

# The Quill

Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival Newsletter • Summer 2022



## A CHORUS LINE

### A Legendary Broadway Musical

by Dennis Razze

It's hard to believe that *A Chorus Line* was first produced in 1975 and ran for an astonishing 6,137 performances at the Shubert Theatre. It's hard to believe because in many ways it seems so fresh and vital today.



**Dennis Razze**  
Associate Artistic  
Director

Thousands of talented young people still flock to New York each year with the hope of landing a role on Broadway. During the past few years of the pandemic, large group auditions like the one we witness in *A Chorus Line* have not been common, and have been replaced by self-taped auditions, Zoom auditions, and small group dance calls. Most likely the large group dance auditions of the kind we see in *A Chorus Line* will return as conditions improve. Still, the excitement of seeing these two dozen hopeful performers literally put themselves “on the line” to win a part in a Broadway musical speaks to any person who aspires to succeed and be part of something that is bigger than themselves.

The genesis of *A Chorus Line* is the stuff of Broadway legend—and like most legends there are different accounts of the origin of the work and what transpired. The origin of the idea for *A Chorus Line* and who contributed what to the final script spawned multiple lawsuits. Suffice it to say that the show was born from late night sessions from midnight to sunrise during which a group of dancers were asked questions and told

stories about their lives. These accounts were recorded on audio tape, and it was these recordings that formed the basis of the stories told by the dancers in the musical. Some of the stories in the show are almost verbatim from the actual accounts that were recorded.

The show was birthed at The Public Theatre under the auspices of the New York Shakespeare Festival produced by the indomitable Joseph Papp, and the profits from *A Chorus Line* supported the artistic work of The Public Theatre for several decades. Director-choreographer Michael Bennett was the genius behind the creation of the musical and he—along with co-choreographer Bob Avian—brilliantly staged the show to the incredible score by Marvin Hamlisch, with lyrics by Ed Kleban. Bennett was one of musical theatre's great “director-choreographers” (the title given to those artists who both directed and choreographed a musical).

Director-choreographers are an elite group and include such artists as Jerome Robbins, Bob Fosse, Gower Champion, Graciela Daniele, Tommy Tune, and Susan Stroman.

Currently, *A Chorus Line* is garnering a resurgence of new productions being performed world-wide. I believe *A Chorus Line* speaks with a fresh voice to us today because it continues to be so challenging to have live performances during the pandemic and in this transition to a post-pandemic world.

In a world where close personal contact might literally risk putting your life on the line, the desire to perform – especially for a singer and a dancer – achieves new

resonance as we confront our fears and weigh the risks. True performers are accustomed to risk, and the sheer joy and the lyric “what I did for love” makes it all worth it and is what makes them feel truly alive. In a larger context, all of us need purpose in our lives and all of us aspire to achieve goals, and like those Broadway hopefuls we can truly relate when they sing “I hope I get it!” and “I really need this job.”

One of the themes of this show is how these individual dancers must lose their individual identities when they become an anonymous part of the chorus line. On the surface that loss might seem dehumanizing and even sad. However, their sacrifice produces a sum that is greater than its parts and is evidence of what human beings can accomplish when they work together toward achieving something.

Perhaps a more relatable example is what we experience when we watch star athletes—who each have their special talents and egos—work together and become a *team*. We know they are all individually talented but seeing them work together and *win* is a thing of beauty. *A Chorus Line* celebrates those moments when human beings achieve something working together and in doing so, they achieve victory, both personally and as a team.

PSF had hoped to produce *A Chorus Line* in 2020, but that season was sadly curtailed by the pandemic. Now in 2022, PSF is finally getting to realize the dream of producing this musical masterpiece.

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# Notes from the Producing Artistic Director

We are pleased to increase our offerings this summer compared to last, working our way back towards a full season and producing as much indoor and air-conditioned theatre as we possibly can for you.



Patrick Mulcahy

These plays are beautiful, every one of them. They speak to loss and renewal, metamorphosis and celebration. We'll open our 31st season with *Every Brilliant Thing*, a touching story of a child's determination to translate the joys of life into medicine when life itself is at stake.

Next up is the sensational Tony Award- and Pulitzer Prize-winning musical *A Chorus Line*, a backstage story of artists hungry for their big break, told through dazzling choreography, a vibrant score, and a script of exceptional sincerity and depth. Then, a staged reading will follow: *The River Bride* by Marisela Treviño Orta, a poignant and tender Brazilian fishing village fairy tale, mapping mystery in matters of the heart.

From one of America's most influential dramatists, August Wilson's Tony- and Pulitzer-winning *Fences* examines family and friends, dreams and sacrifices, in a moving story of generational and societal struggle.

Closing out the season is Shakespeare's marvel of a festive comedy, *Much Ado About Nothing*, rich in its vibrant personalities and breadth of emotional landscape. Laughter, love, and delight are on the menu in this bountiful banquet of a play.

Add a rousing concert, plus our two productions for children and their families, and our Young Company Shakespeare Project, and this promises to be a season to remember.

As we enter my "what I did for love" season, won't you join us and make your summer and ours as merry as the day is long?

*Patrick Mulcahy*

Producing Artistic Director

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Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival's production of *Much Ado About Nothing* is part of *Shakespeare in American Communities*, a program of the National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with Arts Midwest.



PSF receives state arts funding support through a grant from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, a state agency funded by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency.

PSF IS THE OFFICIAL SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA.



## Chorus Line continued

A few of the cast members were originally cast in 2020, but most of the cast for 2022 are new.

The biggest change is our choreographer. For 2022, Luis Villabon will recreate the iconic Bennett choreography—something he certainly knows in minute detail as he has had a long personal and professional relationship with *A Chorus Line*. I could not be more thrilled to be working with Luis on our production and in the process of our collaboration I am learning so much about the show, its history and its traditions, as well as the myriad details that make it unique among the pantheon of musical theatre.

Luis has a long relationship with the show, having played the role of Paul in 13 different national and international tours, performing that role in nearly 2,000 performances. He has coached Antonio Banderas, who played the role of Zach in a production of *A Chorus Line* in Málaga, Spain. This was one of several times when Luis was the associate choreographer with Baayork Lee, who played the original Connie

on Broadway. Baayork is one of the greatest living authorities on the show, having learned the choreography directly from Michael Bennett.

Luis has such incredible vitality and energy, which you witness each time he demonstrates a signature Bennett dance move. He is incessantly busy—before the PSF production, Luis will be choreographing *A Chorus Line* at the Laguna Playhouse in California this spring.

I am also thrilled to be working with Richard Latta, who will design the lighting for PSF's production of *A Chorus Line*. I became acquainted with Richard after seeing a terrific production of *Ragtime* at the Ogunquit Playhouse in Maine, where he is the resident lighting designer. We are very fortunate that his schedule there was perfectly timed such that we could hire him to design *A Chorus Line* this summer here at PSF.

The lighting of the original production of *A Chorus Line* was designed by Tharon Musser. Her lighting of *A Chorus Line* has been hailed as one of the great theatrical

design achievements of modern musical theatre. Notably, it was the first musical to be controlled by computer, which allowed for complex cueing and split-second transitions.

Another newcomer to PSF is musical director and conductor Andy Peterson. Andy hails from “down under” and has worked on Broadway on *Tootsie* as well as being a noted composer of *Razorhurst* and *Stalker: The Musical*. He was also the co-creator on the hit musical audio series *The World to Come*, for which he wrote more than 50 original songs. Luis and I are very excited to have Andy on our team.

Finally, Luis, Patrick Mulcahy, and I—after many months of casting—have assembled an amazing cast for PSF's production of this groundbreaking show. Among the cast are many Broadway performers, as well as veterans of regional theatres and national tours, several of whom have previously performed in the show. I am happy to introduce some of the incredibly talented people you will see perform here at PSF this summer! ■

**A CHORUS LINE**  
MAIN STAGE | JUNE 22 to JULY 10

## This Cast is **ONE** Singular Sensation



**SISSY BELL**  
Cassie

Broadway: *Anastasia*, *Tootsie*;  
Off-Broadway: *Trip of Love*;  
National Tour: *Elf the Musical*;  
Regional: *A Chorus Line*  
(Engeman Theatre), North  
Shore Music Theatre.



**KATHRYN BRUNNER**  
Val

Regional: Elle Woods, *Legally  
Blonde* (Walnut Street,  
Riverside Theatre), Sophie,  
*Mamma Mia* (Pioneer Theatre),  
Mary Phagan, *Parade* (Arden  
Theatre); TV: *Awkwafina is  
Nora From Queens*.



**MADISON FINNEY**  
Sheila

Off-Broadway: *Science*  
(Theatre For the New City);  
Regional: Val, *A Chorus  
Line* (The Cape Playhouse);  
BFA, Musical Theatre, Pace  
University (2020).



**JAMES HARKNESS**  
Zach

Broadway: *Ain't Too Proud*,  
*Aida*, *The Color Purple*,  
*Chicago*, *Guys and Dolls*;  
National Tour: *Aida*, *Dreamgirls*;  
Screen: *Blue Bloods*, *Law &  
Order*, *Moving On*, *North*.



**PATRICK S. HIGGINS**  
Mark

Film: *Baby John* (Steven  
Spielberg's *West Side  
Story*); Regional: *Billy Elliot*,  
*Billy Elliot: The Musical*  
(Venice Theatre), Mark, *A  
Chorus Line* (Eight O' Clock  
Theatre).



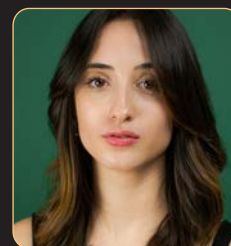
**TARA KOSTMAYER**  
Bebe

Off-Broadway: *A Chorus  
Line* (New York City Center  
Encores!); Regional: *In the  
Heights* (Park Playhouse), *42nd  
Street* (San Diego Musical  
Theatre), *West Side Story*  
(Lamb's Player's Theatre).



**EDDIE MORALES**  
Paul

Regional: *In the Heights*  
(Co-production: Portland  
Center Stage, Cincinnati  
Playhouse in the Park, Seattle  
Rep, Milwaukee Rep), Maltz  
Jupiter Theatre, Wick Theatre.



**VANESSA SIERRA**  
Diana

National Tour: *Patty, A Charlie  
Brown Christmas*; Regional:  
Anita, *West Side Story* (Marriot  
Theatre), Paper Mill Playhouse  
Conservatory and Broadway  
Show Choir.



# MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

by Andrea Selitto, Dramaturg

It is a rare thing to find a play which is lighthearted yet sincere, joyous yet poignant, rollicking yet solemn. Somehow Shakespeare's bittersweet comedy *Much Ado About Nothing* manages to be all these things. Composed at the height of Shakespeare's career, along with beloved comedies such as *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It*, *Much Ado About Nothing*

remains one of the playwright's most popular and most performed plays.

Before the celebrated period of creativity in which *Much Ado About Nothing* was produced, Shakespeare's theatrical endeavors were interrupted by an event now as familiar to today's audiences and theatre professionals as to their Elizabethan counterparts: an outbreak.

It is not known precisely how or when Shakespeare came to live and work in London, as he disappears almost entirely from the historical record around the year 1585. When he does reappear in the early 1590s, it is as a successful actor and playwright, having authored a number of plays, including the infamous comedies *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *The Taming of the Shrew*. This meteoric rise from obscurity to fame provoked jealous rival and dramatist Robert Greene to malign Shakespeare as an "upstart Crow" who was "in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country."

allowed the theatres to reopen. By that time, the closure of the London theatres had lasted nearly two years.

During the epidemic, the city's professional acting companies were left with no choice but to leave London to tour throughout the provinces. The difficulties of life on the road proved too much for most, and by the time the theatres reopened, only two major acting companies remained: the Admiral's Men and the newly formed Lord Chamberlain's Men.



In bringing this play to the stage, Pfeiffer hopes to provide a much-needed respite from dark times—whether it is from war, or sickness, or the trials and tribulations of everyday life.

Shakespeare's promising career, however, nearly came to an abrupt end in 1592. That summer, an epidemic of plague struck London and the surrounding suburbs. The disease swept through the city and in September, the theatres were closed amidst the outbreak. The epidemic raged with no end in sight for the whole of the following year. More than 15,000 lives were claimed. It was not until 1594 that infections declined, and in August, city officials finally

Shakespeare—who had turned his attention from drama to poetry during the long closure, publishing his first poem, the minor epic *Venus and Adonis*, in 1593—joined with the Lord Chamberlain's Men, and soon became their principal playwright.

The re-opening of the theatres was a joyous occasion: with London's population still reeling from the epidemic and mired in the ensuing economic downturn, theatre provided a welcome escape from the

## Meet the Players



**TAYSHA MARIE CANALES**  
Margaret

Regional: *Romeo and Juliet*, *Blood Wedding* (Wilma Theater), *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *La Bête* (Arden Theatre), *Shakespeare in Love*, *All My Sons* (People's Light); F. Otto Haas Award.



**AKEEM DAVIS**  
Benedick

PSF: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Love's Labor's Lost*, *Twelfth Night*; Regional: Arden Theatre, Woolly Mammoth, Folger Theatre, People's Light, Theatre Exile; Helen Hayes, Barrymore Award nominee, F. Otto Haas Award.



**MABOUD EBRAHIMZADEH**  
Borrachio

Regional: McCarter Theatre, Milwaukee Rep, Theatre Exile: *The Invisible Hand* (Barrymore Award), Hartford Stage, Round House, Kennedy Center, Folger Theatre, Baltimore Center Stage, People's Light; Screen: *Jessica Jones*, *Imperium*, *Sally Patcholik*, *Homebound*.



hardships of everyday life. Crowds of up to 2,500 people gathered at the playhouses each afternoon, from the poor laborers who paid a penny to stand in the yard before the stage, to the wealthy nobles who could afford the extra cost to be seated on cushioned benches in the galleries above. In an effort to protect themselves from plague, audience members might even bring a nosegay to the theatre, a small bouquet of flowers thought to ward off disease with its sweet smell.

*Much Ado About Nothing* likely premiered between late 1598 or early 1599, less than a decade after the epidemic that closed the theatres. While little is known about the play's early performance history, what is certain is that *Much Ado About Nothing* was a hit. This was due, in no small part, to the two combatants waging a "merry war" for each other's affection: Beatrice and Benedick.

As one of Shakespeare's contemporaries, poet Leonard Digges wrote in a verse dedication which appeared in a 1640 edition of Shakespeare's *Poems*: "let but Beatrice / And Benedick be seen, lo in a trice / The Cockpit, Galleries, Boxes, all are full."

For director Matt Pfeiffer, now in his 23rd season with Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival, the parallels which can be drawn between 1590s London and the present-day are apparent. He states, "Where we are at in this moment in time allows us to have perspective on what's different from what the Elizabethans felt, and also how totally the same it is."

It is a comparison which has become a cultural touchstone over the past two years—a period similarly marked by closures, sickness, and uncertainty. The suitability of Shakespeare, and *Much Ado About Nothing* specifically, to the present moment is, as Pfeiffer articulates, "greatly informed by that feeling that a lot of people have had... of desperately craving respite from their fears and their troubles."

This same yearning for reprieve is present in the play itself, which begins with the onset of peace after a successful military campaign. At the home of Leonato, governor of Messina, news has just arrived of the safe return of soldiers from the wars. Among them are the young Lord Claudio, who soon falls in love with Leonato's daughter Hero, as well as the confirmed bachelor Benedick, whose history with Leonato's niece Beatrice has led to a long-standing feud between the two. While Claudio and Hero are quick

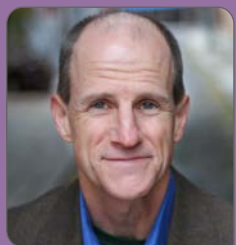
to become engaged, it takes a little help from their friends for Beatrice and Benedick to realize their feelings for each other. All appears to be well, until the villainous Don John puts into motion a plot which threatens to undo the happiness of both couples.

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**ERIC HISSOM**  
Leonato

PSF: *Twelfth Night*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Around the World in Eighty Days*; Regional: Seattle Rep, Milwaukee Rep, Syracuse Stage, Arena Stage, Arden Theatre, Folger Theatre; National Tour: *The 39 Steps*.



**TONY LAWTON**  
Dogberry

PSF: *Henry V*, *Macbeth*; Regional: *Of Mice and Men* (Walnut Street), *Hideous Men* (1812), *Romeo and Juliet* (Arden Theatre); Philadelphia City Paper's Best One-Man Theatre: *The Devil and Billy Markham*, *The Great Divorce*, *The Screwtape Letters*.



**BRETT ASHLEY ROBINSON**  
Beatrice

PSF: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; Regional: Pittsburgh Public, Ars Nova ANT Fest, Wilma Theater, Lightning Rod Special, Pig Iron Theatre, Arden Theatre, InterAct Theatre, Theatre Horizon, Geva Theatre; Barrymore Award Winner.



**LINDSAY SMILING**  
Don Pedro

PSF: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Titus and Cressida*, *Twelfth Night*; Regional: Wilma Theater, Delaware Shakespeare, Lantern Theater, Arden Theatre, Syracuse Stage, People's Light, Two River Theater, Walnut Street, Illinois Shakespeare, Bristol Riverside.



**MARY TUOMANEN**  
Ursula/Priest/Antonia

PSF: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; Regional: Fairview (Wilma Theater), Arden Theatre; Directing: *Rose: You Are Who You Eat* (Guggenheim Museum's Works in Process & Cultural DC); Playwright: Philadelphia Award, *Peaceable Kingdom*; F. Otto Haas Award.



While the witty repartee between Beatrice and Benedick—a key element of the play's success on the Elizabethan stage—showcases some of Shakespeare's best comedic writing, Pfeiffer notes that there is more at play: "It is so deeply human and so deeply complex. These are two people whose insecurities are so deeply held that they are afraid of being found out." As an older couple with a romantic past, Benedick and Beatrice are both keenly aware of what that kind of vulnerability can cost. "They've experienced loss, they've experienced heartbreak. It makes it unique," says Pfeiffer. "It's very hard to find an adult relationship in Shakespeare that's finding itself for the first time."

Claudio and Hero, the younger and more conventional of the two couples, must also earn their happy ending through trial. Their portion of the play, which Shakespeare likely sourced from English-language translations of Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* or Matteo Bandello's *Novelle*, draws from the popular Renaissance trope of the unjustly slandered woman. It is Claudio and Hero's own youth and inexperience which leaves them vulnerable to the machinations of the play's villain. As Pfeiffer observes, "Shakespeare [takes] that traditional, love-at-first-sight relationship and really [puts] it through a grinder."

Ultimately, the resolution of the play hinges on the characters' capacity to heal from pain and find joy again after sorrow.

It is no wonder that *Much Ado About Nothing* has appealed to audiences through the centuries. In bringing this play to

the stage, Pfeiffer hopes to provide a much-needed respite from dark times—whether it is from war, or sickness, or the trials and tribulations of everyday life.

Perhaps this season's audiences will also find a new understanding of this old favorite, as Pfeiffer himself has: "If I had done *Much Ado About Nothing* three years ago, I would not have had as great an appreciation for that feeling of coming out of darkness into something that feels like relief or feels like light." ■



Andrea Selitto is an arts administrator and dramaturg. She holds a BA in Theater from Temple University and an MA in Shakespeare Studies from King's College London.

Andrea Selitto

## MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

SCHUBERT THEATRE | JULY 13 to AUGUST 7

## Dan Domenech In Concert

MAIN STAGE | JUNE 27 | 7:30 PM

"Domenech shows his impressive range of his powerful, smooth, and resonant voice and his command of a variety of musical genres, including Broadway show tunes, rock-and-roll, jazz, and the blues."

—DC Metro Theater Arts

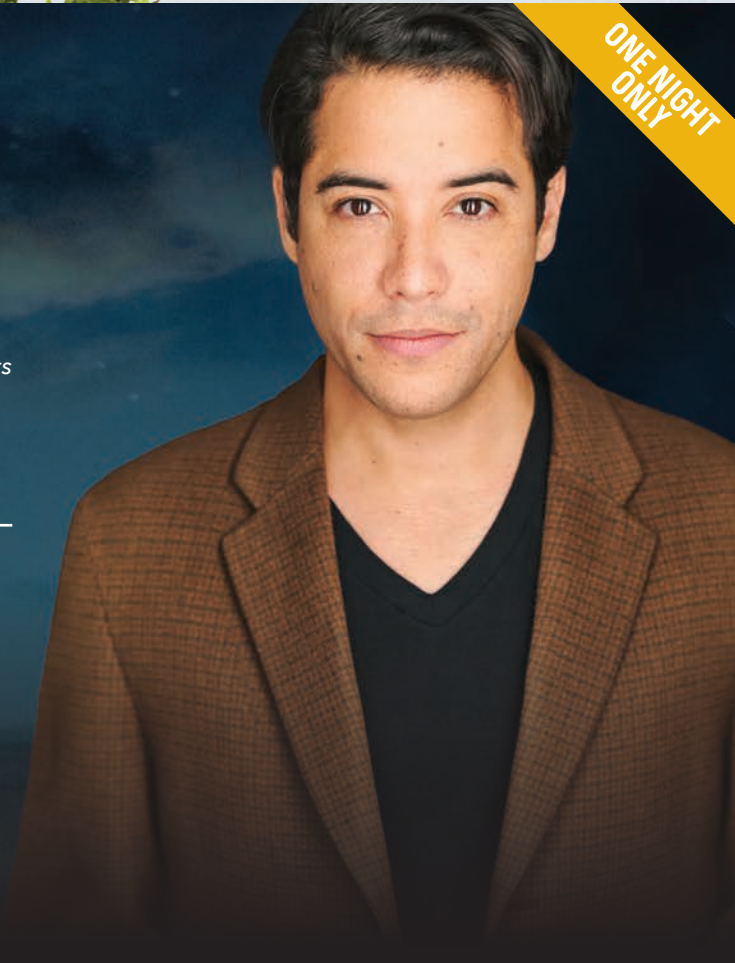
Following playing the role of Che in PSF's production of *Evita*, Dan Domenech returns for an evening of music and stories spanning his 20-year career in entertainment.

DAN DOMENECH, is an American singer, director and actor best known for his understudy portrayal of Jason Dean in *Heathers: The Musical*, Drew in the Broadway musical *Rock of Ages* and a recurring guest appearance on *Glee*.

Domenech has also appeared in the pre-Broadway runs of *Wonderland*, *Sister Act*, National/International tours of *RENT* and *Rock of Ages* and worked as associate choreographer for film and TV projects like *Tropic Thunder*, *Step Brothers*, *Fame*, The Academy Awards and Emmys.

He made his directorial debut summer of 2017 with the beta test of the revamped *Heathers: The Musical* before being mounted in its sold out run at The Other Palace in London.

He currently sings with symphonies around the country and tours with *Broadway's Rock of Ages Band*.



ONE NIGHT ONLY

Dan Domenech



# the River Bride

By **MARISELA TREVIÑO ORTA** • Directed by **KJ SANCHEZ**

The river holds many secrets, including a mysterious visitor who arrives just before a much-anticipated family wedding. In a small Brazilian fishing village, two sisters grapple with their own happily-ever-after as they are tested to remain true to themselves and to each other.

## DISCOVER STAGED READINGS

Often compared to audiobooks and radio plays, a staged reading is a rehearsed read-through of a script performed in front of an audience. Performers can either sit or stand as they read from scripts on a music stand, and a narrator will read aloud the stage directions. Very few if any visual elements, such as props, sets, and costumes, are included.

For audiences, staged readings can be a gateway to hear new plays and be exposed to playwrights they don't yet know about. At a reading, though there may be a hint of lighting, a suggestion of costume, or an occasional sound cue, the emphasis is centered on the actor and words. There is a freshness, a spark, an immediacy, even liberation, as the actors and audience discover the play together without all the trappings of a full production.

For both theatregoers and first-time attendees, seeing the magic of a staged reading is a wonderfully unique experience.

## MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT

Marisela Treviño Orta's first play, *Braided Sorrow*, won the 2006 Chicano/Latino Literary Award in Drama and the 2009 PEN Center USA Literary Award in Drama. Her plays include (select list) *American Triage*, *Ghost Limb*, *Heart Shaped Nebula*, *Shoe* and *Somewhere*. In 2011, Marisela began writing her cycle of grim Latinx fairy tales—fairy tales for adults inspired by Latinx mythology and folklore which include: *The River Bride* (2016 world premiere at Oregon Shakespeare Festival), *Wolf at The Door*, and *Alcira*.



Marisela is an alum of the Playwrights Foundation Resident Playwright Initiative, Goodman Theatre Playwrights Unit, and Playwright's Center Core Writer Program. Currently she is a member of Latino Theatre Company's Circle of Imaginistas who are under commission to create new work. She is the recipient of 2013 National Latino Playwriting Award (*The River Bride*) and a 2019 Alliance Kendeda National Graduate Playwriting Award Finalist. Marisela has an MFA in Poetry from the University of San Francisco and an MFA in Playwriting from the Iowa Playwrights Workshop.

## MEET THE DIRECTOR



*The River Bride* will be directed by KJ Sanchez, who makes her return following directing *Native Gardens*, PSF's first-ever staged reading, which was presented last season as a virtual offering.

KJ is the founder and CEO of American Records, dedicated to making theatre that chronicles our time, theatre that serves as a bridge between people. She is also an Associate Professor at UT Austin and head of the MFA Playwriting/Directing programs. Her productions—as a director/playwright—include (select list) Guthrie Theatre, Hartford Stage, Huntington Theatre Company,

The Alley, Berkeley Rep, Baltimore Center Stage, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, PlayMakers Rep, Asolo Rep, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Two River Theater, Frontera Rep, Round House, Studio Theatre in D.C., Cornerstone Theater Company and Off-Broadway at Urban Stages, HERE Arts Center and the Gene Frankel Theatre. KJ is a Fox Fellow, Douglass Wallop Fellow, and a recipient of the 2014 Rella Lossy Playwright Award.



# EVERY Brilliant THING

A groundbreaking piece of theatre, *Every Brilliant Thing* is a poignant and stirring story examining a family's resilience in the face of severe depression through love, laughter, humor, and honesty. Director Anne Hering and actor Suzanne O'Donnell recently presented the show at Orlando Shakespeare Theater. We asked them to tell us about their experience as they prepare to reprise their roles at PSF this summer.

## Q & A with Anne Hering

**Q.** Having recently directed this play at Orlando Shakespeare, what were your biggest takeaways?



Anne Hering,  
Director

A. I am consistently impressed by the willingness of the audience to become engaged, participate in, and be moved by the story. It makes me realize how much we long for connection, perhaps especially due to the distance we've felt in the last two years.

The play has heavy subject matters of suicide and depression. How is comedy used to tell this story amid these sensitive topics?

Just the fact that "real" people are up there doing something they've not rehearsed invites the audience to be vulnerable. And that vulnerability often is expressed in laughter. That vulnerability is so endearing and every audience cannot help but be supportive and find the humor in the situation. Also, we've all been through tragedy at some point, and wondered if it was okay to laugh. This play gives us permission to find the humor in the sadness.

What do you hope patrons of *Every Brilliant Thing* will take away with them after the performance?

I hope everyone leaves thinking of at least one brilliant thing in their life that they cherish. And the realization that even though we may not all agree at any given moment, we all have had moments of getting support from others and remembering how strong we are.

**ANNE HERING:** Director of Education at Orlando Shakespeare Theater (OST); and Theatre and Speech instructor at University of Central Florida, Valencia College, Rollins College and Seminole State College. Acting credits OST: *The Three Musketeers*, *Henry IV, Part 1*, *God of Carnage*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *All's Well that Ends Well*, *Hamlet*, *The Trial of Ebenezer Scrooge*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *King Lear*, *Into the Woods* and *The Winter's Tale*. Directing credits: *Every Brilliant Thing*, *Christmas at Pemberley*, *The Tempest*, *The Great Gatsby*, *The Turn of the Screw* and *Yankee Tavern*. MFA in Acting, The Ohio State University; and BS in Speech Communications, Ithaca College.

## 5 Tips about Writing and Health

By Katherine Ramsland, Ph.D., DeSales University Assistant Provost and Faculty Member

**E**very Brilliant Thing begins with the storyteller writing a list of everything that is brilliant in the world. Everything worth living for. From youth to adulthood, they add to the list in the hopes of finding joy, particularly during the darkest and most challenging times. In recent years there has been an increase in research studies proving that writing can improve your mental health. Here author Katherine Ramsland, Ph.D. shares five tips to help you with this in your own life, and the research and science behind it.

I've been writing professionally for over two decades, as well as teaching other writers. I'm always looking for research that confirms the benefits of being expressive in writing, and I've seen evidence that it can improve your outlook, provide a sense of momentum, offer structure in the midst of chaos, strengthen your memory, and just plain bring you joy. It can even reduce symptoms of illness and increase your social reach. The following are five tips for using writing to your benefit:

### 1 Don't just write, revise.

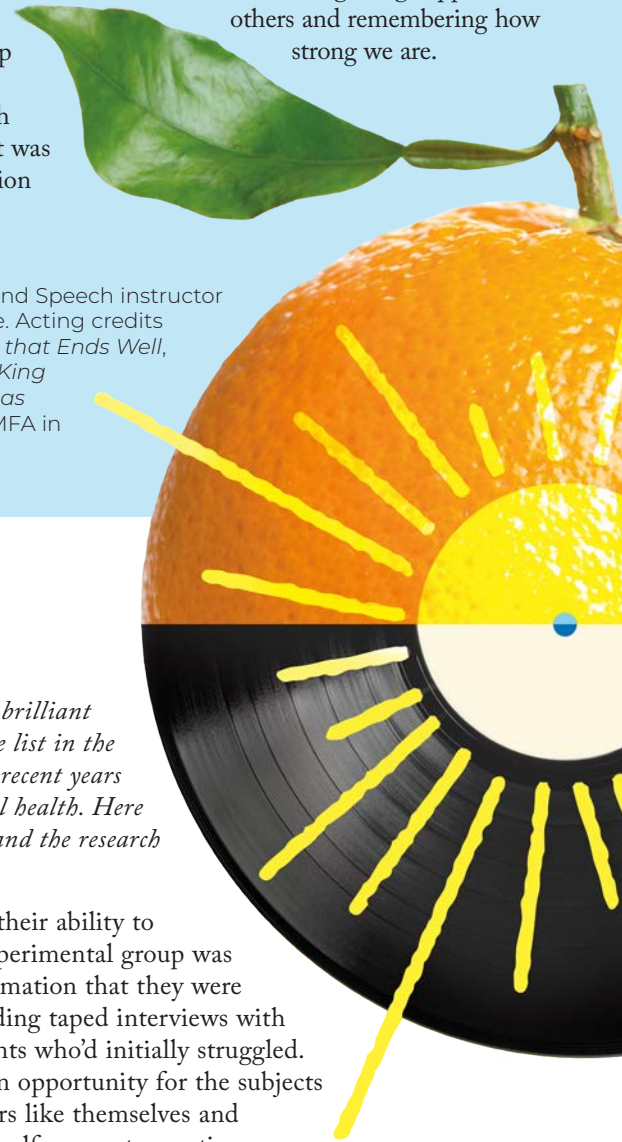
The process of writing and editing one's personal narrative increases opportunities for personal reflection and life choices.

One study assigned insecure college freshmen at Duke University into control and experimental groups. In narratives, all

had questioned their ability to keep up. The experimental group was exposed to information that they were not alone, including taped interviews with successful students who'd initially struggled. This provided an opportunity for the subjects to relate to others like themselves and reconsider their self-concept narratives.

Compared to the control group, the students in the experimental group substantially improved their performance, both short- and long-term, and many more of them continued with their education.

Revising makes us look at what we've stated and think about whether it's what we really believe or want to say.





**“ONE OF THE FUNNIEST PLAYS YOU’LL EVER SEE ABOUT DEPRESSION AND POSSIBLY ONE OF THE FUNNIEST PLAYS YOU’LL EVER SEE, FULL STOP... EXPLORED WITH UNFLINCHING HONESTY.”**

**- The Guardian (UK)**

## Q & A with Suzanne O'Donnell

**Q.** This show creates an intimate bond between the actor and the audience. Why is the audience participation crucial to telling the story?



Suzanne O'Donnell  
Actor

**A.** The play goes beyond audience participation—it is actually audience integration. Audience members become part of the fabric of the story and whatever they do is perfect and it integrates back into the play. It's an act of generosity and makes each show

unique and special. Also, the invitation to participate comes with no expectations of a “performance,” it's a beautiful opportunity to play together... which is so welcome after all these months of isolation.

**What do you hope patrons of *Every Brilliant Thing* will take away with them after the performance?**

My hope is that patrons will remember the joy of gathering with other humans and the importance and blessings that come from sharing our stories.

**If you could add to the list of brilliant things what would be on the list?**

PSF of course! ■

**SUZANNE O'DONNELL:** PSF: *Twelfth Night*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Lend Me a Tenor*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and *Romeo and Juliet*; Orlando Shakespeare Theater: *The Winter's Tale*, *Othello*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *The Taming of the Shrew*; 1812 Productions: *Boston Marriage*; Folger Theatre: *Comedy of Errors* and *Arcadia*; Arden Theatre: *Dancing at Lughnasa* and *Romeo and Juliet*.



### 2 Use regular journal exercises to express your inner life.

James Pennebaker, a psychology professor at the University of Texas, asked students to write for 15 minutes a day. They could choose an important personal issue or a superficial topic. The students who wrote about personal issues, Pennebaker discovered, had fewer illnesses and visits to the student health center.

“I think of expressive writing as a life course correction,” he said. “When we translate an experience into language we essentially make the experience graspable.”

This kind of exercise, others have found, also improves emotional intelligence.



### 3 Use writing to actively engage with your life. It can provide a blueprint for moving forward.

Dr. Marian Diamond at the University of California at Berkeley found evidence to support the idea that the dorsolateral cortex (dc), the brain's planner, also communicates with the immune system. When she discovered that mice with a small dc did not produce immune cells, she tested an idea on humans. Several groups of women played contract bridge, a game that requires planning, strategy, and a good memory, while others passively listened to music.

Continues on page 12

In this captivating one actor play, the storyteller creates a list of everything that is brilliant in the world. Everything worth living for. What's on your list of things that bring joy and light to your life?

ICE CREAM

KUNG FU  
MOVIES

water fights

Me

**EVERY  
Brilliant  
THING**

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JUNE 7 to JUNE 19

# Thoughts on *Fences* from Director Ryan Quinn

In the spring of 2005, I had the privilege of being in the rehearsal room as August Wilson brought the final chapter of his ten-play cycle (*Radio Golf*) for its world premiere at Yale Rep.

As an understudy, I ran lines with the great Anthony Chisholm, received guidance from director Timothy Douglas, and most importantly, sat only a few feet away from the playwright himself, absorbing his transforming language flowing from the company of actors.

Mr. Wilson sat with quiet majesty, carefully listening, ready each new day with fresh pages. At inception, the poetry felt divine to me, but he was still in process, and the words were changed and rearranged throughout previews. Each day the story came more into focus, and

although he was the “greatest living playwright,” he was still at work, in concert with this company, listening and refining.

When I am a bit overwhelmed by the daunting task of bringing one of the greatest plays in the English language to PSF, I try to heed August Wilson's advice to himself, “to be empowered by the ‘chair,’ and sit in the seat of theatre-makers that have come before.”

“  
*Fences* lives in the powerful faith in the possibility of forgiveness.  
”

So I imagine what the room would have been like in the early days, in *Fences* development, before Broadway, before Tony Awards, and before the label of America's Greatest Living Playwright. The days of developing a new play. Our work this summer then, like that of *Radio Golf*, is the act of listening and refining.

So, as I sit and listen to *Fences* in 2022, and hear voices from the chairs that have come before, I hear Oscar Wilde saying, “Children begin by loving their parents; after a time, they judge them; rarely, if ever, do they forgive them.” But then there's Mr. Wilson's rebuttal in *Fences*' epigraph. He writes, “When the sins of our fathers visit us, we do not have to play host. We can banish them with forgiveness; As God, in His Largeness and Laws.”

*Fences* lives in the powerful faith in the possibility of forgiveness. However, it often

feels like an impossible task. The trauma of the father's sin is a charismatic adversary whose lessons can become the malignant lifeblood of identity, woven into marriage vows, the bonds of parents and children, and siblings' duty. It can become the fabric of a family. But how glorious is it then when we can reclaim our identity by trumpeting out sin with forgiveness?

*Fences* intended to arrive at PSF in 2020. So much in the world has changed since then. The pause has given time to reflect and move forward with renewed grace. I have been thinking about the role of theatre and “the chair” a lot—the playwright's chair, the director's chair, the actor's chair. But what I keep coming back to is the audience's chair. The chair to sit and watch and listen to a play together. The chair to bear witness in the age-old tradition that brings us back to the DNA of what it means to be human. Communion in the simple truths of love, honor, duty, and betrayal. The chair that allows us to see ourselves reflected in the nobility of a black garbage man and find the grace to forgive and be forgiven.

*Fences* is our American *King Lear*, and as a young understudy in 2005, it was not lost on me that I was in the room with Shakespeare. So, it now feels fitting that I help bring *Fences* to the Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival, to have audiences that have communed with Hamlet, and Cleopatra, do so with Troy and Rose, and maybe sit in the chair that allows us all to listen and refine our own story. ■

AUGUST WILSON'S

**FENCES**

MAIN STAGE | JULY 27 to AUGUST 7

## Meet the Director



Ryan Quinn  
Director

August Wilson's *Fences* will be directed by actor, director, and teacher Ryan Quinn; who was previously slated to play the role of Bono in PSF's cancelled 2020 production of *Fences*. In 2021, he directed *The Mountaintop* at Arc Stages, *Dad's Season Tickets* at Milwaukee Rep, and *The Tempest* at Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival (HVSF), where he also directed *Macbeth*, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, and two productions of *Romeo and Juliet* for HVSF's spring education tour and its Conservatory Company.

Ryan is a co-founder and the artistic director of Esperance Theater Company, directing *Twelfth Night*, *Youth and Ambition*, and *Breitwisch Farm*. Additional directing: *Everybody*, *Lost Girl*, *So Thrive My Soul* at Milwaukee Rep (Professional Training Institute); *God of Carnage* and *An Octoroon* at American Academy of the Dramatic Arts; and *The Comedy of Errors* at LIU Post.

As an actor, Ryan most recently appeared Off-Broadway as John Proctor in Bedlam's critically acclaimed production of *The Crucible*. Also with Bedlam: *DeadDogPark* at 59E59 Theaters, *Sense and Sensibility* at A.R.T. and Portland Center Stage, *Bedlam: The Series*, and *Hedda Gabler* later in 2022. Additional Off-Broadway performances include *Whorl Inside a Loop* at Second Stage; *Vanity Fair* at Pearl Theatre; *The Killer*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *King Lear*, and *Hamlet* at Theatre for a New Audience. He received his MFA at Yale School of Drama.



## MEET THE CAST OF *FENCES*, STARRING



**TONY TODD**

Troy

Tony Todd has more than 200 TV/Film/Voice-over credits. Select stage credits include originating the title role of August Wilson's *King Hedley II*; a Helen Hayes nomination in Athol Fugard's *The Captain's Tiger*. Others include: *Les Blancs*, *Playboy of the West Indies*, *Othello*, *Zooman and the Sign*, *Dark Paradise*, *Aida* (on Broadway), *Levee*. *James* for the prestigious Eugene O'Neill Playwrights Conference, Athol Fugard's *The Island*, Troy Maxson in August Wilson's *Fences* for the Geva Theatre Center, Paw Siden in the world premiere of the Marcus Gardley play *Black Odyssey* at the Denver Center. TV/Film credits on IMDB @Tony Todd.



**ELLA JOYCE**

Rose

Ella Joyce originated the role of Tonya in August Wilson's *King Hedley II*, starring alongside Tony Todd (Pittsburgh Public); Other world premieres include performances at Yale Rep, Seattle Rep, Huntington Theatre, The Old Globe; Select awards: Jefferson Award and Black Theatre Alliance Award for her originating role in Lynne Nottage's *Crumbs From The Table of Joy* (Goodman Theatre), Los Angeles Ovation Award for August Wilson's *King Hedley II* (The Matrix); Founder/performer at The National Black Theater Festival (Winston-Salem, North Carolina); On TV, she is perhaps best known for her starring role as Eleanor on *Roc* (Fox/HBO); Numerous other credits: EllaJoyce.com.



**BRANDON BURTON**

Lyons

PSF: *Antony & Cleopatra*, *King Richard II*, *Shakespeare in Love*; Regional: Baltimore Center Stage, Public Theater, Shakespeare & Company; Yale Drama: *Othello* (Othello), *Henry VI Part 3*; Yale Rep: *A Raisin in the Sun*; MFA, Yale School of Drama.



**WAYNE T. CARR**

Bono

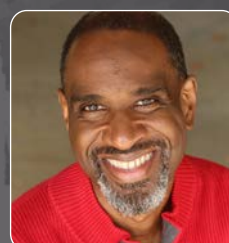
Regional: Guthrie Theatre, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Yale Rep, Utah Shakespeare Festival, Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival, Folger Theatre. Film: *The Tragedy of Macbeth* (2021).



**TYLER FAUNTLEROY**

Cory

Off-Broadway: Playwrights Horizons, New Federal Theatre; Regional: Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival, Folger Theatre, People's Light, Syracuse Stage; TV: *Succession*, *The Oath*.



**BRIAN D. COATS**

Gabriel

Broadway: (MTC/ U.S. Tour) *Jitney*, *On the Levee* (Lincoln Center/LCT3), Pan Asian Rep, Ensemble Studio Theatre, Classical Theatre of Harlem, Public Theater; Select Regional/Touring: Old Globe, Arena Stage, Seattle Rep, Pittsburgh Public, Cincinnati Playhouse, Two River Theater, Denver Center. Numerous TV credits.

## GOING DOWN SWINGING: Baseball as History & Metaphor in August Wilson's *Fences*

by Gabe Moses

Back in the late 1880s, professional baseball was segregated due to a “gentlemen’s agreement” that kept Black men from being part of America’s most popular sport. African American players were not allowed to compete with the white players in the major or minor leagues. There were many years to come before any Black baseball player would be taken into consideration for the major leagues. For decades, Black ballplayers were continually excluded from the game, and needed to create their own opportunities to shine.

Andrew “Rube” Foster—known as one of the greatest African American pitchers and managers of the early 20th century—founded the Negro National League in 1920. Foster’s mission was to have Black teams be owned by Black men only. A plethora of players



**Andrew “Rube” Foster**

professional teams—the Homestead Grays and the Pittsburgh Crawfords.

Players such as Josh Gibson, a catcher for the Homestead Grays and a Pittsburgh legend, would eventually be inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame with record-breaking home runs. Other Hall of Famers that came out of these teams included James “Cool Papa” Bell, Oscar Charleston, Judy Johnson, and Satchel Paige.

came out of the Negro Leagues who would go on to be regarded as the best players of their era.

Pittsburgh, the city where August Wilson’s *Fences* is set, was home to two Black

By following his vision for a Black-owned league of teams, Foster was able to “hit it out of the park” and build a platform for African American men in baseball, which led to their legendary success. In 1981, Foster was voted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

It was not until 1947 when Jackie Robinson broke the color line and Major League Baseball began accepting African American players who were members of the Negro Leagues.

For players like Troy Maxson in *Fences*, the year would be too late. Troy would have been well into his 40s despite being compared in his prime to all-star players like Josh Gibson. Bono, Troy’s friend, even says Babe Ruth and Gibson were the only players to hit more home runs than Troy.

Continues on page 12



Coming from a rough upbringing, Troy eventually found his passion for playing baseball when he was incarcerated for 15 years for accidentally killing a man in a robbery. After being released from prison, Troy joined the Negro Leagues in his hometown of Pittsburgh. In the world of *Fences*, Troy could have been a player on either the Homestead Grays or the Pittsburgh Crawfords, but this can stay open for interpretation.

When the time finally came for African Americans to be considered as players in the Major Leagues, Troy would outgrow his dream. Racism and age were factors standing in the way of him becoming one of the best names in baseball. He believed strongly that the white owners did not see him as “good enough” to play against the others, despite his talents. And even after years of enslavement and acts of violence, Black people were never “good enough” to be the best at anything. The color of their skin

seemed to determine their abilities, which was thought to never reach the skillful qualities of their white peers.

“  
He uses baseball as  
a metaphor for life...  
it's a ‘fastball on the  
outside corner.’  
”

Troy held a grudge against the white men of power for years, which is reflected in how he deals with his son Cory's chance to become a professional football player. Since Troy could not pursue his own baseball career, he feels Cory will also suffer in a world that has not yet erased prejudice from the enjoyment of sports.

Troy allows his failures to haunt him through every step in his life. His frustrations are not only taken out on Cory, but on his entire family, especially his wife,

Rose. He uses baseball as a metaphor for life and death saying it's a “fastball on the outside corner.”

However, through his determination to support his family, Troy succeeds in breaking the color barrier in his job at the sanitation department. This is his way of being the “first Black” in the history of something in his adulthood. Troy Maxson would do anything possible to be a Hall of Famer in his household, despite striking out on his baseball dreams. ■



Gabe Moses

This summer Gabe can be seen in *Much Ado About Nothing*.

Gabe Moses is an alumni of DeSales University's theatre program who is excited to be making his return to PSF this summer. His PSF credits include *Ragtime*, *Crazy for You*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and the 2022 WillPower Tour of *Julius Caesar*.

## Brilliant continued

After an hour, those involved in the game showed increased immune cell production, but the music listeners received no such benefit.

As an activity, writing offers ways to think ahead and envision where you want to go, as well as describing the steps needed to get there.

**4** Use writing to develop mental agility, the ability to see things from many angles.

For example, try writing about a common object like a rug in a unique new way. Then do another one. This exercise contributes to creativity, aha! moments, and mental resilience.

While writing and revising, you generally search for new ways to say something, which calls on the brain's association cortex.

Neuropsychiatrist Nancy Andreason suggests that the brain is a self-organizing system of feedback loops that constantly

generates new thoughts, sometimes spontaneously. The association cortex gathers a lot of diverse information, which creates conditions for unique and surprising interactions. If you practice perceptual flexibility and openness while writing, you can benefit from these feedback loops.

**5** Write, at least occasionally, in longhand.

Research shows that it has a calming effect, actively engages the mind, and improves your memory of what you write in ways that typing cannot achieve.

“One key difference is movement,” says Dr. Marc Seifert, author of *The Definitive Book of Handwriting Analysis*. “That involves the motor cortex of the brain, so ... you are using more of the brain than when you simply type.” Even if you have poor penmanship, the act of writing in longhand requires more mental effort.

DR. KATHERINE RAMSLAND teaches forensic psychology at DeSales University, where she is the Assistant Provost. She has appeared as an expert in criminal psychology on more than 200 crime documentaries and magazine shows, is an executive producer of *Murder House Flip*, and has consulted for *CSI*, *Bones*, and *The Alienist*. The author of more than 1,500 articles and 69 books, including *The Forensic Science of CSI*, *The Forensic Psychology of Criminal Minds*, *How to Catch a Killer*, *The Psychology of Death Investigations*, and *Confession of a Serial Killer: The Untold Story of Dennis Rader*, she was co-executive producer for the Wolf Entertainment/A&E four-part documentary based on the years she spent talking with Rader. Ramsland consults on death investigations, pens a blog for *Psychology Today*, and is currently writing a fiction series based on a female forensic psychologist who manages a private investigation agency.

None of the exercises needs to be solitary. They work as well in a group, and sometimes the presence of other people doing the same thing can enhance the benefits. ■

From the Blog: *Shadow Boxing*, for *Psychology Today*

## WHERE TO GET HELP

*Every Brilliant Thing* speaks openly about depression, mental illness, and suicide. If you or someone you know is in crisis or thinking about self-harm or suicide, there is help available.

Call 911

Go to the nearest emergency room

Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255). Toll-free, 24/7

Text HOME to 741741 to connect with a crisis counselor. Free, 24/7

Lehigh County Crisis Intervention (24-hour) 610-782-3127

Northampton County Crisis Intervention (24-hour) 610-252-9060

For resources: [preventsuicidepa.org](https://preventsuicidepa.org)



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Laura Iris Hill in PSF's WillPower Tour of Hamlet, 2016. Photo by Lee A. Butz.

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# Season Sponsors to Their Very Core: KATHLEEN KUND NOLAN '79 & TIMOTHY E. NOLAN '77

by Bill Hoblin, Director of Development

The DeSales Theatre and Speech Department and Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival were founded by the same person, the late Father Gerard J. Schubert, OSFS. Today, there are many alums who have a deep sense of devotion and loyalty to both institutions. None more so than DSU alums Kathleen Kund Nolan '79 and Timothy E. Nolan '77, who celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary this year.

"We love supporting PSF and encourage everyone to do so," says Kathleen.

Kathleen and Tim return to the lead philanthropic role of the year as the Festival's season sponsors for the fourth time.

"As a theatre major, Father Schubert was an early mentor to me. He gave me the opportunity to combine my love of theatre with lessons learned in my business courses. He was a brilliant and demanding teacher who saw potential in me that I struggled to find in myself. When he asked me to stage manage *Twelfth Night* in 1977, I couldn't say no," says Kathleen. "I'm grateful he pushed me back then. I didn't know at the time, but he started me on a career path that would eventually include senior management positions at leading professional theatres in Boston, Cleveland, and Philadelphia. I worked at McCarter Theatre Center in Princeton N.J. for 30-years as general manager, interim managing director, and now as a trustee.

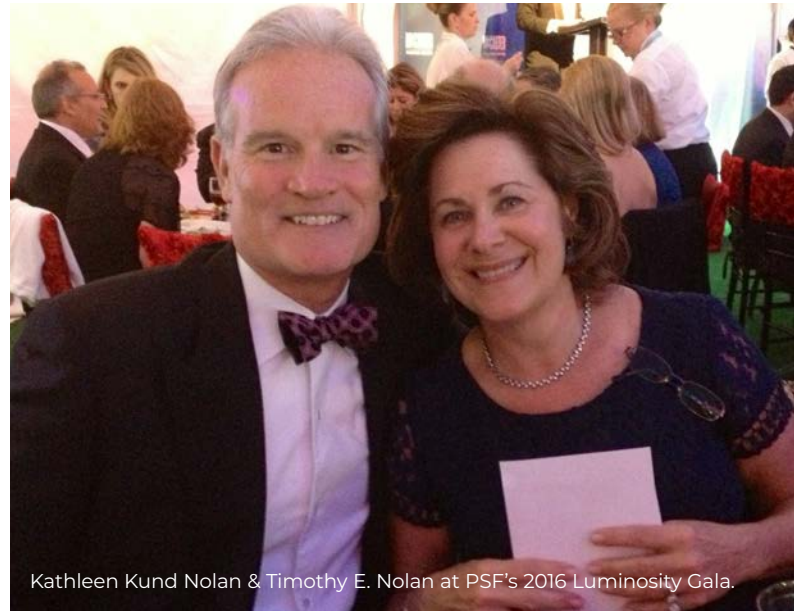
PSF is a part of my DNA. I was a founding board member and have seen it

grow into the dynamic, professional theatre it is today thanks to the leadership of Patrick Mulcahy. The organization has grown into a multimillion-dollar nonprofit, providing year-round and seasonal employment upwards of 225 people!" She continues: "Tim and I are excited for Patrick and wish him the very best of luck when he returns to teaching full-time after this season's Festival."

Tim chimes in: "Kathleen and I met our first semester on campus. I was a biology major but many of my friends—including Kathleen—were theatre majors. I would volunteer as an usher so I could see the productions and my friends on stage for free.

Volunteers can still see shows for free today by joining PSF's Volunteer Guild. I encourage everyone to join. It is a great way to be involved in the best theatre west of Broadway and north of the Avenue of the Arts." (For more information about volunteer opportunities go to [pashakespeare.org/support/the-volunteer-guild](http://pashakespeare.org/support/the-volunteer-guild).)

After graduation, Tim went on to a successful management career in the



Kathleen Kund Nolan & Timothy E. Nolan at PSF's 2016 Luminosity Gala.

healthcare industry. He is the founder of TEN Healthcare Strategies, LLC, a healthcare consulting firm.

"I was the first alumna to serve as the chairman of the University's board of directors, a position I held for six years. It was quite an honor. And Kathleen currently serves as a director on the University's board."

Thanks to wonderful donors like the Nolans, the University and Festival continue to thrive. They are a bridge to the early days and keep DeSales University and Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival interwoven on many levels. ■

## A Trip Down Memory Lane with Kathleen

**Q.** What is your earliest theatre memory, either on stage, behind stage, or in the audience?

**A.** Hmmm.....probably community theatre when I was in middle school.

**Labuda Center for the Performing Arts was completed in 1981. Where did you perform as a student?**

Before Labuda, we performed in the basement auditorium of Dooling Hall. It was challenging to say the least!

**What was your reaction the first time you entered the newly created Labuda Center for the Performing Arts and what did you see?**

I think the opening production was *Charley's Aunt*. Maybe I was jealous that there was actually wing space! But surely, we had a feeling of pride for what Father Schubert and the college had accomplished.

**You mentioned being a stage manager for Father Schubert. Did you act in any productions?**

I was in *Love and How to Cure It*. It was from 1978, I think. I played Rowena.

**What was the first PSF production you saw?**

Since I was a founding board member, I saw the inaugural production, which was *The Taming of the Shrew* in 1992. Tim was with me!

**Do you have a favorite Shakespeare play?**

*Twelfth Night*—the first major production I stage managed.

**What was your favorite musical performed at PSF?**

Absolutely *Les Miz*.





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