



OCT. – DEC. 2024

# PROLOGUE



## HISTORY SINGS

A powerful, indie-rock musical makes its world premiere to launch its path to Broadway.

MC & TOM BRENNAN,  
LINDA & GARY GREENBERG and THE LEMMERMAN FAMILY present

### RUTKA: A NEW MUSICAL

Based on the diary of **RUTKA LASKIER**, as published  
in *Rutka's Notebook: A Voice from the Holocaust*

Music and Lyrics by **JOCELYN MACKENZIE** and  
**JEREMY LLOYD-STYLES**

Book by **NEENA BEBER**

Conceived by **AMY LANGER**  
and **DAVID B. SCHWARTZ**

ALSO  
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## ABOUT PROLOGUE

PROLOGUE is the pre-show publication of Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park. It is published as a service to Playhouse season ticket holders, donors and others.

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# A BROADWAY-BOUND WORK BRINGS PASSION AND SUPPORT

By Sneja H. Tomassian



*Rutka* set model by Todd Rosenthal.

As Cincinnati's national theatre, the Playhouse is committed to putting Cincinnati's artistic excellence in the national spotlight. With the world premiere of *Rutka: A New Musical*, our state-of-the-art theatre complex fulfills a unique promise to become a destination to launch Broadway-bound works. *Rutka* will take maximum advantage of the expanded capabilities in Moe and Jack's Place – The Rouse Theatre, enabling the work we create to gain national attention on the industry's largest stages.

But what does it take to produce a Broadway-bound production in Cincinnati? It takes major investment from both national and local sources. We are deeply grateful to MC and Tom Brennan, Linda and Gary Greenberg, and the Lemmerman Family, who have combined their resources to cover the extraordinary above-title sponsorship of *Rutka*. They all expressed passion for the project.

MC and Tom Brennan said, "*Rutka* is the fruition of the dream of the new theatre at the Playhouse. As lifelong Cincinnatians and fans of the Playhouse, we have always known what an amazing organization the Playhouse is. To be able to help produce a project that puts the Playhouse's great artistry in the national spotlight is very exciting. We are thrilled to show *Rutka* to the Cincinnati audience as a world premiere and out-of-town try-out for a Broadway run."

By producing Broadway-bound shows, we are joining a league of impressive regional theatres that have elevated their national reputations in precisely this way. A successful pre-Broadway run also attracts audiences and top talent.

For Linda and Gary Greenberg, it was the timeless symbol of resilience that *Rutka* Laskier represents. "We decided to support *Rutka* because we were moved by the play's affirmation of life and freedom amid brutal repression and inexorable destruction. We're especially pleased that *Rutka*'s producers plan to take the show to Broadway, as her story deserves a wide audience, and Playhouse deserves credit for helping to make that possible."

Three years into the Nazi occupation of Poland, *Rutka* dreams of escaping and becoming a famous writer, grapples with complex friendships and longs for love. As circumstances worsen, she joins the teenage underground resistance, seeking ways to rise up against her oppressors.

For Terry Lemmerman, it was the appeal of this new work for our youth and families that compelled her to support the project. "*Rutka* is an uplifting story set in a difficult time, and I'm thrilled to support the Playhouse in their mission to bring new plays to our area. My husband and I began taking our grandchildren to the Next Generation Theatre Series performances when they were just four, and I try to support plays that have a wide family appeal. It's especially exciting that this will be the first production to journey from our new stage to New York City."

*Rutka*'s story still resonates today because it's about what happens when society allows hatred to overcome compassion and acceptance. It needs to be told now more than ever.

**Thanks to all of our *Rutka* sponsors for their generous support in helping bring this story to life. Their names are listed on pages 4 and 5.**

MC & Tom Brennan,  
Linda & Gary Greenberg and The Lemmerman Family present

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Music and Lyrics by **JOCELYN MACKENZIE** and **JEREMY LLOYD-STYLES**

Book by **NEENA BEBER**

Conceived by **AMY LANGER** and **DAVID B. SCHWARTZ**

Directed by **WENDY C. GOLDBERG**

Moe and Jack's Place — The Rouse Theatre

**OCT. 13 – NOV. 10, 2024**

Sponsored by **The Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati**

## ORIGINS OF A NEW MUSICAL

By Tatiana Godfrey



*Rutka*, a new musical, is about to make its debut here at the Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, promising an unforgettable story of resistance. The producers, Amy Langer and David Schwartz, talked with us about the creative process behind the show. From the inception of the idea to opening night, they shared insights into the challenges, triumphs and passion that went into bringing this production to life.

### How did you first learn about Rutka's story?

In 2016, with anti-Semitism, hatred and division on the rise, especially noticeable in the schools, we started looking into the stories of young diarists from the Holocaust, outspoken young women, who could be role models for the youth of today. We really only knew about Anne Frank's story. When we discovered *Rutka's Notebook* and noticed that it was just discovered and published in 2006, we were curious to read it. Once we did, we were struck by how her words captured the completely relatable experiences of every teenager, then or now, even in the face of unimaginable existential threats.

### Where did the idea come from to dramatize this diary as a musical?

A big part of it was how deep and engaging Rutka's writing was, despite her young age. It really leapt off the page at us. They say that, in a musical, people sing when the emotions are too big for words alone, and Rutka's writing definitely felt that way.

Even on the page, it felt like it sang.

Beyond that, the need to dramatize it really came from a desire to explore empathy, understanding, and to use art as a means to help fight hatred and discrimination. We believe music has a unique power to connect with people on a deep level. We wanted to make this story resonate with new audiences in a way that felt relevant to them.

Initially, her writing felt almost like punk rock to us, but we quickly realized that wasn't the right sound. After spending three days going down a Spotify rabbit hole, we discovered the band Pearl and the Beard. As soon as we heard them, we knew that their unique and exciting sound captured exactly what we were looking for. The challenge was that the band had already broken up. Thankfully, we were able to find their emails, so we reached out to the band

members and asked them to meet with us. They agreed, as long as it was in a very public place — just in case we were actually crazed fans. When they met with us, it was actually the first time they had been in a room together in two years, since the break-up. That meeting led to an incredible conversation, and the band's two founding members — Jeremy Lloyd-Styles and Jocelyn Mackenzie — decided to take the leap with us, bringing their incredible fusion of indie rock, pop and folk sound to this project. The music that they've created here — inspired by Rutka's words and emotions — is absolutely transcendent.

### What was the process to create a script and score based on Rutka Laskier's diary entries?

The first step was to secure the rights from Rutka's half-sister, Dr. Zahava Scherz, who lives in Tel Aviv. We were definitely nervous about what Zahava would think of our idea — a musical with an indie-rock score about her sister.

When she came to New York, we explained our vision, and to our relief and excitement, she was absolutely thrilled. She loved the idea of bringing Rutka's story to life in a way that could connect with today's audiences and future generations.

Once we had Zahava's blessing, we brought on Jocelyn and Jeremy to start writing songs inspired by the diary's most powerful moments. Because Rutka's diary is only 60 pages long, we knew we had to read between the lines in order to expand on the story.

This involved a lot of research — talking with Holocaust survivors, digging into

the history of Będzin (the town where Rutka lived), studying up on everything that was known about Rutka, and fleshing out the details of Rutka's life. This included themes of teens clinging to normalcy, first love, resistance, resilience and, importantly, hope that they could still make a difference and an impact on the world. We hired a book writer and dramaturg to help us adapt it into a full musical. Neena Beber, who is currently writing the script, has done a brilliant job at adapting it all.

One of the really interesting parts of the story involves a young Polish girl named Stanisława who had to leave her home when the Ghetto was created. The Germans had moved all of the non-Jews out, including Stanisława's family, in order to push all the Jews into that one area. Rutka's family was



David Schwartz and Amy Langer on the first day of rehearsal.

moved in, and, as Stanislawka came back often to check on her old home, the two girls became close friends. Before Rutka was deported to Auschwitz, she told Stanislawka where she had hidden her diary, asking her to retrieve it and protect it after she was gone. Stanislawka did just that and kept the diary safe for 63 years, before finally revealing it to the world. We actually got to meet Stanislawka on Zoom on her hundredth birthday, learning more personal details about Rutka's story from her, which was incredibly moving and added so much depth to the writing process.

### How did you find your way to working with the Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park?

We had been looking at and talking with a number of theatres, but the Playhouse was one that really stood out to us. It had all of the qualities we

were looking for: a tremendous community that truly supports the arts, a Broadway-sized stage, a perfectly-sized house, and the new space is absolutely gorgeous. Plus, having a smart and collaborative Artistic Director was a key consideration for us, and our director, the incredibly accomplished Wendy C. Goldberg, absolutely raved about Blake and the Playhouse team. Perhaps most importantly, we wanted to be somewhere that was excited about *Rutka*, and that would share our passion for the show. From our very first conversation with Blake and the team, their passion for the project, their desire to bring this bold, innovative and moving piece to their audiences, was palpable, and from that moment on, we knew that the Cincinnati Playhouse was the absolute right home for this all-important step on *Rutka's* journey.

## ENHANCE YOUR EXPERIENCE OF *RUTKA*

Dive deeper into the world premiere of *Rutka* by visiting a series of displays in the lobby and attending special events related to the production.

### SPECIAL EVENTS

In partnership with The Nancy & David Wolf Holocaust & Humanity Center, the Playhouse is offering a variety of opportunities to follow in the footsteps of teen diarist Rutka Laskier and learn to be an Upstander – a person who exemplifies the best of humanity and uses those character strengths to make a positive difference in the community. The workshops will use drama to inspire participants to be an Upstander in everyday life.

#### TEEN DAY

Sunday, October 27

Free Upstander Workshop for Teens from 12:30 – 1:30 p.m.

Performance of *Rutka* at 2 p.m. with a special \$20 price for teens

We invite teenagers (ages 12-18) to an Upstander workshop in conjunction with the world premiere of the indie-rock musical, *Rutka*, and to attend the matinee performance that day for a discounted price. Food and beverage provided during the pre-show event.

#### WORKSHOP: Be an Upstander

Monday, November 4 at 6:30 p.m. at Playhouse

Deepen your engagement with the musical *Rutka* through reflection on the work. Please join us for a workshop that connects the ideas of the play to those of being an Upstander. This free, multigenerational workshop is for ages 12 through adult and lasts approximately 90 minutes.

**Reservations are required for both public workshops. Visit [cincyplay.com](http://cincyplay.com).**

### SCHOOL WORKSHOPS

In conjunction with *Rutka*, the Playhouse is also offering Upstander workshops in schools. If you are an educator interested in bringing this program to your classroom, email [education@cincyplay.com](mailto:education@cincyplay.com) for more information.

## DISPLAYS IN THE LOBBY

### Children of the Holocaust

Generously provided by The Nancy & David Wolf Holocaust & Humanity Center, this exhibit examines what life was like for Jewish children during World War II and how they coped with various situations through their own stories, photographs and personal documentation.

### Voices of the Past, Voices of the Present

*Rutka* Laskier and Anne Frank are only two of the many teenagers who kept a diary during the Holocaust. This exhibit explores the diaries of some of the other teenagers who recorded their lives during the Shoah and highlights contemporary teenagers who are standing up for justice today.

### *Rutka* in Context

#### Time & Place: Będzin, Poland

Learn more about the setting of *Rutka*, Będzin, Poland. In 1940 and 1941, Będzin was considered safer than other Polish cities from the occupying German forces. With many Polish Jews forced to move there after German invasion, Będzin soon became a center of resistance and rebellion.

### *Rutka*: Her Own Words

Quotes from *Rutka's* diary are displayed throughout the lobby.



Visit the Nancy & David Wolf Holocaust & Humanity Center for an immersive learning experience. Be inspired by local stories of resilience and survival, and learn how to meet your moment and become an upstander today. In 2019, the Center relocated to the prominent and historic Cincinnati landmark, Union Terminal – the very place where thousands of local Holocaust survivors arrived by train from war-torn Europe to rebuild their lives. Plan your visit at [holocaustandhumanity.org](http://holocaustandhumanity.org).

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# THE DIRECTOR'S CUT: INSIDE THE NEW MUSICAL PROCESS

By Tatiana Godfrey

Wendy C. Goldberg, director of *Rutka*, is no stranger to developing and directing new work. She has become a sought-after collaborator among playwrights and actors alike. In this interview, she shares her history with *Rutka* and the importance of this story.

## What excites you about this story? Why is it important to be told to a contemporary audience?

*Rutka* is inspired by the real-life notebook of Rutka Laskier. Working and creating from such important source material gives the project a great deal of import and emotional resonance. I have been deeply inspired by the idea that Rutka's friends are trying to create their own world under such horrible circumstances, and they are also trying to fight back and keep a sense of hope. That message remains essential during times of crisis. The enormity of loss that the Holocaust wrought is a story we do need to return to, so we never forget, and we never repeat.

## You've been with this musical for a while. How did you first come on board the project?

I have been involved with *Rutka* since the summer of 2022. It's been on a fast track since that moment. We had a concert of the music at the New York Performing Arts Library at Lincoln Center in January 2023 and have had smaller development moments on the piece since then. This production at the Playhouse has come quickly in the typical development of a new musical.

## *Rutka* is a musical "on the path to Broadway." Can you talk about what this means? From where has the project come and what are the next steps after this production?

*Rutka* came originally from the minds of our two producers based in NYC who secured the rights to the original notebook, David Schwartz and Amy Langer. They have been the driving force behind the musical for many years and are enhancing the production. On the path to Broadway means that producers and investors already have given financial support to the work, and the pathway for this show has been carved out with the hopes it lands on the Broadway stage soon. Likely we will start here in Cincinnati and have subsequent productions prior to taking the show into New York. It's the old-fashioned notion of the "out of town tryout" made famous in old movies and plays, like *Light Up the Sky*. Most important shows start outside of Broadway to begin and take time to develop and mature with multiple stops/cities along the way. I am personally thrilled we are here first as I have had such a long association with the Playhouse and think highly of the staff and audience.

## How is working on a new musical different from working on an established piece?

New musicals created entirely from the creative team's imagination (as opposed to a new musical with established/existing music) is the most difficult process, but perhaps the most rewarding, that exists in the theatre. It's a large

team coming together to attempt to tell a story that needs to have equal storytelling weight with all the elements — book, music, lyrics, choreography — and all the typical pieces of a theatre production — sets, costumes, lights, sound, projection — working together toward a magical alchemy. When we perform, we are still working and discovering, and those discoveries will impact the future of the piece. It's still very much in development and that's both profoundly thrilling and challenging all at the same time.

## What are some of the challenges and considerations in staging such a heavy subject in the format of an indie-rock musical?

It's important to keep in mind all of this is based on actual real people who lived and therefore we are respectful of that. The contemporary framing of the play was inspired by the indie nature of the score; we will be able to give the overall story a fresh perspective and allow the story to be told to a new audience.



Wendy C. Goldberg

## How do you see this musical fitting into the broader conversations about the Holocaust?

There were many young diarists from that time, and I think we really only know of one, Anne Frank. Rarely are we focused on what happened for young people in this time, and this is another narrative that sheds lights on this group who died right as they were becoming young adults.

## The main characters in *Rutka* are teenagers. Can you discuss the casting process and the qualities you were looking for in the actors? Do you cast actual teenagers?

The actors who play teenagers are between eighteen and their early twenties. For this piece we needed actors who have a bit more training than just teens may have, and since we are out of town from where they live, we needed people who didn't need a parental guardian. I was seeking people with voice, movement and acting training as well as even some production experience.

## How do you see *Rutka* fitting into your overall body of work as a director and new play advocate?

It feels like the appropriate time for me to take on a large original musical, and I enjoy every aspect of building something new on this scale. I think it's the culmination, in many ways, of a lot of different new work experiences and working with people like Jeremy and Jocelyn [the composers] who do not have a theatre background is exactly the type of work I enjoy developing and advocating for overall.

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

I hope they learn about another important voice from the Holocaust and are reminded of how we are all the same despite any of our differences. That we should be better to each other overall and fight and resist when needed.

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WAYNE L. PRIM FOUNDATION  
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### RUNNING TIME

An accurate running time will be posted on our website on October 12.

### CONTENT ADVISORY

*Rutka* is recommended for ages 12 and up. The teenage characters in *Rutka* try to live normal lives with discussions of first feelings of love, first kisses and new haircuts. Yet, the reality of the world around them includes descriptions of the violence and death associated with the Holocaust.

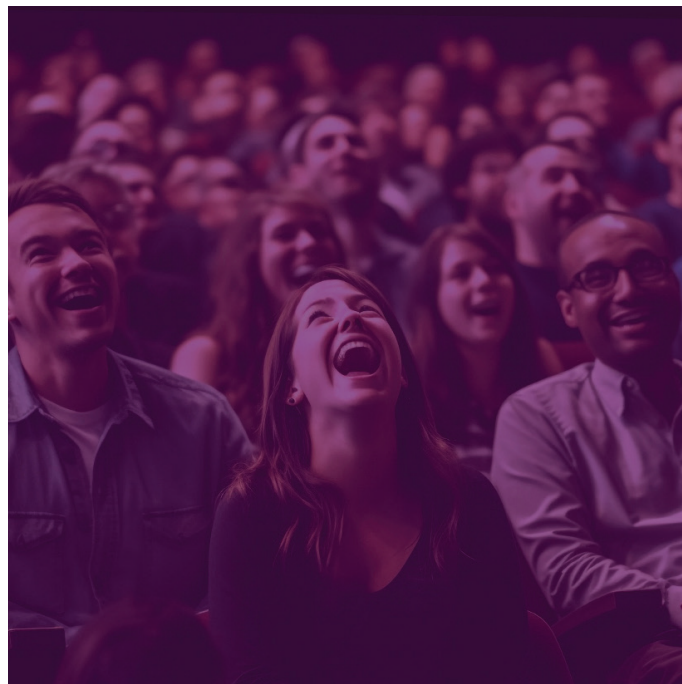
# The Second City®

## 65<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY SHOW

Rosenthal Shelterhouse Theatre  
**OCT. 24 – DEC. 22, 2024**

### FUNNY. INFLUENTIAL. ICONIC. THE SECOND CITY CELEBRATES 65 YEARS OF LAUGHS

By Russell Florence Jr.



Fostering the next generation of superstars within the hilarious, challenging and spontaneous realm of improvisational comedy has been the lifeblood of The Second City since it opened in Chicago in December 1959.

Members of the iconic troupe are heading to the Playhouse for a celebratory, 65th anniversary presentation of all-time favorite songs, sketches and characters written by some of The Second City's famous alumni. The illustrious roster includes Dan Aykroyd, John Belushi, John Candy, Steve Carell, Stephen Colbert, Tina Fey, Keegan-Michael Key, Eugene Levy, Colin Mochrie, Bill Murray, Catherine O'Hara, Jordan Peele, Amy Poehler, Gilda Radner and Cecily Strong among numerous others.

"The Second City is known for great satire, exceptional improv comedy and, of course, great talent," said Rob Wilson, Associate Artistic Director of The Second City. "The show at the [Playhouse] is going to deliver all three things. The folks who know us well know there is always fresh new talent [allowing] you the ability to say you saw them first and also reminisce about some of the things that may have made you laugh through the years. And for those who are new to The Second City, we literally have something for everybody due to the improvisational nature of what we do."

The Second City's impressive track record as a launch pad for success is not lost on Wilson. "The thing that is difficult to pinpoint specifically is who will be the next person [to reach superstardom]," Wilson said. "Anybody on our mainstages right now can very well be The Next. But I think we do ourselves a little bit of a disservice if that's what we aim at because across the board we believe in training. The things that make these improvisors, these performers, so great is that they are great listeners, and therefore, great observers. Once they can observe the world and accurately take it all in, they give it to us in a way in which we can all recognize, which is what really makes us laugh. It's the recognition of truth."

The Second City Training Center was founded in the mid-1980s to accommodate the demand for workshops and instruction by troupe members. Training Centers are located in Chicago and Toronto with former locations in Detroit, Las Vegas, Cleveland and New York City. The improvisation and comedy classes include courses in comedy writing, acting and scene study,

clowning, and music improvisation. Former students of the Training Center include Halle Berry, Sean Hayes, Bonnie Hunt, Jack McBrayer and Tim Meadows to name a few.

With a firm grasp on the basics of improvisation and the physicality that goes along with it, members of The Second City are able to quickly adapt and serve the essence of any song or sketch, which contributes to the troupe's appealing aesthetic.

"I've worked in a lot of theatres and have made things a lot of different ways but no one makes its content the way The Second City does," Wilson said. "Some people improvise, but we specialize in improvising to sketch. It's a collaborative nature."

He went on to explain the troupe's collaborative instincts showcased in its most recent mainstage show.

"There was a really silly scene that closed the show that was about a Duke and a Duchess sitting at a table being served by their servants. Hilarity ensued because every single person added something to it to make it absolutely ridiculous. If any one person would've written it, we couldn't have had [the same result]. But because they collaborated, because they put the 'Yes, and...' to it, we came up with fantastic material that highlighted everybody."

As for the Playhouse experience, the program will not list the creators of sketches, but Wilson says the audience will enjoy figuring out who might be behind the writing based on the material's tone. Above all he anticipates the troupe providing a joyful, reflective trip down memory lane.

"We are very much celebrating 65 years of The Second City, so you'll see some sketches from the likes of Stephen Colbert, Bill Murray, Amber Ruffin and Keegan-Michael Key," Wilson said. "We'll also have improv and definitely song and dance throughout the show. We'll also take a look at some sketches that still make sense for the good or bad such as a scene that has the punch line: 'It's Nixon's fault.' And because of the world we live in, this joke still works. We are celebrating all of the sketches that got us to this point."

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RUNNING TIME

An accurate running time will be posted on Oct. 24.

CONTENT ADVISORY

The Second City's 65th Anniversary Show is recommended for adults and older teenage audiences. The comedy of the Second City generally contains adult language and mature themes and may include elements of audience participation. We may be able to provide more information closer to the show. However, we can't predict what might happen during the improvisation sections – other than that it will be hilarious.

**FIRST** first financial bank presents  
**A CHRISTMAS CAROL**

By **CHARLES DICKENS**

Adapted and Originally Directed by **BLAKE ROBISON**

Directed by **BRIDGET LEAK**

Moe and Jack's Place — The Rouse Theatre  
**NOV. 22 – DEC. 29, 2024**

## DIRECTING THE JOY OF THE SEASON

By Tessa D'Errico

The approaching holiday season brings to mind Black Friday deals, gingerbread and, of course, the return of *A Christmas Carol* at the Playhouse. This year's production will be directed by Bridget Leak, a prolific and innovative member of the Cincinnati theatre community.

After working on the all-new *A Christmas Carol* as Assistant Director to Blake Robison last year, Leak is ready to take the production into her own hands, while still honoring the heart of the story and traditions that audience members will expect to return. "Working with Blake as both playwright and director was a great insight into how he views and values this story," Leak said. "We knew then that I would be directing the following year, and he put a lot of trust in me to help shape the scenes and guide the actors."

Audiences can anticipate another magical year of Cincinnati's joyful holiday tradition. Last year's all-new production marked the return of *A Christmas Carol* after a year off in 2022 while the Playhouse's mainstage theatre complex was being constructed, and it played to a completely sold out run in its inaugural season. Now, the team is getting ready to kick off the second year of the holiday production in Moe and Jack's Place – The Rouse Theatre. "I suspect that getting back in the rehearsal room is going to feel like a family reunion, full of joy and fond memories, but also excitement for the work ahead," Leak said about this year's production. "I think part of the power of this production is the annual tradition of our family telling a story to your family. There are also some new faces in the cast this year, and I'm so excited to welcome them into the Playhouse family."

For the Cincinnati theatre-goer, Leak's name may be familiar. Besides her work on last year's *A Christmas Carol*, she was recently named the Producing Artistic Director of the Know Theatre of Cincinnati. Leak is also the co-founder of Queen



Bridget Leak



City Flash – known for developing innovative and interactive theatre experiences and a mainstay at the annual Cincinnati Fringe Festival. Queen City Flash is also a resident artist in the Playhouse's Arts and Culture Incubator.

Leak originally came to Cincinnati as Robison's first Directing Fellow at the Playhouse. "The original plan was to move here for nine months, assist on 13 productions and then move directly back to New York City," Leak said. "But what I found in Cincinnati was an eager audience with a big appetite for new theatre, in a gorgeous – and affordable! – city with an amazing artist community. I applied for the final round of the Cincinnati Arts Ambassador Fellowship, and that grant allowed me and my husband to create our own theatre company and start self-producing."

Since then, she has accumulated many directing credits across Cincinnati, including the Playhouse, Ensemble Theatre Cincinnati and the Know. She is also a faculty member and director at University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music and Xavier University. "We moved here for theatre and stayed because of the audiences. It's been 11 years and I couldn't be happier, or luckier, that we decided to make Cincinnati our home."

Even as *A Christmas Carol* changes its director, the heart of the classic story will always remain the same. "Dickens' text is timeless because its message is so simple and enduring," according to Leak. "It's a story about redemption, a lesson: it's never too late. And that message resonates as profoundly whether it's coming from Albert Finney or Fozzie Bear. Our family traditions are a shorthand for love. They anchor and center us."

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HONORARY PRODUCER **BARBARA M. WEYAND**

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RUNNING TIME The show runs approximately 1 hour and 50 minutes, with a 20-minute intermission.

CONTENT ADVISORY *A Christmas Carol* is suitable for all general audiences, including children ages 5 and older. Due to the full-length nature of the show, children younger than 5 cannot be admitted.

