

PROIGHTE

MARCH 2023

The Singular Sensations present **A CHORUS LINE**

Celebrate the grand opening of Moe and Jack's Place – The Rouse Theatre with the sensational, Tony Award-winning musical that bursts with artistic passion!



ALSO INSIDE: THE CHINESE LADY

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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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2022-23 Moe and Jack's Place – The Rouse Theatre Season presented by



2022-23 Rosenthal Shelterhouse Theatre Season presented by **THE VONTZ FAMILY**

Season Sponsor of New Work THE ROSENTHAL FAMILY FOUNDATION

Seasonal support provided by



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THANK YOU TO THE OSBORN FAMILY!
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Marilyn and Jack Osborn

The Playhouse is humbled and honored to have received a \$1 million endowment gift from Jack and Marilyn Osborn in December. In their honor, Blake Robison's title will now be the Osborn Family Producing Artistic Director.

"Marilyn and I have a long-term love and affection for the Playhouse, and we care deeply about having a world-class theatre in Cincinnati," says Jack Osborn. "Having traveled extensively and gone on the Playhouse's annual London theatre trip for 20-plus years, I'm proud that the productions at the Playhouse are as outstanding as plays we've seen in London or New York."

The Osborns have contributed decades of business leadership and philanthropic service to Cincinnati, serving on the boards

of the Cincinnati Opera and Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra. Jack Osborn retired as CEO of Valley Industries and has served on the Playhouse Board of Trustees for 22 years, including two seasons as president (2002-03 and 2003-04). Before retiring, Marilyn Osborn had a long career in the investment business, having worked at Fifth Third Bank and Bartlett and Co. She also ran her own investment firm for 10 years.

Noting that the Osborn Family Producing Artistic Director is the first named position at the Playhouse, Jack Osborn states, "We hope our gift inspires others to give to the endowment to name other positions or programs at the Playhouse."

"Jack and Marilyn have been passionate supporters of the Playhouse for many decades, and we are grateful for this wonderful gift to the endowment," says Robison. "I am honored to have the title of the Osborn Family Producing Artistic Director."

THANK YOU TO THE SINGULAR SENSATIONS!

With a cast of 26 performers and a 12-person orchestra, *A Chorus Line* is one of the most ambitious musicals the Playhouse has ever produced! Members of The Singular Sensations have made this massive undertaking possible for the Playhouse by collectively sponsoring the production's unique expenses. Their support has truly made this grand opening production a dazzling reality. Thank you to the individuals below for your generosity!

- Ms. Karlee L. Hilliard
- Terry Lemmerman
- The Markley Family
- Jack and Marilyn Osborn
- Digi and Mike Schueler

- Betsy and Jerry Shroat
- Marty C. Tomb
- Ellen and Ray van der Horst
- Barbara M. Weyand

STAY CONNECTED! **f o y d** CINCYPLAY.COM

EXPLORE THE FEATURES OF THE NEW MAINSTAGE THEATRE COMPLEX

Welcome to the all-new Mainstage Theatre Complex, featuring Moe and Jack's Place – The Rouse Theatre! Behind the scenes, our artists and production teams will enjoy new and upgraded spaces as well as enhanced theatre technology. For patrons and community members, the new facility improves your experience from top to bottom — here's how.

ACCOMMODATIONS AND ACCESSIBILITY

- An improved drive up to the Playhouse includes the Maier Circle for drop off, which alleviates traffic congestion to and from the main entrance, the parking garage and the lower drive. The parking garage still has two levels of parking, and parking on the lower drive is still an option.
- Without having to take any stairs, patrons can walk from the parking lot, across the van der Horst Entry Plaza, and enter the Schueler Lobby to the Taft Orchestra and Castellini Parterre seating levels of the Rouse Theatre.
- The Lemmerman Family Box Office is located on the main floor of the Schueler Lobby and to the left of the main entrance. It includes both ticketing services and the coat check.
- There are four types of restrooms: women's, men's, all-gender and family. One of each type is available on each level of the new facility. Restrooms are all wheelchair-accessible and feature automatic sink faucets and soap dispensers.
- The Rouse Theatre includes 97 seats that are accessible without needing to take any stairs. Accessible seating is available in all three sections. There are 11 wheelchair-accessible seats.
- There is one main entrance to the building. To reach the Rouse Theatre from the lobbies, there are two entrances on the main floor and one entrance on the upper floor to the First Financial Balcony, making ingress and egress much easier and faster.

GATHERING SPACES

- The lobbies on the main floor and upper floor are open spaces where you can gather, enjoy refreshments and engage more deeply with the art on stage. The upper lobby includes the Steiner seating area. All-new chairs and tables accompany the space.
- A grand staircase, made possible by the Carol Ann and Ralph V. Haile, Jr. Foundation, provides the focal point of the main entrance.
- Towering, floor-to-ceiling windows overlook Eden Park a design feature that's supplemented by architectural accents which enhance our park setting.
- A large visual timeline of Playhouse history wraps along the wall on the Schueler Lobby on the main floor, complete with details and images from the theatre's 60+ years in existence.
- Al's Bar, named to honor three generations of the Vontz family, serves drinks at two locations: one bar on the main floor in the Schueler Lobby and one bar on the upper floor.
- Casual dining fare and concessions are available for purchase on the upper floor near the Rosenthal Shelterhouse Theatre.

MOE AND JACK'S PLACE – THE ROUSE THEATRE

- Three levels of seating bring more seats closer to the stage, creating an even more intimate atmosphere than the Marx Theatre. There will be 537 seats total in the theatre.
- All-new chairs provide more comfort and legroom.
- A fly gallery above the stage allows us to move set pieces into the air and will create hundreds of new set design options.

COMING SOON

- A luxury lounge, sponsored by Barbara M. Weyand, will host Playhouse donors and a variety of special gatherings.
- An outdoor seating area outside the main entrance will offer a relaxing view of Eden Park. It will also include a play area and mini stage for children, made possible by the Buyniski, Gluckman and Goldfeder families.
- Landscaping throughout the property will take place when the weather is warmer, and it will double the amount of trees that were on site prior to construction.
- The outdoor P&G ArtWalk will run from Mt. Adams Circle, pass through Playhouse property, and continue towards the Cincinnati Art Museum.
- A new patio garden outside the Rosenthal Shelterhouse Theatre will offer a place to take in a view of the Cincinnati skyline.









Want to see more images and learn more about how you can directly impact this once-in-a-generation project? Visit **cincyplay.com**/ **support/a-new-stage**!

The Singular Sensations present A CHORUS LINE

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

Moe and Jack's Place – The Rouse Theatre MARCH 11 – APRIL 14, 2023

THE SENSATIONAL, TONY AWARD-WINNING MUSICAL By Natalie Clare

There's no better moment for the Playhouse to produce one of the most entertaining and beloved musicals in theatrical history. *A Chorus Line*, presented by The Singular Sensations, positively bursts with artistic energy as a love letter to theatre itself. As the first show staged in Moe and Jack's Place – The Rouse Theatre, this Tony Award- and Pulitzer Prize-winning show ushers our community into a new theatrical era.

In A Chorus Line, we meet 17 dancers who are competing for a role in a new Broadway musical. They must perfect vigorous dance combinations and share personal stories about their lives in the hopes of being cast. Through heartfelt monologues and musical numbers, they reveal their own remarkable journeys to the stage. This dazzling production coincides with the grand opening of the Mainstage Theatre Complex — a state-of-the-art facility that enhances our artistic capabilities and brings us further into the 21st century of theatre.

The Playhouse's brand new production of *A Chorus Line* is directed by Osborn Family Producing Artistic Director Blake Robison and features new choreography by Alex Sanchez. Sanchez, who recently co-choreographed *Paradise Square* on Broadway, is the winner of the SDC Joe A. Calloway Award for best choreography and was recently recognized as one of *Dance Magazine*'s "25 to watch." The production features a cast of young New York City dancers led by Shiloh Goodin (who recently performed in *Paradise Square*) as Cassie and Cincinnati's own Drew Lachey (from the band 98 Degrees) as Zach. Set Designer Tim Mackabee, who designed *The Elephant Man* on Broadway, has envisioned a stage that transforms from a rehearsal/audition studio into a more traditional theatre stage as the story unfolds.

In addition to this exciting moment for Playhouse audiences and artists alike, Robison says the show has unique contemporary relevance for today's performers. "It's a musical about theatre and the artists who make it. It's also of the moment. We're emerging from a pandemic in which there was literally no work for actors for nearly two years. When they sing, 'God, I hope I get it...I really need this job,' that sentiment is raw and real."

A Chorus Line premiered off-Broadway in 1975 and quickly moved to Broadway. It found immediate success, touching the hearts of audiences and wowing critics throughout the industry. The story was conceived by the late Michael Bennett, a visionary choreographer, director and musical theatre legend. He started by recording interviews with dancers who were working in New York City in the 1970s. He then worked with Marvin Hamlisch, James Kirkwood, Nicolas Dante and Edward Kleban to embody their stories through monologues, music, lyrics and choreography. Until its premiere, few musicals (if not any musical) had so intimately captured the relentless passion required of theatrical performers.

Though the musical was contemporary to the 1970s, it still authentically reflects a love for the art form that feels timeless — it's part of what makes *A Chorus Line* so beloved, no matter the generation of the audience. Robison aims to find that same cadence through his directorial approach.

"We haven't changed a single word or lyric in this production," Robison explains. "But I think that audiences will see the characters responding to the situation in a more contemporary way. Auditions don't happen the way they did in 1975 anymore. And so we set our production in an audition studio, not on a mythic empty stage. Today's dancers are much more athletic. You'll see that in Alex Sanchez's superb new choreography. And I hope you'll get a sense that our dancers endure this unusually grueling audition process with more personal agency."

Indeed, Sanchez says his vision pays homage to the musical's iconic steps while also embodying more modern sensibilities.

Says Sanchez, "When I was talking to Blake about the show, he expressed wanting to do a new take on *A Chorus Line* and how it could be accomplished choreographically. At the time, I had just worked on creating new choreography for a production of *West Side Story* in Chicago. The way that I approached both iconic works is by diving into the narrative, intention and event of the moment. Capturing the spirit and being true to the story is what will make the creation of new movement feel like it's part of the original story."

A Chorus Line takes the stage in a thrilling moment for Playhouse audiences, whether you're a dancer, performer or someone who's ever chased a dream. Come watch an ensemble of 17 dancers give everything they've got in the all-new Rouse Theatre!

PRESENTED BY THE SINGULAR SENSATIONS

Bahl&Gaynor

SNS



RUNNING TIME An accurate running time will be posted on our website on March 10.

CONTENT ADVISORY

MEDIA SPONSORS

A Chorus Line is suitable for ages 16 and up. During a cutthroat Broadway audition, performers use strong adult language and have frank discussions of sex, sexuality and mental health – all while slaying complex dance combinations and singing their hearts out.

INVESTMENT COURSE! LINDA AND GARY GREENBERG JENNY AND DAVID POWELL RANDOLPH WADSWORTH

Photos on the cover and above by ClintonBPhotography featuring cast members (L-R): Musa Hitomi (Connie), Diego Guevara (Paul), Courtney Arango (Diana), Drew Lachey (Zach), Jonathan Duvelson (Richie) and Erin Chupinsky (Sheila)

HONORARY PRODUCERS

5, 6, 7, 8! By Natalie Clare

Director Blake Robison and Choreographer Alex Sanchez give us closer looks at bringing to life *A Chorus Line*, presented by The Singular Sensations.

DIRECTOR BLAKE ROBISON



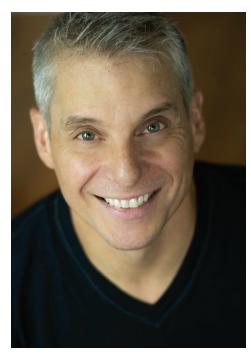
You've mentioned that A Chorus Line holds a special place in your heart as the first show you saw on Broadway. What parts of the story and music did you fall in love with then?

I was a wide-eyed theatre kid. I loved everything about it: the dancing, the singing, the scale of the spectacle. As an adult, I've come to love the personal stories. It's a musical about people who make their lives in the theatre, the ups and downs, the dreams and realities. I can relate.

This musical is very much a love letter to theatre. In your opinion, how does it honor the craft and the artists who create it?

It's well known that the director/choreographer Michael Bennett created the musical from an

CHOREOGRAPHER ALEX SANCHEZ



Do you recall the first time you encountered *A Chorus Line*? What was your experience like?

The first time I saw A Chorus Line was at the Shubert Theater in Chicago. I was 15 years old and went with two high school friends. All three of us were in the high school choir and involved in our school theatre. There were two special moments. One was that one of my friend's cousins was in the show. The second was the first experience I ever had seeing Puerto Rican characters being represented in the story.

As a Puerto Rican kid growing up in Chicago, I never saw my story having any representation in theatre. I hadn't seen *West Side Story* on stage yet. When I heard the names [of characters] Diana Morales and Paul San Marco, I was completely shocked and excited. Hearing both their stories had a profound effect on me and made me connect with the show in a very personal way. It is the first time I have ever experienced that in a show. Part of Paul's story was mine as well. To this day, I can remember it like it was yesterday.

Dance plays a crucial role in this show, which has a legacy for its iconic steps. Tell us how you're approaching the choreography and what audiences can expect to experience.

The way that I approach choreography is to dive into the text of the piece. All the clues of what is needed to create movement is in the text and music. Dancing becomes a heightened form of emotional expression based on what the event is, as well as what the characters want from this event and what actions they take to achieve what they want. The physical gestures are born from those questions. evening of recorded conversations with Broadway dancers. Much of the text and lyrics come directly from that session, so it honors their stories in its authenticity. Our company of artists, today in 2023, brings its own background and experience to the table. I hope that this production celebrates the original creators by allowing its new cast members to put their own personal stamp on the roles and material. Great musicals allow for that.

If you had to choose, what is your favorite song from the show?

"At the Ballet." It's a perfect trio.



I also do a lot of research on the story and find cultural attachments to the characters, which helps me create dance vernacular that is connected to them. My hope is to create choreography that will take the audience on an emotional ride and connect them to the characters. They will experience the energy and commitment that it takes to be a dancer.

If you had to choose, what is your favorite number from the show?

"One," which is the finale and bows of the show, is my favorite number in the show because it defines the spirit that lives inside all dancers. The music is inspiring, hopeful and upbeat. Those are all the attributes that dancers have. The number also celebrates life, filling the room with hope and utter joy. When you hear the song, it's hard not to be affected by its jovial spirit and exuberant brassiness.

It's also a large number that uses the whole cast — which, for me, is a metaphor for the community we are as theatre artists and how our various backgrounds come together to achieve a collective goal. When you listen to the lyrics, you would think that we are singing about the star of a show, but if you flip it to be personal, it's really describing the traits that we all possess. We all are "a singular sensation, every little step she takes," which can really be about us.

THE CHINESE LADY

By LLOYD SUH

Rosenthal Shelterhouse Theatre MARCH 25 – APRIL 30. 2023



LOOK CLOSER

By Tatiana Godfrey

For the first time this season, Playhouse audiences will return to the Rosenthal Shelterhouse Theatre as The Chinese Lady takes the stage. The play is based on the true story of Afong Moy, who is supposedly the first Chinese woman to step foot on U.S. soil in 1834. Striking a rare balance between poetic darkness and humorous moments of whimsy, The Chinese Lady blends historical accounts with a deep exploration of character and culture.

Who was Afong Moy? Everything known about her life has been learned from artifacts that help piece together basic details. When Moy was 14 years old, her parents exchanged money with the Carnes Brothers — American merchants who were buying decorative goods from Southern China and bringing them to New York City to sell at an incredible mark-up — who brought along Moy to help sell their goods as "authentically Chinese."

When she arrived in New York, she was made to do a series of exoticized performances, demonstrating the Carneses' ideas of what daily life in China must have been like: using chopsticks, pouring tea, using a fan. She was, quite literally, placed on display to educate the American public. In these performances, Moy was surrounded by the goods the Carneses had purchased, which spectators could then purchase.

In 1836, the Carneses, finding her to be a lucrative selling point, took Moy on a tour through the U.S., visiting cities like Pittsburgh, Boston, Buffalo and Cincinnati. They promised to send her back to her family when her two-year contract ended, but that didn't happen. So, amidst increasing hostility towards Chinese populations in the U.S., Moy spent her time in and out of poor houses and being made to perform at P.T. Barnum's American Museum.

There is no written or oral record of Moy after her time with Barnum. The *Chinese Lady* imagines what her life and experiences were, creatively defying the limits of time. In the show, she bears witness to some of the most pivotal events in American history, and through her eyes, we experience our collective past anew.

Many historians and storytellers have sought to answer the question, "Who was Afong Moy?," including The Chinese Lady playwright Lloyd Suh. He first

encountered Moy's story while doing research for another play and describes being "haunted" by what he found. Suh told American Theatre magazine, "[A]s I began to think about her and research more and then eventually began to start exploratory writing, the layers of that haunting just kind of grew until I knew that I had to do something with it."

He continued to develop his idea at various theatres across the U.S. until its premiere in Massachusetts. It transferred off-Broadway to the Public Theater in early 2022.

Since then, Moy has been touring the country again. At one point in the 2021-22 playgoing season, The Chinese Lady was the most produced play in the U.S. Suh's writing and the fervor around the play compellingly parallels Moy's real-life performances and travels. How much has changed in the almost 200 years since Moy's arrival? How has the relationship between the U.S. and its Asian American and Pacific Islander citizens changed? How has the perception of Moy's performance changed? These parallels are at the root of *The Chinese* Lady's power as a play.

In a time of increased anti-Asian violence in the U.S., Suh commented on how The Chinese Lady has been received across the U.S. "I feel like what's happened over the past couple of years is that this country is now in a very self-aware reckoning about what it is to be an American, what it is to live in a country that has the kind of history that it has, and how the color and origin of our bodies influences the way that we navigate that history."

In The Chinese Lady, Moy tells her own story in her own words with honesty, urgency and whimsical humor — a surprising and thoughtprovoking combination that makes this play, and most certainly the woman at its center, truly memorable.



ARTIST SPONSOR

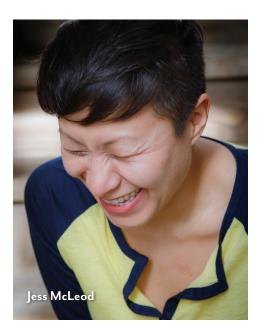
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RUNNING TIME An accurate running time will be posted on our website on March 24.

CONTENT ADVISORY The Chinese Lady is suitable for ages 13 and up. As Afong May tells her story, she doesn't shy away from authentic and unfiltered descriptions of historical violence and cultural exotification.

Above photo of Sami Ma by Tony Arrasmith/Arrasmith & Associates.

WATCH HER STORY UNFOLD By Tatiana Godfrey



Director Jess McLeod delivers artistic insight about Afong Moy and the timely significance of *The Chinese Lady* by Lloyd Suh.

Can you talk about the idea of performance and how it applies both to the script and to your vision for it?

Well, I don't want to give too much away (directors don't like to reveal their tricks!), but we're having a lot of fun playing with the fact that Asian American women are always performing. There are roles we're expected to play, social dynamics we're expected to fall into and qualities we're assumed to possess. Whether you're Afong Moy in 1834 or me, an Asian American woman walking down the street in 2023, we're forced to be in conversation with Asian stereotypes because we've been silenced and kept from the public eye — other than stories about Asian women written by white men with their own agendas. We haven't been out there in any real way consistently, and with the help of the Playhouse's amazing scenic and prop shop (okay, there's a hint!), we drop the audience into reckoning with that.

What do you think Playhouse audiences should know before seeing the play?

Nothing. Come as you are, with everything you know and don't know.

What do you hope audiences will take away from this production?

A better understanding, historical and emotional, of the lived experience of Asian American women. Asians and Asian Americans are constantly pegged as "perpetual foreigners." First, being born somewhere other than America should be no cause for harassment and second, you can be born in America, speak only English and still be met on a daily basis with hostile calls to "go back to your country." The social message here has always been loud and clear: Asians are dangerous and we don't belong — and in recent years, we're to blame for COVID, which is ridiculous, false and incredibly dangerous, especially in today's violent climate. Why don't we belong? And if this is where I'm from, where does that leave me? Where should I qo?

The twin of the "perpetual foreigner" myth is the myth of the "model minority," the idea or expectation that all Asians are or should be smart, successful, compliant, hard-working, high-achieving. It all sounds "positive," but every racial stereotype is still a cage, a myth that holds white supremacy — the ultimate myth — in place. So we're either "yellow peril" or, if we do whatever American authorities tell us to do, "teacher's pet." And you have to wonder: What does thinking of Asians as "Others" really do for whoever thinks of us that way?

And, of course, Asian and Asian American women also have a long history of being objectified and sexualized by all men but especially white men. What/who does that serve? Six Asian American women were slaughtered in Atlanta in 2021 by a young white male gunman who blamed them for his own "uncontrollable sexual desire." Ideas about us need to change. We are literally under attack.

It's time to face how and why these myths and stereotypes were born. I hope audiences will face these things with us so we can all start to let them go.

What are some other plays and who are some other playwrights that are exciting you right now?

It's an exciting era for playwrights and for theatre. I tend to like plays that drop you into the deep end and help you swim back up to the top, enlightened and refreshed and laughing or crying or both. Jordan E. Cooper's Ain't No Mo (which just had a too-brief but brilliant Broadway run) is a brilliant black comedy that will slap you awake. Liliana Padilla's How to Defend Yourself (currently playing off-Broadway) is an incredible play about a group of college students who think they know it all but are deeply confused about sex and consent. And I think |ay Adana, who wrote The Jordan & Avery Show, a dynamic two-hander about the ups and downs of a complicated friendship (i.e. every friendship), is the next |onathan Larson — or the first |ay Adana!

7

JOIN US FOR POST-SHOW DISCUSSIONS

Following every performance of *The Chinese Lady*, members of the artistic team invite audience members to have in-depth conversations about the themes and ideas represented in the play. These discussions provide an opportunity for patrons to dive deeper into the show's subject matter and connect with other audience members about their interpretations.



ENROLL IN A SUMMER OF MAGIC

PLAY IN THE PARK HOUSE

This summer, incoming first- through 12th-grade students can take their imagination to new heights! Camps return to the Playhouse's iconic Eden Park/ Mt. Adams location and will also continue to be offered at Mason Community Center. Registration is now open for both locations.

The Playhouse's summer camps are process-based programs designed to build confidence, strengthen communication skills and develop a sense of ensemble and community. No theatrical experience and no auditions are required. A limited number of full- and partial-tuition scholarships are offered for all camps and determined based on need and space available. Before Care and After Care are offered at both locations and may be added to camp purchase.

FULL-DAY, ONE-WEEK CAMPS are offered for incoming first- through 10th-graders. Each week offers five courses that are designed to engage in the playfulness of theatre, with classes and themes varying between each weekly session.

FULL-DAY, ONE-WEEK AND MULTI-WEEK PERFORMANCE ACADEMY PROGRAMS are offered for incoming first- through 12thgraders. These process-based camps are designed for young theatre enthusiasts who want to experience the production of a play from beginning to end. Classes focus on performance techniques and rehearsal.

THE LAUNCH PAD ACCESSIBILITY PROGRAM integrates students with developmental disabilities into a traditional theatre camp environment. Pre-camp preparation and daily support resources are provided by trained staff and camp instructors. The program is available for one-week theatre camps at both locations.

Visit **cincyplay.com** to explore camp themes and programs, and to register for a summer of magic!



Photos by Mikki Schaffner.