

SEPTEMBER – OCTOBER 2026

PROLOGUE

HIGH-TECH THRILLER

MC and Tom Brennan present

HEIST

By ARUN LAKRA

RAZOR-SHARP SATIRE

Digi and Mike Schueler present

TALK

World Premiere
By THERESA REBECK

SCENE BY SCENE

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ABOUT PROLOGUE

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NURTURING THE NEXT GENERATION OF AMERICAN THEATRE TOGETHER



Photos from Made In Cincy by Mikki Schaffner.

For more than six decades, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park has believed that great American theatre begins with a blank page. That belief has led to 90 world premieres and 29 commissioned plays, many of which have gone on to productions across the country.

Since 2006, the Jerome Fey Endowment for New Plays has provided the foundation for this work, allowing playwrights the time, resources, and artistic collaboration needed to develop bold new stories. Those commissions could then come to life on our stages as world premieres with support from The Rosenthal Family Foundation and The Harold & Mimi Steinberg Charitable Trust. Together, these dedicated partners have helped establish the Playhouse as one of the nation's leading homes for new play development.

Today, that commitment is expanding once again through **Made in Cincy: New Works Festival**, an annual celebration that invites audiences into the creative process itself. The festival gives theatre lovers a rare opportunity to experience new plays and musicals in development, engage directly with playwrights and artists, and help shape the future of American theatre before these works travel to stages across the country.

This next chapter is made possible through the generous leadership of Nancy and Mark Dawes, The Carol Ann and Ralph V. Haile Jr. Foundation, and Digi and Mike Schueler, whose investment is helping transform Cincinnati into a destination for the creation of new work. Their support builds upon decades of visionary philanthropy. It ensures that the Playhouse remains a place where artists can take creative risks, and audiences can experience the excitement of discovering tomorrow's great plays today.

The festival's pilot in May demonstrated just how enthusiastically our community embraces that mission, with every public reading selling out and audiences actively engaging with playwrights during the development process. Made in Cincy officially launches this fall alongside the world premiere of *Talk* by nationally acclaimed playwright and Cincinnati native Theresa Rebeck.

As we continue to build Made in Cincy, we invite you to join us. Together, we have the opportunity to create something truly special. With your partnership, we will continue nurturing the next generation of American theatre — one new story at a time.

To learn more about how you can support new work at the Playhouse, please contact Sneja Tomassian, Chief Philanthropy Officer, at sneja.tomassian@cincyplay.com or 513-977-2081.



OCT. 2-3, 2026

SEVEN THINGS TO KNOW WHEN ATTENDING

By Tatiana Godfrey

Did you used to rock out at Bunbury Music Festival? Maybe you celebrate our local brewing history at the annual Bock Fest. Maybe you've even dabbled in the odd theatre festival, joining the party at Fringe each summer. Whether you're a seasoned festival-goer or you're still figuring out what exactly a theatre festival entails, here are seven things to know before attending Made in Cincy: New Works Festival.

What is a new works festival?

Across the country, theatres like Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park hold new works festivals, which celebrate and support playwrights and their new pieces. Before audiences even arrive, playwrights, directors, actors, and dramaturgs work on developing the new play and preparing it for presentation. Then the plays are presented to the public at the festival, either through a reading — where actors read the script aloud for the audience to hear — or through a world premiere production.

When is Made in Cincy?

The festival runs October 2 and 3 and features:

- Three readings of new plays — *Untitled Ophelia Play* by Amy Berryman, *The Myth of Two Marcos* by Tony Meneses, and *The Best Little Cat House in Scab Holler* by Maggie Lou Rader
- One world premiere production — *Talk* by Theresa Rebeck
- A panel discussion with the playwrights
- Festival Happy Hour

How much is this going to cost?

The three readings and panel are free, requiring only a reservation. The happy hour is free with a cash bar. Tickets for *Talk* are available for purchase at a discounted rate for the festival performance on October 2 at 7:30 p.m. If available, parking will be available for purchase with your reservation.

How do I participate in these events?

A new play reading is less about polished production and more about the script itself. Expect actors with scripts in hand, simple to no staging, and plenty left to your imagination. Listen closely — not just to the dialogue, but to the stage directions, which will be read aloud by a narrator — and let the play unfold in your mind. Afterward, you'll be invited to a talkback, where playwrights are eager to hear what resonated, what confused you, and where you felt engaged. The most helpful feedback isn't about how to "fix" the play, but about your honest experience watching it.

How does a play become part of Made in Cincy?

Made in Cincy is built on relationships. We invite playwrights we've come to know and admire, giving them the time, space, and resources to continue developing work they're excited about. At the same time, we're committed to championing Cincinnati's own playwrights, creating opportunities for local



Photo from Made In Cincy by Mikki Schaffner.

artists alongside nationally recognized voices. In this way, the selection is mission driven: Bring remarkable new work to Cincinnati while helping put our vibrant theatre community on the national map.

Why haven't I heard of Made in Cincy before?

This is actually the first year of the festival, and it's been a long time coming! After years of one-off workshops, readings, commissions, and world-premieres, we piloted this concentrated festival last spring around three readings: *The Church of Broken Things* by Resident Artist Maggie Lou Rader, *The Mink* by Resident Artist Isaiah Reaves, and *Ohio River Prayers* by nationally acclaimed playwright Nathan Alan Davis. We learned a lot from this soft launch about how to hold both artists and audiences through the process and have built an exciting experience for the hard launch in October.

Who all is going to be there?

Expect an exciting mix of people. Made in Cincy will welcome artists from both Cincinnati and across the country, theatre professionals, dedicated fans of new work, and audience members discovering the festival for the first time. That's part of what makes a new works festival special — everyone gathers around stories that are still taking shape, and every person in the room becomes part of that experience.

For a full schedule and to make reservations for Made in Cincy: New Works Festival, visit cincyplay.com/made-in-cincy.

EVENT SPONSORS

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DIGI AND MIKE SCHUELER

MC AND TOM BRENNAN present

HEIST

By ARUN LAKRA

Directed by BLAKE ROBISON

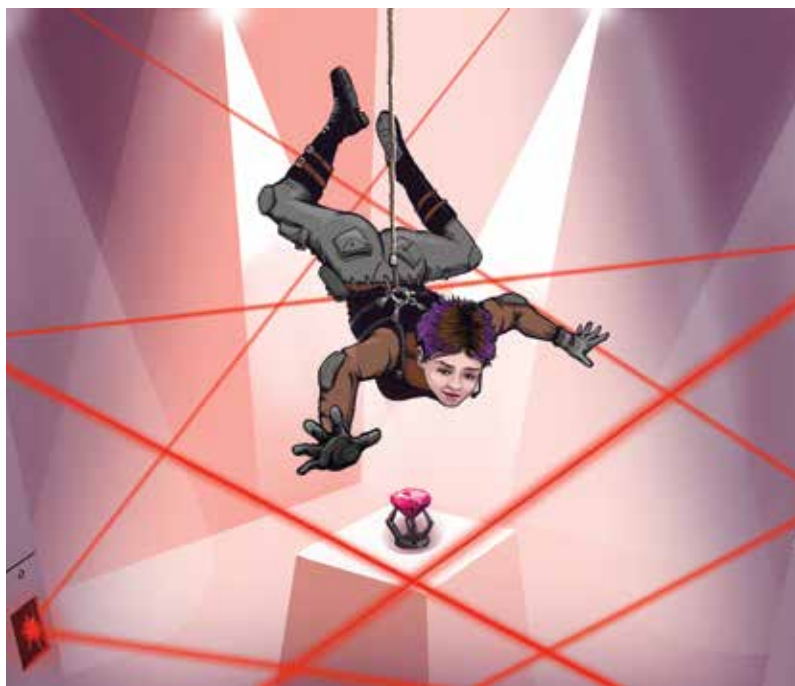
Co-Produced with Milwaukee Repertory Theater and Gulfshore Playhouse

Moe and Jack's Place — The Rouse Theatre

SEP. 12 – OCT. 11, 2026

HEIST ENTERTAINS WITH SAVVY INTRIGUE, SPECTACLE, STORYTELLING

By Russell Florence Jr.



Clever, funny, sharp, and unpredictable, *Heist* pays tribute to caper movies like *Ocean's Eleven*, *The Italian Job*, *Mission: Impossible*, and *The Usual Suspects* with appealing intrigue and zestful flair.

Canadian playwright Arun Lakra's contemporary account of professional thieves bonded by purpose yet shaken by betrayal centers on ringleader Marvin, a criminal mastermind who gathers four unique personalities, including a gymnast and a computer geek, to initially assist him in stealing a prized ruby valued at \$6 million. The group ultimately sets their sights on stealing a diamond from the notorious international jewel thief known as The Spider, resulting in entertaining twists befitting the caper genre.

Heist received its world premiere in January 2024 at Vertigo Theatre in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. During its American premiere in December 2025 at Arizona Theatre Company in Tucson and Tempe, critics praised the script's ability to surprise. "*Heist* subverts expectations and brings audiences into a story where morality is grey, stakes are high, and no one is who they seem to be," noted BroadwayWorld.com.

Lakra said his playwriting typically leans into more serious, thought-provoking territory, which makes him even happier to have redefined what a caper can be.

"One of the things people seem to appreciate about this play is the comedy," Lakra said. "You don't typically walk in to see a heist expecting to laugh, but happily, audiences seem to find the play funny. I'm pleased that this play has found a home at the nexus of a heist thriller and a whodunnit with a splash of comedy."

The Playhouse's Osborn Family Producing Artistic Director Blake Robison is staging *Heist*'s Midwest premiere, co-produced by Milwaukee Repertory Theater and Gulfshore Playhouse. He commended Lakra's impressive grasp of capers academically and structurally.

"Arun has an innate understanding of the genre and an encyclopedic knowledge of heist films," Robison said. "The script is a Rubik's Cube. There's great craft behind it. Arun has woven the pieces together in clever and unexpected ways. He knows how to lead the audience and how to turn the tables at just the right moment."

He particularly enjoys the familiarity of the characters in relation to various capers.

"I love how each character is a type: the Popeye, the Mary-Lou, the Geek, etc.," Robison said. "We compare these characters with their prototypes in other heist stories. That's part of the fun. 'Oh, he's like George Clooney in *Ocean's Eleven* or 'She's the Ving Rhames character in *Mission: Impossible*.'"

As a fan of classic and modern cinematic capers, Robison also admires *Heist* for being able to bring a new dimension to the kinds of stories typically told on stage.

"I do love caper stories! Not just recent ones like *Ocean's Eleven* but older ones like *The Sting*, too," Robison said. "It's one of the most enduring and entertaining genres in film, but much rarer in the theatre. I think people are drawn to the daring, the complexity, and the fantasy of it."

In his attempt to create a work that expands theatrical possibilities, specifically from a technical standpoint, Lakra is most proud of *Heist*'s cinematic allure.

"I feel live theatre, in general, is evolving rapidly as far as pushing the boundaries of what's possible," Lakra said. "With *Heist*, we wanted to create a cinematic experience. In some ways, a hybridization of a movie and a play. We take advantage of modern high-tech video projections and aerial acrobatics to complement the on-stage storytelling and the theatrical twists. The tech is part of the fun."

Lasers, aerial stunts, and state-of-the-art projections are certainly essential, but Robison is eager to balance spectacle with specificity.

"The challenge of this script is twofold," Robison said. "First, we've got to track all the strands of the plot and know what's really going on in each scene. There's what the audience sees at first glance, and then there's what's really happening once you know more. The second challenge is to bring specificity to the characters. They can't be two-dimensional. We need to care about them even in the rapid-fire context of the storytelling."

Above all, he hopes audiences are receptive to experiencing the unique thrill ride *Heist* provides as an exciting launch to the 2026-27 season.

"First and foremost, it's FUN," Robison said. "We need a little pure entertainment right now. Also, this production allows us to show off the capabilities of our new Playhouse. It's a high-tech show with lasers, actors who fly, and more projections than we've ever done at the Playhouse. A great way to kick off the new season!"

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IN CONVERSATION WITH PLAYWRIGHT ARUN LAKRA

By Russell Florence Jr.

Arun Lakra's *Heist* brings pure entertainment to the forefront as a smart caper with cross-generational appeal. In advance of the Playhouse production, Lakra revealed details about the creation of the play as well as balancing life as a playwright with his primary occupation as an ophthalmologist.

What appeals to you the most about heist films? What are the attributes that make that brand of storytelling so captivating?

From a personal perspective, I very much appreciate entertainment, whether it's plays or movies or TV shows, where my whole family can enjoy it together. I have two young adult kids and two elderly parents, and as you can imagine, it's always challenging to find something to watch which is appealing to everyone. Prior to writing *Heist*, I was struck by the fact that caper movies such as *Ocean's Eleven* were something we all enjoyed. As I've spent more time in the *Heist* world, I've tried to better understand what it is about heists in general that make these stories so captivating. What I've come to believe is that in most crime stories, we're not really cheering for the bad guys. In a heist, we are. Which is part of the fun. And the second piece is that in a heist, a lot of the fun is the planning. There is a strategy and set up and often a series of challenges that must be overcome. Intellectual, physical. It's kind of like an escape room where we, the audience, are on the adventure with the characters. As if we are part of the team.

Was *Heist* a major departure for you as a playwright? Or simply another layer to the kinds of stories you enjoy telling?

Traditionally, I tend to gravitate to plays that are deep, powerful, transformative, and make us think about life and its big questions. This is NOT that! So, in that sense, the subject matter is quite different to what I'm used to writing. But strangely, as I started to write *Heist*, I realized I was using many of the same muscles I had developed in my other work, the more cerebral "serious" stuff. I love complex, intricately woven stories, and suddenly I found myself reveling in the fun of the twists and turns and the mental gymnastics required. When putting together a play such as this, it's critical to stay ahead of the audience, but also to not cheat. The plot needs to be airtight and be able to withstand the scrutiny of repeat viewings.

What are some of the major themes in *Heist* you wanted to explore?

As with any heist, there is the extrinsic reward. Money, jewels. But *Heist* is about more than greed. It's about revenge, loyalty, betrayal, trust. And, strangely, family.

How did you become a playwright?

When I attended medical school at the University of Toronto, I had no idea that there was some sort of latent creative side buried inside of me. I stumbled into writing when, for reasons I still don't understand, I decided to write a short story one night when I was on call. I submitted this to the Faculty of Medicine short story competition and inexplicably, I won. I later realized mine was probably the only entry! Regardless, I was encouraged, and I soon discovered that writing helped to sort of balance out the hardcore science side of my brain. I continued to cultivate the creative side through my internship at the University of Hawaii (another great decision!) and my ophthalmology residency in



Arun Lakra — Playwright

Toronto. For the last 20+ years, I have divided my work life between the practice of medicine and the art of writing. These days, I spend a lot of time inhabiting and thinking about the intersection of arts and science. I like to think that writing has made me a better doctor (empathy, humanity, creativity), and medicine has made me a better writer (logic, structure, methodology). And that the combination has, hopefully, made me a better human.

What advice would you give to others who are balancing a professional career with creative pursuits? How can they find inspiration and motivation to pursue their passions outside of work?

The dual career, the doctor-writer hyphenate, or the "subplot" as I like to call it, has its share of challenges and rewards. Through the years, I have come to realize that there are many of us who share a similar desire to explore different, often divergent, paths. While I did not deliberately set out to do so, I have stumbled onto this double life that has somehow worked for me. A few years ago, I gave a TedX talk on this subject, *SUBPLOTING: Rethinking the Way We Follow Our Passions*. If anyone is interested, there is a link to it on my website, arunlakra.com.

What do you hope audiences take away from *Heist*?

The most gratifying thing about *Heist* is that it seems to be attracting a new cohort of folks in addition to traditional theatregoers. In particular, young people — students, young folks in their 20s and 30s. We see multi-generational families coming to enjoy the show together. Date nights. Raucous student performances. One of the most exciting things that has been said about *Heist* is that it's kind of a "gateway drug" to the theatre. And if plays like *Heist* can bring a new generation into the theatre, I think that would be fantastic.

CONTENT ADVISORY

Heist is recommended for teenage and adult audiences. This thrilling crime caper has all the elements you enjoy from this genre, including a motley crew who love quick-witted banter (with some strong language) and an elaborate plan that involves guns and discussions of violence.

SPECIAL EVENTS

DEEP DIVE SCREENINGS OF ICONIC HEIST MOVIES

Heist stories have been a movie mainstay since 1903's *The Great Train Robbery*, the first work of "narrative cinema." Plotting thieves have thrilled audiences in hundreds of great films since, and in conjunction with our production of *Heist*, the Esquire Theatre is screening some of the best robbery capers ever.

Join us for a deep dive on these iconic heist movies with Film Professor Joe Horine, who will give a brief intro and lead an optional Q&A after the film. Visit esquiretheatre.com for tickets.

- Thursday, Sept. 17, 7 p.m. — *Asphalt Jungle* (1950)
- Sunday, Sept. 20, 7 p.m. — *To Catch A Thief* (1955)
- Wednesday, Sept. 23, 7 p.m. — *Rififi* (1955)
- Tuesday, Oct. 6, 7 p.m. — *Topkapi* (1964)
- Thursday, Oct. 8, 7 p.m. — *The Killing* (1956)
- Sunday, Oct. 11, 2 p.m. — *The Usual Suspects* (1995)

DIGI AND MIKE SCHUELER present

TALK

World Premiere

By THERESA REBECK

Directed by MËLISA ANNIS

Rosenthal Shelterhouse Theatre

SEP. 26 – OCT. 25, 2026

DEVELOPING STORY

By Tatiana Godfrey



It's no secret that the Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park has long been committed to uplifting and championing new play development. But if the launch of the Made in Cincy: New Works Festival (which you can read about on page three of this publication) wasn't enough to make the case for our dedication to new plays, then our commissioning initiatives put it beyond all doubt. Of the 90 world premieres produced since the Playhouse's founding, over a quarter of those plays have been commissions. A commission funds and supports a playwright and their play through multiple drafts, workshops, and table reads with the aim of eventual production on one of our stages. It is, in effect, a years-long bet on a person rather than a finished script: the Playhouse commits its resources before it knows what the play will become, trusting the process to get there. This season, we're proud to produce our next commissioned project, *Talk* by acclaimed playwright and Cincinnati native Theresa Rebeck.

Rebeck's *Dead Accounts* was a Playhouse commission that went on to Broadway in 2012, and her play *Bad Dates* was a hit with Cincinnati audiences in both 2005 and 2016. Her return, then, feels especially fitting — she is an artist with a meaningful history here and a track record of engaging Playhouse audiences. And in *Talk*, that relationship continues with a story that feels both timely and unmistakably Rebeck.

Talk is about a cable news talk show host who is hosting a live show at the urging of her producer and studio executives to boost ratings. When she insists that one of her guests, a Nobel Prize-winning economist, is boring, she enlists her producer to find a last-minute replacement to speak on the show's topic, a global minimum wage. The live show descends into chaos as the surprise replacement sparks rising arguments from the other panelists on the show. The aggressive banter builds into an explosive climax that

leaves the characters, and the audience, reeling.

Osborn Family Producing Artistic Director Blake Robison is keenly aware of the importance of commissioning new works. In 2018, he commented to the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, "When you have the resources to invest in new playwrights and new stories — and we do — then doing productions like this becomes your responsibility to the art form." When he sets his sights on a prospective commission, he does so in a variety of ways. Sometimes he'll approach a playwright with a vague idea about themes and topics. Sometimes he'll leave the door wide open for creative possibilities. Back in 2021, he reconnected with Rebeck, and the two engaged in creative conversations about what stories she'd be interested in telling next.

Originally, this commission was intended to be an adaptation of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlett Letter*. "I was having coffee with Theresa in New York, and I said, 'Wouldn't it be great to do something that fits in with high schools and their reading lists?'" said Robison, adding that they discussed a variety of books that most students read in school before landing on *The Scarlett Letter*. "It's such a fascinating morality tale, and it's a good time to readdress it. There hasn't been a stage version of it for nearly 20 years, so that's very exciting to me."

That plan didn't survive contact with the writing process itself. Rebeck was pulled toward a different story, and Robison didn't try to talk her out of it. This is, in a sense, the whole premise of the commission: you back the writer, not the outcome. If the work wanders in a direction nobody anticipated, that's not a failure of planning — it's the plan working as intended.

That spirit of following the work wherever it wants to go led Rebeck away from Hawthorne and into the chaotic world of cable news. Drawing on her own experiences writing for television, she set out to satirize the increasingly performative nature of public discourse, where outrage often carries more value than expertise and entertainment can eclipse conversation. The



Theresa Rebeck — Playwright

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first draft was already funny, but its central character pushed so hard that it was difficult to stay with her. Early conversations about the play focused on making the main character, Brenda, less abrasive without sanding off the qualities that make her such a force. Rebeck returned with another draft that found that balance. Soon afterward, the script was workshopped in New York.

A workshop isn't a rehearsal, exactly. There are no costumes or scenery, and actors spend most of the week seated around a table with scripts in hand. This workshop brought together Rebeck, Robison, a director, a dramaturg, a stage manager, and a remarkable cast. For a week, the room ran on caffeine and close listening, everyone tracking the same question from a different seat at the table. Some of the actors from that room will also appear in the Cincinnati production, carrying what they discovered into the next stage of the play's life.

From the outside, a workshop might look like a simple table read. From the inside, it's more like watching a play rewrite itself in real time. "It's important to me for the play to feel contemporary. Like it's responding to the present moment, right now," Rebeck said before entering the workshop process. This became a lens through which feedback was given. The actors read a scene aloud. Someone stops to ask a question. Why does this character say this? Does this joke land? Is there a clearer way to phrase that thought? The actors weigh in. The director offers an observation. Robison chimes in. The dramaturg asks questions to help clarify the story. Rebeck listens, pushes back when she disagrees, laughs when something unexpected emerges, and quietly starts typing. Every adjustment is recorded as it happens. By the end of the week, the play has become something new.



Stephen Barker Turner and Haynes Thigpen in *Dead Accounts*. Photo by Sandy Underwood.



Haley Walker in *Bad Dates* (2016). Photo by Mikki Schaffner.

This new draft is the one that arrived in Cincinnati. It's the version the artistic team used to begin assembling the artists who will ultimately bring it to life. Even then, though, the play isn't finished.

In the months leading up to rehearsal, the director and design team met to figure out what the play will look and sound like. The dramaturg and director spent hours with the script together, asking questions before actors and the playwright step into the room. These sorts of questions are geared towards deepening understanding of how the play works. What kind of relationship does Brenda have with the audience? Is she selling ideas, or selling herself? When is she speaking from conviction, and when is she simply repeating talking points? How does the play explore capitalism not just as an economic system but as a set of values that shapes the way Brenda moves through the world? Beneath all of the comedy, where are the moments of genuine truth?

Not every question needs an answer before rehearsal begins. In fact, many of them are better answered by actors standing on their feet than by people

sitting around a conference table. Those conversations become the next round of discoveries. The actors will reveal new possibilities. Rebeck will continue revising. Characters will become fuller, motivations clearer, rhythms sharper. By the start of technical rehearsals, the script will finally lock into place so designers can build the technical world around it.

And even then, in some ways, the play is still becoming itself.

That's the remarkable thing about a commission. Audiences often think they're coming to opening night to see a finished product. In reality, they're seeing the latest chapter in a years-long conversation between playwright, artists, and audience. Every draft, every workshop, every rehearsal asks the same question: "Can this story become clearer, funnier, richer, more human?"

With *Talk*, Cincinnati audiences won't just be seeing Theresa Rebeck's newest play. They'll be seeing the result of hundreds of conversations, countless questions, and years of collaborative curiosity — exactly the kind of artistic journey a commission is designed to make possible.

SPECIAL EVENT

THE STATE OF JOURNALISM: PANEL DISCUSSION

Sunday, Oct. 11 at 3:30 p.m.

Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park

Are you passionate about freedom of the press? Are you concerned about erosion of the First Amendment? Do you wonder how real journalists navigate the current media environment? Join us following the 2 p.m. performance of *Talk* on Sunday, Oct. 11 for a dynamic discussion about the state of journalism today with a panel of esteemed Cincinnati journalists.

The event is **FREE** and open to all, whether you attend that day's performance or not.

CONTENT ADVISORY

Talk is recommended for older teenage and adult audiences. The show reflects today's political and media climate, where NOTHING is off limits. This biting satire uses some language and frequently references mature subjects to discuss topics including immigration, racism, classism, minimum wage, the government... and more. We warned you.

PLAY IN THE PARK
CINCINNATI HOUSE

INTRODUCING SEASONED DISH FOR PRE-SHOW DINING

Beginning this fall, you'll see some new faces, new menus, and new options for our pre-show casual dining service. SeasonedDish will bring their culinary experience and passion for cooking to Playhouse audiences with the start of *Heist*.

Founded by chef and entrepreneur Trish Fail, SeasonedDish Catering & Events is a Cincinnati-based catering company rooted in hospitality, community, and guest experiences. What began as a passion-driven venture has evolved into a trusted culinary partner for corporate clients, nonprofit organizations, weddings, cultural institutions, and large-scale community events throughout the region.

"We are excited about the opportunity to contribute to one of Cincinnati's most respected cultural institutions while creating a food-and-beverage experience that reflects the quality and creativity associated with the Playhouse," said Chef Trish.

Known for bold yet balanced flavors and polished presentation, SeasonedDish creates experiences that feel special while remaining accessible and welcoming. Their approach will center around elevated grab-and-go offerings, seasonally inspired menus, and efficient pre-show and intermission service. The menu will vary throughout the season, feature accessible contemporary cuisine, and include wellness-conscious options.

"Rather than traditional concession-style service, our goal is to create a hospitality experience that feels curated, polished, and intentionally connected to the guest journey," said Renee Weber, who will manage the operations at the Playhouse for SeasonedDish.

During the run of *Heist*, SeasonedDish will be testing a new pre-order option. Order and pay online in advance, and your meal will be ready for pick-up when you arrive at the theatre or at intermission with no wait in line! Depending on response and results, the pre-order option may extend for the entire season.

SeasonedDish will open 90 minutes prior to showtime and will be located at the food service counter located on the second floor. For the current menu throughout the season and to pre-order during *Heist*, visit cincyplay.com/eat-drink.



SeasonedDish's Renee Weber and Chef Trish Fail.