

PROLOGUE

MAY 2022

Moe & Jack Rouse and
Randolph Wadsworth present

SCHOOL GIRLS; OR, THE AFRICAN MEAN GIRLS PLAY

This biting comedy explores
teenage girlhood and all the
drama that comes with it.

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NINE YEARS OF SUPPORT



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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 subscribers, donors and others.

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SUBSCRIBER INFO FOR YOUR NEW PLAYHOUSE

Next season, the Playhouse community takes an exciting step into a new era with the opening of Moe and Jack's Place – The Rouse Theatre. There's much to look forward to with this once-in-a-generation project — and we're sure you'll have questions along the way! Here's a brief guide to help you navigate those changes. You can always read more at cincyplay.com.

OFF-SITE PRODUCTIONS

We'll be performing the first three shows of the season off-site.

Agatha Christie's Murder on the Orient Express

Sept. 24 – Oct. 23, 2022

Jarson-Kaplan Theater at the Aronoff Center for the Arts, 650 Walnut St., Cincinnati, Ohio 45202

Frida...A Self Portrait

Oct. 15 – Nov. 6, 2022

The Carnegie Theatre, 1028 Scott St., Covington, Kent. 41011

The Lion

Nov. 12 – Dec. 4, 2022

Warsaw Federal Incline Theater, 801 Matson Pl., Cincinnati, Ohio 45204

The remainder of the 2022-23 season will be performed at the Playhouse after the grand opening of the Rouse Theatre in March 2023. Learn all about next season's shows on pages six and seven of this issue.

SUBSCRIPTION FAQS

Below, read our most frequently asked questions related to subscriptions. For more information, visit cincyplay.com/visit/faqs.

- All 2021-22 subscribers who renewed into the Rouse Theatre four-show package by the renewal deadline will be in the first seating group. Among that first seating group, subscribers will be seated in an order based on two criteria: your number of years as a subscriber and the level of your participation in the campaign to build the new mainstage theatre facility. If you haven't yet donated, please consider giving with your renewal to move up in the seating queue.
- We plan to take a very personalized approach to seating for the fixed-seat Rouse Theatre subscribers in the first seating group. We expect this process to take several months. All subscribers can expect to receive their dates and seating locations (for both off-site and on-site shows) by Aug. 1, 2022.
- Subscription tickets for off-site performances in the fall will be mailed by early September, and tickets for the on-site season in the new mainstage theatre will be mailed in the winter. Subscribers will also have the option of receiving digital tickets.
- Individual tickets for fall productions are expected to go on sale to the general public this summer, and individual tickets for the Rouse and Rosenthal Shelterhouse Theatres will go on sale sometime in the winter. Subscribers will have an advance opportunity to purchase additional tickets before the general public.
- If you have any questions or concerns, call our Patron Services staff in the Box Office at 513-421-3888.

STAY IN THE KNOW

One of the best ways to stay up-to-date with new developments is to join our e-list. In addition to receiving exclusive offers and behind-the-scenes content, you'll be among the first to know about news items. To sign up, go to cincyplay.com, scroll to the bottom and enter your email when prompted. You can also follow us on Facebook (@cincinnatiplayhouse) and Instagram (@cincyplay).



REFLECTING ON THE MARX THEATRE'S RICH HISTORY AND ARTISTIC LEGACY

When the Playhouse first opened its doors in 1960, it only offered one stage: a former Eden Park shelter house that had been converted to a theatre, known today as the Rosenthal Shelterhouse Theatre. It only took a few years and several sold-out shows before artistic leadership decided to expand the Playhouse and construct a larger space with a new, additional stage. In 1968, the Robert S. Marx Theatre staged its first production for the public.

This spring marks the last performances of the Marx Theatre before Moe and Jack's Place – The Rouse Theatre takes its place. For 54 years, the Marx has entertained audiences with Shakespearean classics, bold new work, toe-tapping musicals and visionary productions that moved to Broadway soon after making their Cincinnati debut — like our Tony Award-winning production of *Company*. In honor of its artistic legacy, we take a closer look at the Marx Theatre and some of its memorable productions.



The cast of *Camino Real*. Photo by Sandy Underwood.

The first show to perform in the Marx Theatre was *Camino Real* by Tennessee Williams, which opened on July 18, 1968.



Photo of the Marx Theatre construction.

The Marx Theatre was designed by Hugh Hardy of the New York architectural firm Hardy Holzman and Pfeiffer. The theatre's innovative design and flexibility landed Hardy a number of awards.



Photo of Howard Kaye, Robert E. Fitch and Suzanne Bedford in the 1990 production of *The Wizard of Oz* by Sandy Underwood.

Aside from the yearly production of *A Christmas Carol*, the top-selling show in the Marx Theatre is *The Wizard of Oz*. Between the 1982 production and its 1990 remounted production, it sold more single tickets than any other show in Marx Theatre history.

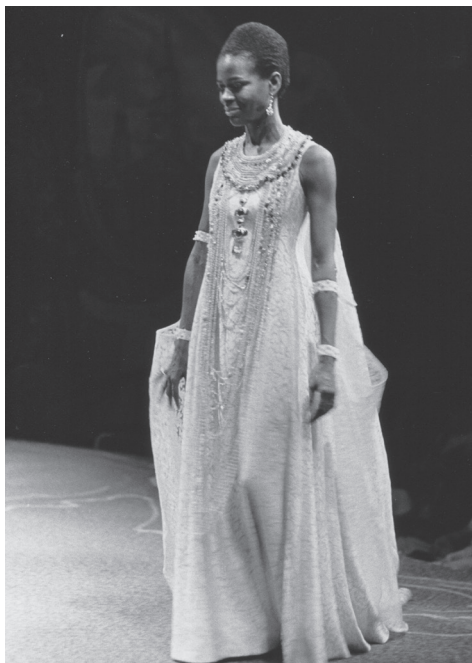


Photo of Cicely Tyson in *Pygmalion* by Sandy Underwood.

The 1970 production of George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* featured a young Cicely Tyson as Eliza Doolittle. It was directed by former Playhouse Artistic Director Word Baker whose pioneering, non-traditional casting choices were met with creative acclaim.



Photo of Lynn Redgrave in *The Notebook of Trigorin* by Sandy Underwood.

The 1996 world premiere of *The Notebook of Trigorin*, starring Lynn Redgrave, was groundbreaking for the Playhouse — it was written by legendary playwright Tennessee Williams but had never been produced. It garnered international acclaim and attention.



Photo of Henry Winkler and Charles Berendt in *The Incident at Vichy* by Sandy Underwood.

In 1973, the Playhouse hired Harold Scott as Artistic Director. He was the first Black artistic director in the history of American regional theatre. In his first season, he produced "The Festival of American Greats," with four timeless, popular works of theatre, including *Incident at Vichy*. Marx Theatre subscriptions rose by 105 percent as a result.



Photo of Sabina Zuniga Varela and Gabriel Ruiz in *Native Gardens* by Mikki Schaffner.

The 2016 world premiere of *Native Gardens*, by Karen Zacarias, became one of the most produced theatre shows in the country, according to *American Theatre* magazine.

For more memorable Marx Theatre productions, visit the photo boxes in our lobby during the run of *School Girls; Or, the African Mean Girls Play*.

Moe & Jack Rouse and Randolph Wadsworth present

SCHOOL GIRLS; OR, THE AFRICAN MEAN GIRLS PLAY

By JOCELYN BIOH

APRIL 30 – MAY 22, 2022

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



BEAUTY. AMBITION. BITING COMEDY.

By Russell Florence Jr.

Jocelyn Bioh's acclaimed comedy *School Girls; Or, the African Mean Girls Play* is a coming-of-age story spotlighting sisterhood with thought-provoking bite.

Set at an exclusive, all-girls boarding school in 1986 Ghana, the tale concerns a close-knit circle of high schoolers eagerly excited to audition for the annual Miss Ghana pageant with the hope of competing in the Miss Universe pageant. Paulina, the resident Queen Bee, expects to be the clear favorite, but her mission grows complicated with the arrival of new student Ericka, a transfer student from Ohio who has lighter skin and a savvy knowledge of American culture and sensibilities. Situations escalate as Ericka's pageant potential threatens to crush Paulina's dreams.

Earning the 2018 Lucille Lortel Award for Outstanding Play, *School Girls* is a gossipy nod to Tina Fey's 2004 comedy *Mean Girls*, but its reflections on such themes as colorism, hair, body image and socioeconomics open the door to a relevant discussion of Black culture.

"In the case of *School Girls*, as a dark-skinned woman, I know in a very personal and visceral way what it's like to feel inferior to people who are lighter-skinned than me," Bioh says in an interview with *Women and Hollywood*. "The journey to owning and accepting beauty was a really long one, and I always knew I would address that in a play, but I wasn't sure how. It didn't feel like an after-school special because that's also not my thing. Colorism is played out in my play, although it's not mentioned. That's why I think the story really lives."

"*School Girls* displays the ways colorism affects the Black community," says Candis C. Jones, who directs the Playhouse production. "Sadly, it will

always be timely because we may never be able to shake racism. The play exposes the ways white supremacy and racism trickle down and affect young Black girls as they are discovering their identity. We see how colorism creates separation and conflict among the young girls in *School Girls*."

Looking back on her first viewing of *School Girls* (which made its world premiere off-Broadway at MCC Theater in 2017), Jones says she was moved by the sheer authenticity of the relationships. "When I first saw *School Girls* in 2017, I was saddened to see the hierarchical power dynamic in the girls' friendship because I know how real it is."

She continues, "*School Girls* shares a similar template to the iconic movie, *Mean Girls*. In both stories, we can see how the major social-psychological principles of discrimination, conformity and prejudice seep into how the characters think and make choices. What's so special about *School Girls* is that it specifically shows how colorism operates within all three of these principles for Black people. We rarely see how having lighter skin can be a marker of privilege and a standard of beauty. This unspoken privilege can cause harm in Black female friendships and diminish self-worth. From 1986 to now, we see how colonialism has driven these beauty standards. As a lighter-skinned Black woman, it is vital for me to hold a space of sisterhood and compassion while working with an ensemble of Black women on *School Girls*. The play is a source of healing and a celebration of us."

In addition to paying homage to her Ghana heritage, Bioh regards her play as a significant form of positive representation.

"If you don't see the things, you don't know the things exist," says Bioh in the aforementioned interview with *Women and Hollywood*. "To have a play of eight Black women, where all the women are funny, all of them are three-functional, all of them are able to share their weaknesses and be super vulnerable, all in an enjoyable night. These kinds of plays are very rare."

Bioh's ferociously funny play takes the Marx Theatre stage on April 30.

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RANDOLPH WADSWORTH

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RUNNING TIME An accurate running time will be posted on our website on April 29.

CONTENT ADVISORY Recommended for ages 13 and up. The competition for Miss Ghana is fierce, and while they're in pursuit of the crown, contestants use adult language and have frank discussions of body shaming, classism, colorism and self-image.

WHO WILL TAKE THE CROWN?

By Russell Florence Jr.



Candis C. Jones

Jocelyn Bih's acclaimed coming-of-age comedy *School Girls; Or, the African Mean Girls Play* takes a deep dive into Black culture. Director Candis C. Jones discusses the play and her artistic vision.

How would you describe the characters in the play? Do you find them unique or similar to characters in other plays?

The characters in *School Girls* are so relatable that an audience may think of the archetypes among friends groups or social cliques from their adolescent years. There's your "Queen Bee," the frick and frack and the new girl, to name a few. These young girls are also coming of age and figuring out what it means to be liked and beautiful.

Do you feel the Ghana setting supplies its own level of intrigue or engagement especially for American audiences?

School Girls was inspired by the controversy of the 2011 Miss Ghana pageant. The winner, Yayra Erica Nego, was an American-born and Minnesota-raised biracial woman. It was said that her father was from the Volta Region of Ghana, but his name and where he resides were never verified. The heartbreak of this play is that it shows the ways in which Western culture is glorified in Ghana. It has infiltrated the community to the point where young girls are looking beyond their culture to define beauty. Although an audience might see a sense of uniformity among the characters and beauty in that unity, the most popular girl in the play is contending with a desire to change who she is. The play leads

up to a beauty pageant that causes some to sacrifice friendships and values, all to compete in the national eye.

How are you envisioning the show? Are you planning to delve into certain aspects of the piece in a new way?

This is one of those plays where you don't need to reinvent the wheel. Meaning, it sings out with simplicity. It strikes an eloquent balance of comedy and drama. That said, my focus is deep honesty and truth in the performances. We have a cast beautifully representing the diaspora. Among my focus on the performances, I will be prioritizing moments where the cast can bond and connect with each other in our rehearsals. I'm most thrilled to see how these ladies will collaborate and share their experiences with each other.

What are your fundamentals as a director? What do you hope audiences take away from your production?

I hope audiences develop a deeper awareness of how colorism affects all of us... What are the ways we make identity-based assumptions? What are the ways we uphold and further bias/discrimination? What are our personal privileges? How do those privileges affect the ways we relate to others?



CRITICAL PRAISE FOR SCHOOL GIRLS

"Nonstop belly laughs along with a helping of heart."

— *Chicago Sun-Times*

"Funny and fast-paced... [Bih] knows how to craft bouncy, juicy dialogue that performers can have fun with. She also knows that there's a sting inside all this fun."

— *NY Magazine*

"Uproarious. Affecting, human and sympathetic, too."

— *New York Stage Review*

"A ferociously entertaining morality tale that proves as heartwarming as it is hilarious." — *The Hollywood Reporter*

"Pretty impossible not to love." — *Deadline*

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE NEXT SEASON

By Natalie Clare and Deja Shanks

OFF-SITE PRODUCTIONS

AGATHA CHRISTIE'S MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS

Adapted for the stage by Ken Ludwig Directed by Risa Brainin

Sept. 25 – Oct. 23, 2022
at the Jarson-Kaplan Theater

Whodunit? Detective Hercule Poirot is determined to find out in this masterpiece from the world's most popular mystery writer.

Agatha Christie's thrilling, train-ride mystery finally arrives in Cincinnati! Ken Ludwig is no stranger to adapting cherished literary figures for the stage. Combining the classics with comedy, he's written stories that feature Sherlock Holmes, Long John Silver, Tiny Tim, Tom Sawyer and Robin Hood, to name just a few. The Agatha Christie estate even approached Ludwig specifically to adapt *Murder on the Orient Express*. Playhouse audiences will recall recent productions of his enjoyable scripts like *Treasure Island* (2018), *Baskerville: A Sherlock Holmes Mystery* (2017) and *The Three Musketeers* (2012).



Dale Hodges and Callie Johnson (above) and Andrew May (below) in the Indiana Repertory Theatre 2020 production of Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*. Photos by Zach Rosing.



Vanessa Severo in the Portland Center Stage 2021 production of *Frida...A Self Portrait*. Photo by Owen Carey.

FRIDA...A SELF PORTRAIT

Written and Performed by Vanessa Severo
Directed by Playhouse Associate Artistic Director Joanie Schultz

Oct. 15 – Nov. 6, 2022
The Carnegie Theatre

Iconic Mexican painter Frida Kahlo comes to life onstage with breathtaking physicality and raw honesty in this stunningly creative production.

Framed creatively as a sort of interview, *Frida...A Self Portrait* captures the difficulties and wonders of the painter's life. This powerhouse of a one-woman show reflects on the moments that defined her. Vanessa Severo uses music and movement to vibrantly transition into the people and experiences that have shaped Frida's persona and the way we see her artwork today.

In the play, we learn that Severo has pulled from years-long research and an affirming trip to the historic La Casa Azul (The Blue House where Frida resided), which was left to the people of Mexico as a museum. She recounts these stories using unapologetic strokes of humor, wit and fierceness, while correlating her life with Frida's, cracking open a powerful portal between them. In an interview with Portland Center Stage at the Armory, Severo says, "I have traveled to Mexico, spent time in Frida's house... My writing, my thoughts and my connection to Frida have deepened."

THE LION

By Benjamin Scheuer | Directed by Sean Daniels and Alex Stenhouse

Nov. 12 – Dec. 4, 2022
Warsaw Federal Incline Theater

Straight from the London stage for an exclusive engagement, a singer-songwriter shares the story of his family through heartrending monologues and original songs.

The Lion is a coming-of-age journey and one-man musical that earned Benjamin Scheuer — the show's playwright, composer and original performer — a spot on the "Top 10 Best Performances of 2015" by *The Huffington Post*. It also won a Theatre World Award in 2015. The *L.A. Times* wrote in a review, "The vibe of casual, unrehearsed immediacy masks the narrative complexity of a novel or an opera." Scheuer has since continued his songwriting, co-producing a song with Grammy Award-winner Robin Bayton, who has engineered for artists like Taylor Swift, Coldplay and Mumford & Sons. The Playhouse's production features an intimate performance of the musical tale by Max Alexander-Taylor, who uses six distinctive guitars to accompany original lyrics and preface sentimental monologues.

MOE AND JACK'S PLACE - THE ROUSE THEATRE

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 | Directed by Blake Robison

March 11 – April 15, 2023

Celebrate the grand opening of the Rouse Theatre with the sensational, Tony Award-winning musical that bursts with artistic passion.

A Chorus Line has dazzled audiences since it opened off-Broadway in May 1975 and debuted on Broadway just a few months later. The original production was a smash hit, earning the 1976 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and nine of the 12 Tony Awards for which it was nominated. It performed a record-breaking 6,137 performances before closing.

The show's enduring legacy is the raw, unfiltered way it spotlights Broadway hopefuls whose names don't appear on marquees. The performers compete earnestly to become one of 17 who perform in perfect unison in the background of the leads. In this way, *A Chorus Line* is a love letter to musical theatre.

AUGUST WILSON'S SEVEN GUITARS

Directed by Ron "OJ" Parson

April 23 – May 14, 2023

With live blues and lyrical dialogue, August Wilson's Tony Award-winning play promises a soulful exploration of the ties that bind and the chords that hold us together.

August Wilson's *Seven Guitars* marks the Playhouse's fourth production of the legendary playwright's American Century Cycle — a series of 10 plays that chronicles the lives of Black Americans throughout the 20th century. The story is set against the backdrop of Pittsburgh's Hill District in 1948, when music, arts and culture were particularly vibrant. Jazz came to life through the city's first Black-run radio station and in the many clubs that gave rise to new talent.

Second only to *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *Seven Guitars* is Wilson's most musical play, bringing lyrically written monologues and live blues to the stage. A *New York Times* review of the original Broadway production writes that the characters "play off one another like the members of an improvising septet, each being used as an instrument to create the distinctive Wilson sound of the blues."

WORLD PREMIERE! SHANE

By Karen Zacarias | Directed by Blake Robison

June 3 – 25, 2023

One of the greatest Westerns of all time finds new life on the stage with a fresh perspective.

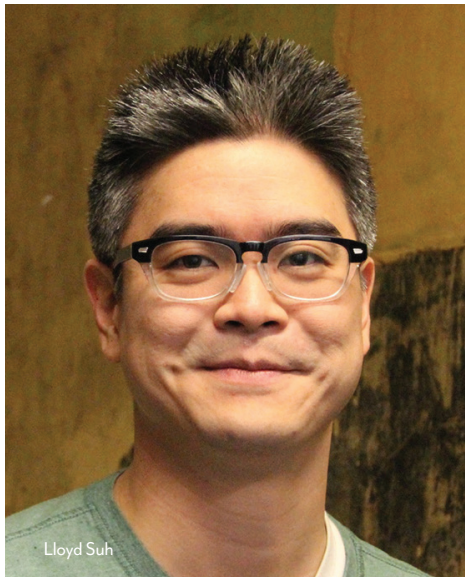
Jack Schaefer's classic novel was published in 1949 and later released as a film in 1953, racking up numerous Academy Award nominations. *Shane* details the arrival of a mysterious ex-gunfighter and his fascination with a man whose demeanor he's never before encountered.



Photo by Tony Arrasmith/Arrasmith & Associates.

Karen Zacarias' previous Playhouse credits include *Destiny of Desire* (2020), *Native Gardens* (2016) and *The Book Club Play* (2013). She has been named one of the most produced playwrights in the nation in recent years, and she's earned various awards and recognition, including a Helen Hayes Award, a National Francesca Primus Prize and a National Latino Play Award. She is also a Playhouse Associate Artist.

ROSENTHAL SHELTERHOUSE THEATRE



Lloyd Suh

THE CHINESE LADY

By Lloyd Suh | Directed by Jess McCleod

March 25 – April 30, 2023

***The Chinese Lady* is a darkly poetic yet whimsical story about Afong Moy — supposedly the first Chinese woman to step foot on U.S. soil in 1834 and placed on display to educate the public about her identity.**

Afong Moy is as fabled as she is real. Historical records confirm her presence, but those records are remarkably complicated. How much of her display was accurate? How much was performance and presumption? Playwright Lloyd Suh's script, which debuted off-Broadway in 2018, presents these questions and more in a way that defies time.

With the proverbial "fourth wall" between performer and audience removed, *The Chinese Lady* takes audiences through the harrowing chapters of Afong's life as a living exhibit. As she guides us, she reveals a uniquely specific perspective of our country's history. When asked by *BroadwayWorld* what he hopes audiences leave with after the curtain call, Suh replied, "empathy" and "how valuable it can be to strive for understanding."

WORLD PREMIERE! ORIGIN STORY

By Nathan Alan Davis | Directed by Playhouse Associate Artistic Director Joanie Schultz

May 20 – June 25, 2023

With delightfully unexpected turns and an ensemble of endearing characters, *Origin Story* is a comedy about life's biggest questions and the surprising ways we find the answers.

In 2018, playwright Nathan Alan Davis was named one of the "Black Male Writers for Our Time" by *The New York Times Style Magazine*. The acclaimed list honored men who are "producing literature that's essential to how we understand our country and its place in the world right now." The recognition is among many in recent years for Davis — he has received several back-to-back awards including the 2021 Windham-Campbell prize presented by Yale University, the 2020 Steinberg Playwright Award, the 2019 Rita Goldberg Fellowship and the 2018 Whiting Award.



Nathan Alan Davis





Photos from 2021-22 Leading Ladies events.

THE LEADING LADIES CELEBRATE NINE YEARS

By Kendra L. Struthers

The 2021-22 season marks nine years of support (and celebrations) from the Leading Ladies. The group has become the Playhouse's largest production sponsor, raising more than \$80,000 every year. They bring another exciting year of theatre to a close at the end of this season, and they're looking forward to celebrating their 10th anniversary next season!

Established in 2011, the Leading Ladies program brings together an enthusiastic group of theatre-loving women to support live theatre while experiencing how that theatre is made — and having a great time in the process. They sponsor one of our Marx Theatre productions every year, which have included *Pride & Prejudice*, *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Jane Eyre*, *Marie and Rosetta*, *Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*, *Destiny of Desire* and *Steel Magnolias*. They have raised more than \$825,000 in sponsorships for the Playhouse since their inception — a remarkable testament to what women can accomplish when they come together.

Along with their production sponsorship, the Leading Ladies hold four special events for members each year. Events include an opportunity to socialize, an educational component that gives exclusive access to theatre-

making and a delicious dinner that's served with a signature cocktail. Each season culminates in the "Big Event" in which ladies can bring a friend for dinner and to enjoy a dress rehearsal of the show they've sponsored.

This year's Leading Ladies program was led by co-chairs Nancy Lippincott and Terry Lemmerman and was 139 members strong. So far this season, they have explored the world of hand props, received insight into the art of directing and attended the dress rehearsal of their sponsored show, *Steel Magnolias*. At their final event of the season on May 9, they have an exclusive opportunity to meet Anne O'Sullivan, who brings to life Dr. Ruth Westheimer in our production of *Becoming Dr. Ruth*, presented by The Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati.

In celebration of 10 amazing years next season, the Leading Ladies host more behind-the-scenes programming and welcome the Cincinnati community to our all-new, mainstage theatre complex.

LEADING Ladies

Your role awaits — no auditions necessary!

Leading Ladies memberships start at \$500 and go up to \$1,500. If you would like to be one of these special women, please contact Kendra L. Struthers at **513-977-2024** or **kendra.struthers@cincypay.com**.