



FORWARD THEATER CO.

RESIDENT COMPANY AT OVERTURE CENTER
2019-2020 ANNUAL REPORT

“For the last 10 years, Forward Theater has been Madison’s premier professional theater company and its reach and impact has complemented the quality of its plays and their performance.”

~ Neil Heinen
October 2019



FORWARD THEATER CO.

MISSION

Creating a home base for Wisconsin theater professionals and audiences that expands the cultural and economic life of the greater Madison area.

COVER PHOTOS

Clare Arena Haden, Nadja Simmonds, and Tosha Freeman in *Mary Jane*

Norman Moses, Celia Klehr, Michael Herold, and Susan Sweeney
in *For Peter Pan on Her 70th Birthday*

David Daniel in a rehearsal performance of *Every Brilliant Thing*
at La Follette High School as part of our Adopt-a-School Partnership

Jonathan Wainwright, Jack Dwyer, Jennifer Vosters, DiMonte Henning,
Daniel Torres-Rangel, Nadja Simmonds, Deija Richards, Casem Abu Lughod
in *Sapiens* during the Wisconsin Wrights Festival with stage manger Karen
Moeller, director Jake Penner, and playwright Eric Schabla

Mary Jane

by Amy Herzog

Sept 12 - 29, 2019



Our fall 2019 plays spoke right to the heart. Two of today's most talented playwrights found inspiration in their own lives and crafted these moving and magical stories illuminating the vital importance of compassion, love, and listening in our interactions with those around us.

“I wanted to write this play that was really about women sustaining each other, listening to each other, and bearing witness to each other's lives,” said Herzog in her [2018 Obie Playwriting Award] acceptance speech. “I was able to do that because of the women who do that for me in my life.” ~ **AMY HERZOG**, *American Theatre Magazine*

“It reminded me that whether I'm an employer, family member, friend, or have just a passing encounter with a caretaker, sincere empathy is what's needed... it's what our whole world needs most right now, I think. Please go see this beautiful, eye-opening, and deeply emotional production. Then hug your loved ones extra tight.”
~ **AMANDA WHITE**, audience member

PRODUCTION TEAM

Director: Mary MacDonald Kerr
Actors: Caron Buinis, Clare Arena Haden, Samara Frame, Tosha Freeman, Nadja Simmonds
Scenic Designer: Lisa Schlenker
Lighting Designer: Noele Stollmack
Costume Designer: Kim Instenes
Composer/Sound Designer: Joe Cerqua
Stage Manager: Sarah Deming-Henes

Technical Director: Kevin Zimmer
Props Master: Pamela Miles
Stage Manager - Interim: Tony Reitano
Assistant Stage Manager: Enya Nett
Wardrobe Supervisor: Megan Dickel
Master Electrician: Brad Toberman
Scenic Charge: Pamela Miles
Sound Technician/Board Op: Benjamin Krueger
Carpenter: Jordan Rockman

Photos above: Clare Arena Haden as Mary Jane; *Mary Jane* cast with director Mary MacDonald Kerr from left: Tosha Freeman, Clare Arena Haden, Samara Safarik, Mary MacDonald Kerr, Caron Buinis, and Nadja Simmonds

Below: Susan Sweeney as Ann/Peter Pan; Jim Buske, Celia Klehr, Susan Sweeney, Michael Herold, Sam White, and Norman Moses

“This set was only the beginning of the magic at Forward Theater Company today. So grateful for the opportunity to be moved, challenged, and entertained each season.”
~ **DANIELLE THAI**, subscriber

“What a beautiful script! All of the performances were wonderful, and the set was magical! Thank you for taking the students backstage.”
~ **JOSH BROWN**,
La Follette High School Theater Director

PRODUCTION TEAM

Director: Jennifer Uphoff Gray
Actors: Jim Buske, Michael Herold, Celia A. Klehr, Norman Moses, Susan Sweeney, Sam D. White, Buttercream Frosting
Scenic Designer: Joseph Varga
Lighting Designer: Greg Hofmann
Costume Designer: Scott Rött
Composer/Sound Designer: Joe Cerqua
Stage Manager: Sarah Deming-Henes
Technical Director: Kevin Zimmer

Props Master: Pamela Miles
Fight Choreographer: Whitney Derendinger
Assistant Stage Manager: Enya Nett
Wardrobe Supervisor: Megan Dickel
Master Electrician: Brad Toberman
Scenic Charge: Pamela Miles
Sound Technician/Board Op: Benjamin Krueger
Carpenter: Jordan Rockman
Scenic Painter: Carri Dahl
Stage Crew: Doug Dion, Matthew Korda, Jordan Rockman

For Peter Pan on Her 70th Birthday

by Sarah Ruhl
Nov 7 - 24, 2019



Every Brilliant Thing

by Duncan Macmillan
with Jonny Donahoe



Jan 23 - Feb 9, 2020



Photos: David Daniel contemplates his journey in the final scene; David Daniel interacting with members of the audience portraying the veterinarian (above) and his future wife, Sam (below)



Every Brilliant Thing brought us together in a new, intimate way. David Daniel's tour-de-force performance infused this meditation on mental illness with the encouragement to look for the small joys and wonders of everyday life.

“Omg what a fantastic amazing show. David Daniel is a treasure - amazing, powerful performance. And thank you Forward Theater Company for consistently interesting, vital work and for engaging the incredible talent in our area. Love it!”

~ PETER VAN LONE, audience member

“As it ended, I was thinking how rich my life feels. And I was so grateful.”

~ CHRISTY GIBBS, audience member

“#1,000,001-when you go out even though you really don't feel like it and it turns out to be the best decision as you are witness to something amazing.”

~ SHANDA KENNEDY, audience member

“Two of my favorites - theatre and mental health! ”Every Brilliant Thing” is a wonderful example of starting the conversation on mental health and how educational and important theatre is and can be. This play is witty and incredibly moving, it shines compassionate light on the impact of suicide, and reminds us of all the things that make life brilliant. I am so lucky to get to see this play AGAIN and this time with the woman that makes my life so brilliant!” 😊

~ KELSEY PACETTI, audience member

President of UW-Whitewater Chapter of Active Minds

Active Minds is a nationwide movement on college campuses to bring the topic of suicide and mental health to light.



1,941 attended
post-show talk backs



PRODUCTION TEAM

Director: Tyler Marchant
Actor: David Daniel
Lighting Designer: Noele Stollmack
Scenic Designer: Christopher Dunham
Costume Designer: Kristina Sneshkoff
Composer/Sound Designer: Joe Cerqua
Stage Manager: Sarah Deming-Henes

Technical Director: Kevin Zimmer
Props Master: Pamela Miles
Assistant Stage Manager: Enya Nett
Wardrobe Supervisor: Megan Dickel
Master Electrician: Brad Toberman
Scenic Charge: Pamela Miles
Sound Technician/Board Op: Benjamin Krueger
Carpenter: Jordan Rockman



Just a week before opening night, we canceled *The Amateurs* due to the evolving Covid-19 situation. We had already invested production costs and, in line with our mission to support Wisconsin theater artists, we paid all artists and technicians the full amount of their contracts for the scheduled run.

the amateurs

by Jordan Harrison

Moving our community FORWARD

Beyond the stage, we partner with other non-profit organizations to increase the diversity of those engaging with our work and the wellbeing of our entire community.



Madison Senior Center



Board member Ledell Zellers, company manager Celia Klehr, and artistic director Jen Uphoff Gray are joined by Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway at Madison's Outreach Magic Pride Festival.



wisconsin wrights

NEW PLAY FESTIVAL
JUNE 2020



Artistic director Jen Uphoff Gray, stage manager Jo Chalhoub, and playwright Quan Barry join the cast of *The Mytilenian Debate* for a post-show talkback.

“ The play [*The Mytilenian Debate*] was spell binding and so meaningful and a POWERHOUSE cast.”

~ **JOANN GRUBER-HAGEN**, subscriber

“ I'm an established poet and fiction author but being selected to participate in Wisconsin Wrights has given my playwriting impulse (which was just something I tinkered with on my own) legitimacy and introduced me to the world of theater. Since my play, *The Mytilenian Debate*, was performed online, I've completed new work and signed with a major theater agent (who represents the most produced playwright in America!).

Consequently, I'm very excited to learn more about the amazing world of contemporary theater, and Wisconsin Wrights is the vehicle that invited me, a writer of color, in. For that, I will always be tremendously grateful for the support and community extended to me.”

~ **QUAN BARRY**, playwright

Curtain call for the cast, director, and stage manager of *The Year Without Summer*



The Year Without a Summer

by Greer DuBois

June 25, 2020

Director: Jeanne Leep

Dramaturg: Deanie Vallone

Stage Manager: Shannon Heibler

Cast:

Whitney Derendinger, Lea Hulsey,

Chantae Miller, Shawn Padley,

Andy White, Jessica Jane Witham

Sapiens

by Eric Schabla

June 26, 2020

Director: Jake Penner

Dramaturg: Rachel Lynett

Stage Manager: Karen Moeller

Cast:

Casem AbuLughod, Jack Dwyer,

DiMonte Henning, Daniel Torres-Rangel,

Deija Richards, Nadja Simmonds,

Jennifer Vosters, Jonathan Wainwright

The Mytilenian Debate

by Quan Barry

June 27, 2020

Director: Mark H.

Dramaturg: Jen Plants

Stage Manager: Jo Chalhoub

Cast:

Jeb Burriss, Olivia Dawson,

Gavin Lawrence, Samra Teferra

SHARING OUR SKILLS AND RESOURCES WITH LA FOLLETTE HIGH SCHOOL'S THEATER PROGRAM

Our Adopt-a-School partnership with La Follette High School's drama program is an exciting new part of our community engagement efforts. La Follette students and their new theater director Josh Brown are filled to the brim with talent and enthusiasm, but they are vastly under-resourced compared with other area high schools. It's a perfect fit of our skills and resources with their needs.

We hired teaching artists to give an audition workshop and mentor their students in sound design, stage management, costume design, and lighting design as they prepared for their fall play, *Girls in the Boat*. In addition to helping nurture more (and more diverse) future theater audiences and artists, we're ecstatic to be part of their growing program to give more students the opportunity for artistic expression and essential collaboration and problem-solving skills.

“The support from Forward for *Girls in the Boat* was invaluable. There was a definite difference in how the cast and crew worked together – they were more prepared, more professional.

Forward Theater is helping lay the foundation for the development of a vibrant, new LHS theater program.”

~ Joshua Brown, La Follette High School Theater Director

As they worked on their spring musical *13*, we again provided teaching artists to mentor students in performance and design. Thankfully, they were able to perform for a week before they had to shut down due to the pandemic.



From top left: Members of the *Girls in the Boat* cast, Jen Uphoff Gray chatting with the students after rehearsal, Whitney Derendinger (center facing front) getting the kids moving and comfortable during his audition workshop

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR 2019-2020 CORPORATE SPONSORS

Thank you for your commitment to bringing exceptional professional theater to Madison area audiences.

The Great Performance Fund for Theater, a component fund of the Madison Community Foundation

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CONTINUING OUR TRADITION OF ENDING IN THE BLACK

Because more than 80% of *The Amateurs* ticket buyers donated back the value of their tickets – a total of \$124,175 – we remained in the black for our 11th season in a row. **CHEERS TO YOU!**

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR 2019-2020 FORWARD LEADERS

Forward Leaders show a strong personal commitment to Forward Theater's mission by making annual gifts of \$1,000 or more.

\$15,000 - \$24,999

Diane Ballweg

\$10,000 - \$19,999

Maurice & Sybil Better
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Anonymous (2)
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