey



Mrs. Christie offers audiences an imaginative, time-bending exploration of one of literary history's most tantalizing mysteries: Agatha Christie's real-life 11-day disappearance in 1926. Directed by Associate Artistic Director Joanie Schultz and written by Heidi Armbruster, the play blends historical detail with theatrical invention, inviting audiences to consider not only what happened during those missing days but also how Christie's life and legacy continue to resonate a century later. Much like the titular character did in her novels and stories, *Mrs. Christie* layers humor, sharp dialogue, and unexpected turns that invite audiences to savor both the mystery and the mischief.

At the heart of the play are two women separated by 100 years: Agatha herself, in the tumultuous days leading to her disappearance, and Lucy, a contemporary woman in 2026 navigating her own crisis. Their stories parallel and intersect in surprising ways as Lucy travels to an Agatha Christie Festival and finds herself, almost literally, following in Christie's footsteps. Schultz describes Lucy's journey as "a scavenger hunt of sorts, putting together clues about the disappearance of Agatha Christie," launched by grief over her sister's death and a desire to rediscover a sense of purpose. Her visit to the festival becomes more than a literary pilgrimage; it transforms into a fascinating, twisting mystery that pulls her deeper into Christie's world.

The 1926 timeline draws extensively on Christie's documented biography. At this point in her life, Christie had just lost her mother, was on the brink of divorce from her husband Archibald Christie and was beginning to establish herself as a writer — but was far from the world-famous novelist she would become. Armbruster's script draws on this rich context, using Christie's lived experiences to anchor the play's imagined elements. While the disappearance itself remains, historically, a mystery, *Mrs. Christie* uses the gap in the record as a space for theatrical possibility, honoring what is known while embracing creative freedom to explore what might have happened emotionally and psychologically during those 11 days.

**"Sophisticated, smart,
funny, heartbreaking
and hopeful."**

— *BroadwayWorld*

In the contemporary thread, Lucy begins as a woman adrift, unsure how to rebuild her life after loss. Through her search for Christie, she finds someone whose struggles, though separated by a century, echo her own. Both women are 37, both in the midst of significant personal upheaval, and both questioning whether reinvention is possible at this stage of life. The questions Christie faced in 1926 about identity, purpose, and reinvention are the same questions Lucy confronts in 2026, and in many ways, the ones audiences continue to grapple with today. Alongside this emotional depth,

Mrs. Christie offers flashes of wit and playful twists that keep audiences smiling as they unravel the clues alongside the characters. It's a mystery with a mischievous streak, a theatrical experience that entertains as much as it intrigues.

As the threads of the play intertwine, the production invites audiences to consider the stories women tell and the stories told about them. Christie's life has often been reduced to her fame, her marriage, or the enigma of those missing days. *Mrs. Christie* restores dimension to her, portraying a smart woman navigating personal upheaval

in a world rapidly reshaped by war, shifting gender expectations, and cultural transition. At the same time, Lucy's journey reminds us that the act of searching — whether for answers, meaning, or a way forward — can be transformative in its own right.

In blending fact with fiction, history with emotional truth, and mystery with humor, *Mrs. Christie* offers an experience that is both suspenseful and delightful. It does not attempt to solve the disappearance outright; instead, it asks what such mysteries leave behind in those who live through them and those who inherit their stories. As audiences follow Lucy and Agatha across a century, the play becomes a testament to the enduring power of storytelling, the resilience found in reinvention, and the ways the past continues to shape the paths we forge today.

CONTENT ADVISORY

Mrs. Christie is recommended for ages 13 and up. Using minimal adult language, the mysterious disappearance of Agatha Christie leads to depictions of attempted murder as well as references to violence, infidelity and death. Two characters discuss having suicidal thoughts.

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INSIDE TWO PLAYS: A CONVERSATION WITH THE DIRECTORS OF *MARY'S WEDDING* AND *MRS. CHRISTIE*

By Tatiana Godfrey

Recently, Osborn Family Producing Artistic Director Blake Robison and Associate Artistic Director Joanie Schultz sat down to discuss two of the plays they're directing this season at the Playhouse — *Mary's Wedding*, a lyrical World War I romance, and *Mrs. Christie*, a time-spanning investigation into Agatha Christie's real-life disappearance in 1926. In their conversation, the two directors explored how history shapes character, how emotional tension drives storytelling, and why these narratives continue to resonate with contemporary audiences. This interview has been edited for content and clarity.

What are the plays that you're directing and what are they about?

Blake Robison: I'm directing *Mary's Wedding* by Stephen Massicotte, which is a lovely period romance set during the Great War, or the First World War. And it is about a Canadian farm boy who meets a young woman and falls in love and then is shipped off to the trenches of France. Thematically, the play is about the intersection of love and memory, dreams, and the process of letting go.

Joanie Schultz: I am directing *Mrs. Christie*, which is on two different timelines. One of them is a contemporary woman in 2026 who is going to an Agatha Christie festival. Concurrently, there's a timeline in 1926 that is pulled straight from Agatha Christie's life, which is falling apart, and she disappears for 11 days. Lucy, in the contemporary time, is trying to find out what happened to Agatha during those 11 days, and the two women find each other over space and time and jump into that second act of their lives together.

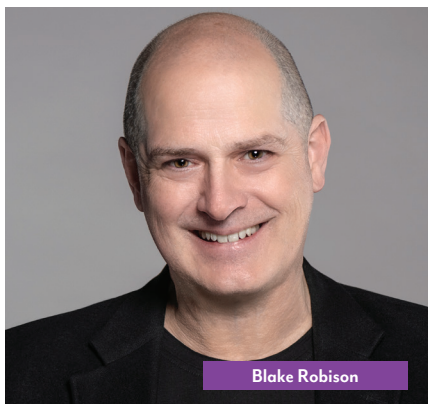
Both plays depict things that really happened. Then, there are also things that are imagined, either by the characters or by the writers themselves. How do you balance things that are based on fact with things that are imagined?

BR: I feel that the playwright has done that balancing act for us. It's baked into the play. The two main characters are imaginary, but there is one character based on an actual person who is portrayed by the actress playing Mary. The war piece of the storyline in *Mary's Wedding* is very rooted in historical fact. The play takes care of that for the audience, so you don't need to know a lot about World War I.

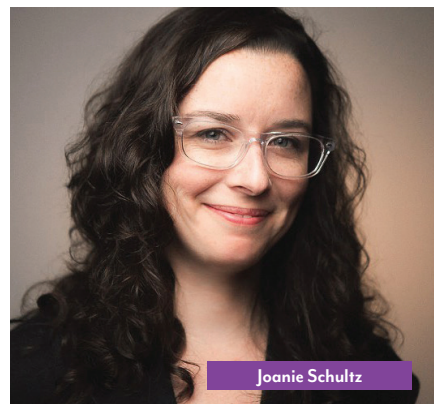
JS: And then [the playwright of *Mrs. Christie*] Heidi's done such great research. She went to the Agatha Christie Festival and spent so much time researching Agatha's life that there is this real component. Heidi takes a lot of license with supposing what was happening with Agatha during those 11 days. So, it is a mixture of fact and fiction that I think the playwrights of both plays really set up enough for the audience to know what's going on, to then take you on the ride with the rest.

Both plays unfold, directly or indirectly, in the shadow of WWI. How does that historical moment inform the way your characters see themselves or each other?

BR: Well, the plays are set in a specific time and social context, a certain era. *Mary's Wedding* spans 1918 to 1920, and we sort of live in that memory space between there. So, it informs it in the sense that the characters are a product



Blake Robison



Joanie Schultz

of their era. There are certain expectations, certain social roles that a young woman was expected to play, to inhabit at that time. On the side of Charlie, it was perhaps a simpler time in terms of our understanding of good versus evil. All these young men going off to fight a war that everyone considered necessary and moral, is a clarity that we don't often get in contemporary times.

JS: *Mrs. Christie* definitely does bust out and time travel, trying to be a clash of times and spanning over 100 years in that way. But the setup for the play, really, is so much about Agatha Christie's actual real-life history. She met and married Archibald Christie, who was a colonel in World War I, over a period of three months — because it was the middle of the war, and he was flying off to fight. And so, a couple of things happened. One is that when they were married, they didn't really know each other very well, and two, she became a volunteer nurse for the Red Cross. There, she learned a lot about pharmaceuticals, and that became her inspiration about poisons and things.

I do think that World War I was a time in which a lot of women went into working because all the men were fighting, and that created career women in a way that was not necessarily working for a lot of men when they came back. There was a real change in women's roles in between the two world wars that Agatha's really a part of.

You've both mentioned the roles of women during wartime, Agatha Christie as a nurse, and then Mary's life is directly related to this war unfolding. How do you see the plays commenting on the roles that women are allowed or forced to take during and in the aftermath of war?

JS: There's something interesting about sacrifice, which I see in *Mary's Wedding*. What do women sacrifice in war?

BR: Well, Mary is English, and she's just moved to Canada with her mother.

And there's something in there. We don't have a lot of detail about why, necessarily, but that alone is interesting, that they would leave England with the war on. And then, her plight, if you will, is to stay there and wait.

JS: Yeah. So many women had to wait for information.

BR: I think in *Mary's Wedding*, the commentary is about the emotional weight of separation. When might a reunion happen, and what would that mean? There's a longing that is pervasive throughout the play that creates an emotional tension that keeps you going. But it's shared between the two of them.

JS: Yeah, *Mrs. Christie* is post-war Agatha. We also meet Nancy Neele, who is a younger woman having an affair with Agatha's husband and ends up, in real life, marrying him. And so, I think we see different representations of what a woman should be and what's expected. There is a pool of traditional women's roles versus the new woman, and what that looks like differently on both.

What resonates with you about telling these stories in 2026? Are there contemporary echoes that make these stories feel urgent today?

JS: That's an easy question for me because it takes place in 2026 along with taking place in 1926. I think that partially has a lot to do with Heidi's resonance with Agatha Christie. You know, both women [in *Mrs. Christie*] are in a moment of grief and change, and wondering if, at 37, they can restart and where they still have to go from here. I mean, Agatha wasn't even famous yet. Her career had just begun as the great Agatha Christie that we know now; most of her books were written after then. Just knowing that and also seeing the inspiration of this contemporary character finding solace and inspiration in this literary, artistic, singular, unique woman who is our ancestor in our female lineage. I think that's resonant right now.

BR: I was thinking of *Mrs. Christie* just over the last day or so with the passing of Tom Stoppard. Because so many of his plays have a similar structure, where you have contemporary people playing detective, trying to figure out what happened at this place 100 years ago, or who were my ancestors, and how are they affecting my life now? Plays like *Arcadia* and *Leopoldstadt*. And, you know, *Mrs. Christie* has the same structure.

JS: It does, it does. We've actually talked about *Arcadia* a handful of times in our design meetings.

BR: *Mary's Wedding* doesn't do that in the same way, but I believe that there's great value in telling period stories. And I think audiences are smart enough to draw the connections for themselves. We don't have to hit people over the head for them to understand that young people in love at a time of political turmoil and world tumult has something to do with what happens and continues to happen in the world today.

SPECIAL EVENTS

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

ART TALKS

Stay after select performances for a behind-the-scenes discussion with members of the artistic team.

Mary's Wedding

Sun., Feb. 15 at 2 p.m.

Sun., Feb. 22 at 2 p.m.

Wed., Feb. 25 at 7:30 p.m.

Thu., March 5 at 7:30 p.m.

Mrs. Christie

Sun., March 8 at 2 p.m.

Thu., March 12 at 7:30 p.m.

Wed., March 25 at 7:30 p.m.

ENHANCE YOUR EXPERIENCE OF *MRS. CHRISTIE*

MYSTERY/THRILLER BOOK SWAP

Who doesn't love a mystery? Who doesn't love a free book? Who keeps adding to their to-be-read pile that is already too high? The answer is everyone who loves books, and we are here to enable your book habit! During *Mrs. Christie*, we are hosting a Mystery/Thriller Book Swap in the lobby. Just bring a mystery book or two to contribute to the stock, then browse and take a new one home. No spoilers!

WINE PAIRING DINNER

Wed., March 4 | Thu., March 12 | Fri., March 27

Enjoy a curated wine tasting experience from 6-7 p.m. where we pair four delicious courses that complement every sip. Cost is \$75 per person, which doesn't include tickets to the play (sold separately). Reservations required.

AGATHA CHRISTIE FILM SCREENINGS

Sun., March 8, 7 p.m. – *Murder on the Orient Express* (1974)

Mon., March 9, 7:30 p.m. – *Witness for the Prosecution* (1957)

Wed., March 11, 7:30 p.m. – *Death on the Nile* (1974)

Dive deeper into the world of Agatha Christie with local film historian Joe Horine at the Esquire Theatre. Join us for movie screening followed by a Q&A session. For tickets and more information, esquiretheatre.com.

READ BETWEEN THE WINES BOOK CLUB

Tuesday, March 10 – 4:50 *From Paddington*

Thursday, March 19 – *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*

Join us in reading and discussing two Agatha Christie novels at our pre-show Read Between the Wines Book Club. Enjoy wine, hors d'oeuvres, and a fun book discussion. The discussion runs 6:15-7 p.m. Cost is \$25, which includes hors d'oeuvres, two glasses of wine, and doesn't include a ticket to the show (sold separately). You don't have to attend the play that evening to join the Book Club.

SOLO NIGHT

Wed., March 25

Attend theatre solo, but not alone. Solo Night is 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 for \$10. Come as strangers, leave as friends!

PLAY IN THE PARK
CINCINNATI HOUSE



SET THE STAGE AT SUMMER CAMP!

If the winter weather has you dreaming of summer, it's not too early to sign up the kids and teens in your life for the Playhouse's yearly summer theatre camp. Offering eight weeks of fun-filled opportunities, summer campers will explore their creativity and develop their theatrical talents. This summer's programs consist of one-week theatre camps and showcases, as well as two-week performance academies.

The one-week theatre camps let campers explore the fundamentals of creating theatre, focusing on specific skills such as playwriting, stage combat, musical theatre, acting, and more. The showcases focus on rehearsal, performance, and storytelling abilities. Each session features a unique theme. Coming this summer are one-week camps featuring *K-Pop Demon Hunters*, Disney's *Zombies* and *Descendants*, *Super Mario*, *SpongeBob*, *Superman*, and *Wicked: For Good*. The showcase themes are *Hamilton* and *K-Pop Demon Hunters*.

For youth and teen performers seeking more immersion into the world of theatre, two-week performance academies stage a full-length play or musical. With daily rehearsals, they work together to bring the production to life, culminating in a final performance complete with select costumes and set pieces. This summer's performance academies are *Seussical KIDS* and *Shrek KIDS* for younger performers, with *Legally Blonde The Musical JR.* and *Beware the Jabberwock* for teens and tweens.

Campers will not only grow as performers, but as people. In the Playhouse's inclusive and artistic environment, campers will tap into their creativity and build confidence both on and off the stage. "The campers grow every single week, and we see it. A camper who comes in on the first day of a five-day camp is not the same camper who leaves on Friday," says Ariana Moses, the Playhouse's Education Director. "They've made friendships, they've formed a community, they've learned new skills, and they've put together something to show their family and friends."

Summer Camp programming options are available at the Playhouse's theatre complex in Mt. Adams and Mason Community Center with opportunities for campers entering grades one through 12. Programs will begin on June 1 and run through July 31.

For more information on the 2026 summer camp offerings, visit cincyplay.com or call the Box Office at **513-421-3888**.