

PROLOGUE

MARCH 2022

LEADING *Ladies* presents

STEEL MAGNOLIAS

With beloved characters,
heartwarming dialogue and snappy
repartee, *Steel Magnolias* revels in the
power and grace of female friendship.

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THE JEWISH FOUNDATION
OF CINCINNATI PRESENTS
BECOMING DR. RUTH

THANK YOU, BAHL & GAYNOR

PLAY IN THE PARK
CINCINNATI **HOUSE**



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ABOUT PROLOGUE

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INTRODUCING: THE 2022-23 SEASON!

The Playhouse embraces a new era of theatre with a lineup of productions we can't wait to share. We're partnering with theatres in the community to perform our first three mainstage shows off site while construction is completed. The Rouse Theatre will open in March 2023 with a new production of the blockbuster musical *A Chorus Line*. The season also includes an Agatha Christie mystery, another chapter in August Wilson's American Century Cycle and two world premieres, including a fresh take on the classic *Western Shane* from acclaimed playwright Karen Zacarias.

"The 2022-23 season embodies the very best of American theatre and celebrates the rich diversity of our world," says Producing Artistic Director Blake Robison. "Our new facility will serve the entire Cincinnati arts and culture community. We are eager to open our doors, share resources and highlight the work of so many outstanding artists for our loyal audiences."

OFF-SITE PRODUCTIONS

AGATHA CHRISTIE'S MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS

Adapted for the stage by **KEN LUDWIG**

SEPT. 24 – OCT. 23, 2022 at the Jarson-Kaplan Theater

A thrilling whodunit from the world's most popular mystery writer.

FRIDA...A SELF PORTRAIT

Written and Performed by **VANESSA SEVERO**

OCT. 15 – NOV. 6, 2022 at The Carnegie Theatre

Mexican painter Frida Kahlo comes to life onstage in a stunning production.

THE LION

By **BENJAMIN SCHEUER**

NOV. 12 – DEC. 4, 2022 at the Warsaw Federal Incline Theater

A musical story about a singer-songwriter and the redemptive power of music.

THE ROUSE THEATRE GRAND OPENING SEASON

A CHORUS LINE

Conceived and Originally Directed and Choreographed by **MICHAEL BENNETT** | Book by **JAMES KIRKWOOD** and **NICOLAS DANTE** | Music by **MARVIN HAMLISCH** | Lyrics by **EDWARD KLEBAN**

MARCH 11 – APRIL 14, 2023

The sensational, Tony Award-winning musical opens the new theatre!

AUGUST WILSON'S SEVEN GUITARS

APRIL 22 – MAY 14, 2023

August Wilson's poignant, Tony Award-winning play with live blues music.

SHANE

By **KAREN ZACARIAS**

JUNE 3 – 25, 2023

WORLD PREMIERE! An exciting, new perspective on one of the greatest Westerns of all time.

ROSENTHAL SHELTERHOUSE THEATRE SEASON

THE CHINESE LADY

By **LLOYD SUH**

MARCH 25 – APRIL 30, 2023

A poetic story about the first Chinese woman to step foot on U.S. soil.

ORIGIN STORY

By **NATHAN ALAN DAVIS**

MAY 20 – JUNE 25, 2023

WORLD PREMIERE! A funny and heartfelt comedy about life's biggest questions.

Visit cincyplay.com to learn more about the 2022-23 season!

OFF THE HILL AND UNDER THE SEA

By Deja Shanks

Playwright Mike Kenny's colorful and charming adaptation of *The Little Mermaid* rounds out the 2021-22 Off the Hill touring season. No stranger to the Playhouse, Kenny's scripts have been featured in previous seasons, including his 2018-19 adaptation of *Rapunzel* that explored themes such as adventure, independence and empowerment. *The Little Mermaid* gives us an exclusive look at life under the sea, as well as the excitement above it, merging the two worlds into one unforgettable story!

Originally created by Hans Christian Andersen in 1837 and made popular by Disney, *The Little Mermaid* is a tale about how far a curious mermaid will go to achieve true love. Kenny's adaptation keeps the spirit of the original fairy tale, in which the mermaid makes a deal with a sea witch to become human. The script emphasizes the importance of family and thoughtful decision-making.

Playhouse Director of Artistic Engagement Daunielle Rasmussen says Kenny's adaptation aligns more with the original story by Andersen than the Disney version. "It has a lot to take away from it, such as the belief that love and strength can come from your family. It also looks at the difficulty of making choices between your own happiness and doing the right thing and that there can be unexpected consequences to the choices that we make."

The youngest of six sisters, the little mermaid dreams of a happier world above the sea and is assured by her grandmother that when she turns 15, she will "sit on the rocks in the moonlight and see it all." Coming of age, she becomes enthralled by the unknown world above the sea when a mystery man is thrown

from his ship into the deepest of waters and then rescued by the mermaid who gets him safely back to shore. The story alternates between these two settings, which poses no challenge to *The Little Mermaid's* scenic designer, Kenton Brett.

"Special slots on top of the rolling set panels allow us to change fan coral into a tree, a ship at sea or an iceberg," says Brett, who has designed numerous sets for the Playhouse, including *Stuart Little*. To help establish the setting of below sea, onto the stage, *The Little Mermaid* will feature key props to help transport the minds of the viewers.

"We are bringing the sea to life with silks — brightly colored and custom-dyed silks painted to match the waves and coral seabed of the set," says Brett.

"I wanted all of the costume and prop items to feel like items they would find in the ocean, either from shipwrecks or natural materials in the ocean," Rasmussen adds.

And although fairy tales are historically filled with magic, happy endings and true love, they are also about the underlying themes and messages that help younger audiences process certain realities. Rasmussen believes that introducing these stories will keep the conversation going beyond theatre doors.

"Fairy tales like this one and the stories told by the Brothers Grimm were used to teach children morality and to help them process really difficult human experiences, such as consequences and loss," says Rasmussen. "I think that it's important to provide the opportunity for kids to have a story-based example of these ideas so they have tangible ways to talk about more abstract concepts



Photo by Tony Arrasmith/Arrasmith & Associates.

with their parents. My goal is always to create more opportunities for dialogue and discussion between kids and teachers and families."

The Little Mermaid will be performed at various community centers from April 9 to May 7. It is recommended for ages 5 and up. To learn more, visit cincyplay.com.

Off the Hill is made possible with support from **THE ROBERT AND ADELE SCHIFF FAMILY FOUNDATION, L&L NIPPERT CHARITABLE FOUNDATION** and **THE CHARLES H. DATER FOUNDATION**. The Bruce E. Coyle Acting And Education Intern Company supported by **JERRY AND BETSY SHROAT**. Virtual performances supported by **MACY'S**.

GO OFF THE GRID WITH THE PLAYHOUSE!

Off the Grid creates immersive theatre experiences for today. With an innovative artistic approach, interactive performances take place in site-specific or social settings that reimagine the nature of theatrical storytelling.

HEXES AND VEXES: A Dungeons and Dragons Interactive Experience

by Julia Gomez and Kyle Carey Miller

April 13-15 and April 22-24 | Pyramid Hill Sculpture Park | Cost: \$30

Surrounded by a blighted and enchanted forest, the Kingdom of Cinestreal has long been protected by the ancient magic of the Queen's Crown. But calamity erupts when a cloaked mage steals this powerful artifact and vanishes beyond the city's walls. Only by assembling your motley crew of friends, your magical items and all your knowledge of spells can you hope to vanquish the villain and — with the luck of the dice — restore peace and balance to your beloved home.

THE ERSATZ EXPRESS

by Ethan Graham Roeder

May 14 | Lebanon Mason Monroe Railroad | Cost: \$50

You're cordially invited to an evening of starlit cabaret and time-traveling adventures! Along the tracks of the Lebanon Mason Monroe Railroad, you'll encounter a ragtag band of time-traveling explorers who commandeer your train ride as they try to get back to their own era. It'll take more than song and dance to convince them that you shouldn't be taken along with them. Secure your seats to a uniquely entertaining train ride full of love, loss and locomotive, live storytelling.

To learn more about Off the Grid and reserve your tickets for these and other upcoming events, visit cincyplay.com.

MARX THEATRE

LEADING *Ladies* presents

STEEL MAGNOLIAS

By ROBERT HARLING

MARCH 19 – APRIL 17, 2022

Visual on the right and on the cover by Tony Arrasmith/Arrasmith & Associates.



HUMOR AND HEART

By Russell Florence Jr.

Robert Harling's beloved 1987 dramedy *Steel Magnolias*, a tale born from memories of the strong women in his family and extended support system, elevates the bonds of sisterhood with great humor and heart. Presented by the Playhouse's Leading Ladies, *Steel Magnolias* combines stirring drama with snappy and memorable repartee.

Written in 10 days and just a few months after the loss of Harling's sister, Susan, from diabetic complications, the play had a nearly three-year run off-Broadway at New York's Lucille Lortel Theatre. In 1988, Harling, who grew up in Natchitoches, Louisiana, adapted his play for film with Sally Field and an Academy Award-nominated Julia Roberts respectively portraying mother/daughter duo M'Lynn and Shelby Eatenton. The play has also received productions around the world in such countries as Sweden, South Africa, South Korea and Japan.

Set in Truvy Jones' in-home beauty salon, the play overflows with a naturally engaging familiarity and ambience, allowing the characters to particularly resonate for women of all ages and backgrounds. In addition to M'Lynn, Shelby and Truvy, memorable characters include the habitually sour Ouiser Boudreaux; elegant, former mayor's wife Clairee Belcher; and sweet, shy Annelle Dupuy.

"All the characters were based on real people, Mama's friends," Harling recounts in a 2013 article in *Garden & Gun* magazine. "I've never told a living soul who Ouiser is based on. After the play had some success and everybody from Natchitoches went up to New York to see it, I was really worried because Ouiser's such a crotchety old curmudgeon. And lo and behold, every woman in town was saying, 'He based Ouiser on me.'"

"The characters' quirks and idiosyncrasies are grounded in truth," adds Laura Gordon, who directs the Playhouse production. "Their relationships are honest. I think they continue to resonate with audiences because they're so recognizable. I think the play is a perfect mix of warmth, honesty and humor."

Over 30 years ago, Gordon played Truvy at Riverside Theatre in Iowa City, Iowa. She acknowledges how much the script has deepened with time.

"I remember being struck by the sense of community in the play," she notes. "The relationships are so rich. I'd say my appreciation has only deepened over the years. I certainly have a much clearer understanding of the older characters now."

As Gordon prepares to bring her own style and vision to the script, she isn't planning to leap into uncharted territory by any means. On the contrary, she's allowing Harling's colorful language to set the mood and emotions bolstered by the promise of authentic period costumes.

"I'm approaching this play in a pretty straightforward manner," she says. "We're keeping it true to the time it was written in the mid-to-late 1980s. We have an entirely female design team for the production which is really exciting, including our costume designer, Holly Payne, who was born and raised in Arkansas and has a keen understanding of these women."

With Truvy's salon as a fitting centerpiece for conversation and revelations, *Steel Magnolias* blooms with endearing themes of love, joy, sorrow and hope.

"When I was a kid, the mystique of the beauty parlor was that guys were never allowed," Harling notes in *Garden & Gun*. "You didn't know what went on in there, and they all came back different somehow. I realized this hermetically sealed environment would be the best place to have these women express their true feelings."

"I think the familiarity of this story is one of its strengths," Gordon says. "I hope the audience feels like they're visiting old friends who they haven't seen in a while. All of us have been living through an incredibly difficult time of late. I'm excited to share a story that embraces friendship through good times and bad, that celebrates kindness and the resilience of the human spirit, all while having a good laugh. As Truvy says, 'Laughter through tears is my favorite emotion.'"

Make your appointment to visit Truvy's salon as *Steel Magnolias*, presented by Leading Ladies, begins performances on March 19 in the Marx Theatre.

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RUNNING TIME
CONTENT ADVISORY

An accurate running time will be posted on our website on March 18.

Recommended for ages 13 and up. This all-female cast discusses marital relationships, medical illness and death, and they make sarcastic references to sexuality and non-threatening acts of violence. Being good Southern belles, they usually deliver these lines through cheeky euphemisms.

MEET THE CAST

Leading Ladies presents *Steel Magnolias*, the beloved story about the power and grace of female friendship.



KATE ABBRUZZESE

Role: Shelby

Iconic quote: "I would rather have 30 minutes of wonderful than a lifetime of nothing special."



GINA DANIELS

Role: Clairee

Iconic quote: "The only thing that separates us from the animals is our ability to accessorize."



ANNIE FITZPATRICK

Role: M'Lynn

Iconic quote: "We'll make it through this just fine. You know what they say. That which does not kill us makes us stronger."



NAOMI JACOBSON

Role: Quiser

Iconic quote: "I'm not crazy. I've just been in a very bad mood for 40 years."



BRITTANY ANIKKA LIU

Role: Annelle

Iconic quote: "I swear to you that my personal tragedy will not get in the way of my ability to do good hair!"



SUSAN LYNKEY

Role: Truvy

Iconic quote: "Smile! It increases your face value!"

LEADING *Ladies*

WHEN WOMEN COME TOGETHER, GREAT THINGS HAPPEN

Our production of *Steel Magnolias* is made possible by support from the Playhouse's Leading Ladies — a group of remarkable women who are passionate about theatre and enjoy exclusive events and behind-the-scenes access to productions. The program's co-chairs, Nancy Lippincott and Terry Lemmerman, agree that the story's characters, comedic moments and depictions of courage and resilience make *Steel Magnolias* uniquely memorable. Lippincott hopes audiences enjoy the show's celebration of friendship and "the strength that comes from having friends to share the good and bear the bad times." For Lemmerman, the story reminds us "how resilient we can be with friendships that make life easier, just like the friends I've made through Leading Ladies."

Learn more about how you can become a Leading Lady at cincyplay.com!



The Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati presents
BECOMING DR. RUTH

By MARK ST. GERMAIN

APRIL 9 – MAY 15, 2022

Anne O'Sullivan in the New Repertory Theatre 2019 production of *Becoming Dr. Ruth*
by Andrew Brilliant/brilliantpictures inc.



**YOU'RE ON THE AIR
WITH DR. RUTH**

By Natalie Clare

Many of us know Dr. Ruth Westheimer as America's favorite sex therapist in the 1980s and '90s. She took pop culture by surprise, delivering sound advice on intimacy and relationships that few cultural figures were able to do at the time, and she did so with a disarming demeanor, a cheerful smile and an open mind. But few of us know the story of this remarkable woman's journey.

In *Becoming Dr. Ruth*, an illuminating one-woman show presented by The Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati, Dr. Ruth narrates the harrowing details of her life, one riveting chapter at a time. The play takes place in her New York apartment, which is filled to the brim with moving boxes, photos, bookshelves and papers. She's recently lost her husband, and she's managing the unenviable task of packing up remnants of an incredibly full life. "We can visit while I pack," she says to the audience with her signature warmth, setting the stage for an inspiring and affectionate theatrical portrait.

Dr. Ruth — the real woman — is no stranger to speaking before a group of people. She made a career of giving advice to people about their most personal moments and experiences. *Becoming Dr. Ruth* flips that on its head, and through the performance of an actor, we hear true stories that we never knew about the public persona. Some are joyful and triumphant — others are heartbreaking and tragic. Altogether, she speaks candidly about surviving unimaginable experiences and accomplishing remarkable achievements.

Before she was Dr. Ruth, she was Karola Ruth Siegel, born in June 1928 in Frankfurt, Germany. Her parents placed her on a kindertransport in 1939 for her safety, which took her from Nazi-occupied Germany to Switzerland and permanently separated her from her family. She survived war-torn Europe and became an Israeli sniper and Jewish freedom fighter

with the Haganah. She later moved to Paris with her first husband to begin her education and then navigated life as a working single mother in New York City, in pursuit of continuing her training in psychology and counseling. Shortly after, her illustrious career as an educational media personality began.

"If you thought you knew all about Dr. Ruth, the woman, the myth, the legend, you might just be mistaken," *TheaterMania* writes of the one-woman show, calling it "an enjoyable tribute to a figure of popular culture who truly deserves it."

Director Stephen Nachamie envisions transforming the Rosenthal Shelterhouse Theatre space into Dr. Ruth's home in such a way that the audience feels like guests and not spectators of a show. He says, "We are inviting the audience into her apartment. It is important that they meet Dr. Ruth not as the polished talk-show host or figure they know but to see her as a human being."

Nachamie says the production includes projections that elevate the personal atmosphere inherent to the show. Coupled with detailed production elements through sound, lighting and wardrobe, he aims to help the audience feel right at home with Dr. Ruth as they "glimpse inside her most personal memories."

The Playhouse's production of *Becoming Dr. Ruth* is familiar ground to Nachamie. Not only does he have a personal connection to Dr. Ruth through his family (having met her several times when he was a child), but he directed the show in 2019 at New Repertory Theatre in Massachusetts with actor Anne O'Sullivan at the center. She returns to the role in the Playhouse's production.

BroadwayWorld wrote in a review of the show at New Repertory Theatre, "A must in any solo stage performance is for the artist to connect with the audience, and Anne O'Sullivan reaches through the fourth wall to grab our attention with warmth and Ruth's indomitable joie de vivre."

Likewise, *TheaterMirror* expressed, "I entered the theatre expecting to learn more about a likeable acquaintance and left it feeling like I'd just discovered a dear, dear friend. You will, too."

Becoming Dr. Ruth, presented by the Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati, takes the stage April 9 in the Rosenthal Shelterhouse Theatre.

PRESENTED BY  Jewish Foundation
of Cincinnati
INVESTING IN OUR COMMUNITY

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NEWS

RUNNING TIME An accurate running time will be posted on our website on April 8.

ARTIST SPONSOR THE CAROL B. HELDMAN
SEXUALITY EDUCATION FUND

CONTENT ADVISORY Recommended for adult and teenage audiences. This one-woman show about America's favorite sex therapist appropriately contains discussion of healthy sex and sexuality, while also covering other mature topics. Much like Dr. Ruth, these topics are addressed with a cheerful and disarming tone.

HUMOR AND GRIT

By Natalie Clare

Director Stephen Nachamie shares his take on *Becoming Dr. Ruth* and the indomitable woman at the center of the story.



What had you known about Dr. Ruth Westheimer prior to reading this script? What revealing details of her life did you learn after reading?

I had met Dr. Ruth as a child. My grandfather had a house on Lake Oscawana (where she lived with her husband and children). My cousin cut her grass. She was a family friend of my uncle and my aunt as well. I met her when I was probably around 8 or so. I remember the energy and the giggle.

When my dad was driving our family back to New York City, this voice and giggle that sounded familiar would come over the radio — I knew the laugh. He would change the station (we were kids). I knew a few things that she talks about in the show. When my sister was a teenager and had a friend stay over, they'd stay up and sneak a peek at her television show. I would see her at my cousin's bar mitzvah or now and again at a wedding or event. I also remember Mary Gross playing her on *Saturday Night Live*.

So, in short, I knew very little about her time in Israel and her life and as a cheery grandmother type — and as a world-renowned sex therapist. When asked to

direct the show a few years back, I jumped at the chance. She was very supportive and came to that production a few times (as did playwright Mark St. Germain).

What unique characteristics/ words would you use to describe Dr. Ruth?

Dr. Ruth is persistent, vivacious, a force of nature, personable, disarming, charming, extremely smart. She sticks by her morals and beliefs and wants people to be educated about sex to make responsible choices as well as enjoy it to the fullest.

Dr. Ruth has provided a wealth of knowledge and wisdom about relationships throughout her career. What can audiences glean from hearing the story of her life?

Family is of utmost importance to Dr. Ruth. She cherishes her family. When something appears to be a limitation in life, she sees it as a challenge, not an obstacle. Say "yes" to opportunities as that is where your life "will happen."



PLAY IN THE PARK
CINCINNATI HOUSE



RVP Photography for The Scout Guide Cincinnati.

THANK YOU, BAHL & GAYNOR!

By Mary Kay Koehler

The Playhouse is fueled by the overwhelming generosity and support of our corporate sponsors. They make it possible for our artists and craftspeople to wow our audiences and enrich the Tristate region with meaningful artistic experiences. That's why we're proud to have had Bahl & Gaynor Investment Counsel as a corporate sponsor since 2014.

Bahl & Gaynor's commitment to Playhouse productions has helped us bring stories to life on our stages. We're honored by their longtime support as the artist sponsor of *Tiny Tim in A Christmas Carol*, and we're thrilled about their partnership as a design sponsor for *Steel Magnolias*, presented by Leading Ladies, this season. Just as they help their clients build their futures, Bahl & Gaynor generously made a gift to our Directing

the Future: A New Stage for Cincinnati's National Theatre campaign. Their contribution helps to ensure our impact within the local arts community and the national theatre landscape for generations to come.

Founded in 1990, Bahl & Gaynor is an employee-owned, independent-registered investment adviser located in Cincinnati. The firm has expanded greatly since its inception nearly 32 years ago, managing and advising assets for individuals, families and institutional clients nationwide.

Bahl & Gaynor is committed to its Greater Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky home. The Financial Planning Team (pictured) works directly with clients and their trusted advisors to help individuals and families build their financial futures. In addition to the Playhouse, the firm supports a diverse range of organizations and causes close to the hearts of a dedicated staff and those of their clients.

We're grateful that together we can bring the joy of live theatre to our audiences. Thank you, Bahl & Gaynor, for making this possible!