



AACT announces changes in AACTFest 2021; no Michigan or Region III festivals planned

AACT released the following announcement about AACTFest 2021 and we print it here for your information. Stay tuned next month for more CTAM information about the competition cycle.

“AACTFest is where we gather to attend workshops, network, see compelling theatre from across the nation, and it is the biggest theatre family reunion in the United States. AACTFest 2021 is still scheduled for June 14-19, 2021 in Louisville, Kentucky. As a response to the Covid-19 Pandemic and the uncertainty it holds for the AACTFest 2021 cycle, the AACT Board of Directors voted on Friday, May 9, 2020 to adopt an Invitational style model to ensure the festival would continue and remain open to theatres across the country.



“With the uncertainty of when and if state festivals will run, it became clear that the invitational model will not allow for both processes to work at the same time. Many states have already had to make the difficult decision to cancel or delay indefinitely, which stretches the uncertainty even longer, and there are many theatres who will struggle to meet the financial commitment to present festival shows.

“The AACTFest 2021 national companies will be chosen by application, evaluation, and adjudica-

tion, not by the usual state and regional festival process. This model alleviates any financial burden or obligation of the state or regional festival during such unprecedented times, while still giving every theatre across the nation a fair opportunity and access to the festival process.

“We are excited to present excellent and entertaining shows in a new and exciting format never done before. It does preclude the traditional system of advancement through the state and regional system, but keep in mind any member theatre is eligible for the invitational.

“The purpose of the shift is to make the process easier, equitable, and more financially feasible for theaters to participate, and ensure a national festival in Louisville. With that, we ask for your understanding and support as we work through the details of this new provisional model. Applications will open July 2020 through October 2020. You will be notified when details are in place and applications are being accepted.”

Fall Conference and Annual Meeting changes coming
Although no details are available as the Board works things out, it is most likely that the 2020 Fall Conference (October 9-11) will morph into a virtual conference, rather than an in-person event as currently planned. Watch for details here in July issue!



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Callboard

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This is the official newsletter of the Community Theatre Association of Michigan, issued monthly to all group affiliates and individual members with e-mail addresses on record. Distribution is by e-mail with a link to the newsletter on the association website. Back issues are available on the association website. Correspondence to the Callboard should be sent to the Editor at mellbee@earthlink.net. Updated e-mail and postal addresses are maintained by the Administrator and should be sent to ctamthrives@gmail.com.



Pit & Balcony caught in the middle of their run

Pit and Balcony Theatre presented the Great Lakes Bay regional premiere of Meteor Shower, the latest play by comedian Steve Martin, March 13-15, 2020. Slightly smaller audiences, following CDC guidelines groups were socially distanced from one another throughout the theatre, enjoyed the absurdity and fun of Martin's play. Unfortunately, due to the state's limit on public gatherings that went into effect on March 16th, we had to cancel our second weekend of performances, but are so grateful we were able to present an abbreviated run of this play to such an appreciative audience before the lockdown began!



There are only three things you need in life: Chocolate, Friends and Theatre.

--Jessica Fletcher

CTAM Calendar of Events

Table with 2 columns: Date and Event details. July 18-19, 2020: Board Strategic Planning Retreat, location TBD. October 9-11, 2020: Fall Conference and Annual Meeting. Location TBD.





Submit your play for the AACT NewPlayFest 2022

Scripts for AACT NewPlayFest 2022 are being accepted May 1 - June 30, 2020.

Non-musical, full-length plays only. Scripts must be unpublished and must not have received a full production. (If selected, the AACT theatre's production is to be a world premiere.) Only one script per playwright will be accepted. No fees required for AACT member playwrights, \$10 script processing fee for non-members.

For more information on submitting a script for NewPlayFest 2022, visit aact.org/newplayfest-call-scripts.

For AACT NewPlayFest information, including past winning playwrights and productions, visit aact.org/NewPlayFest.

Center Stage Midland affected by flooding

For those of who have been asking about how Midland Center for the Arts has been affected by the flooding, here's a brief update:

Many of their volunteers, onstage and backstage, have been severely affected by the flood. Some will not be able to return to their homes for many months. Please consider donating to the Midland Area Community Foundation to support their recovery. It's going to be a long road.

In their main facility, one of the lower level rehearsal rooms took on about four feet of water, which damaged the building's electrical, HVAC and computer equipment.

Their history campus (Doan History Center, the Dow Museum, Bradley House and Carriage Hall) was severely flooded, with the whole area covered in 2 to 6 feet of nasty flood water. There has been an incredible outpouring of support, with more than 40 museum volunteers from across the state driving in to help with the recovery.

Players de Noc chooses to go with the COVID flow!

At a time of canceled productions and an uncertain future, theaters members and volunteers could easily retract in defeat and surrender to a helpless situation. That is unless you're a theater in Michigan. In that case, you hop on your computer and begin to re-invent your craft and re-connect with fellow theaters across the state and even the nation. That is exactly what many theaters are doing right now, and what Players de Noc of Escanaba decided to do as well.

Like many theaters, Players de Noc was forced to cancel its final show of their season due to the shelter-in-place order. The group quickly took steps to reschedule the production to the next season, but also began working on their first piece of Live Streaming theatre just three days after the shelter order was given.

In their first online production, Players partnered with fellow theater members located in Florida, Illinois and Colorado to bring an original script to life. In their second project, the group partnered with actors and theaters from five different states and four different time zones to read and explore a quirky and dark comedy. Who knows where the next project will lead them.

There are hundreds of theaters across the country staying active and redefining our art overnight. It is this action of adaptation and redefinition that brings us closer than ever before. This new time of collaboration and cooperation will surely usher in a stronger and more connected performing arts community. Had it not been for today's circumstances, Players de Noc may never had had the opportunity to partner with such wonderful artists from across the nation. As we say in theatre, "The Show Must Go On" and it has, with a slightly different look. This is a unique time with many opportunities to create and connect, should you choose to use it. I hope you do, and I hope you discover something new.

--Jamie Peterson
Players de Noc



It seems to me...

By Dexter Brigham



What Do We Do Now?

How are we supposed to survive when we can't bring groups of people together? How do we keep from going bankrupt? How can we make art when everything's closed? Is anyone willing to pay for a livestream? Will anyone even let me livestream? What the heck even IS livestreaming? Will the patrons come back? Am I putting people at risk by re-opening? WHAT DO I DO?

These are all questions that I have asked myself, or I have been asked by other theatre people over the past two months. Unfortunately, I don't have all the answers, or even most of the them. Like many of you, I am watching more webinars than I ever thought possible; drafting, scrapping, and then re-drafting budget after budget; staring vacantly into an endless pit of panic and despair; and then getting up every morning and trying to find a way forward.

And so, without further ado, here's a short list of things I think we should be talking about...

LIVESTREAMING

It's not every day that a new medium presents itself. Zoom performances and livestreamed shows are here to stay, my friends. While I don't think that they will continue develop at the breakneck speed of the last two months, the fact that every major licensing company is launching their own streaming platform tells me that we need to get tech savvy yesterday.

PAYWALLS

When the pandemic started, the generous nature of the artistic world showed itself, and the world was flooded with gobs of free content. This was a great thing, and as we begin to shift our thoughts back to reopening, it's important that we reestablish the monetary value of our work. Theatre has value, and that value pays the light bill. As theatres and artists experiment with ticketed livestreamed events, we are finding

that patrons are more willing to support local artists and events that offer an interactive component. This is great news for community theatres, since local artists are our lifeblood!

SINGING

There is still a lot we don't know about how aerosolized moisture from our bodies disperses and accumulates through a room while singing or playing musical instruments. We do know that a church choir in Washington who held a socially-distanced rehearsal early in the outbreak suffered 53 cases and two deaths. Several studies are underway that will hopefully give us more data by summer, but at the moment it appears that large cast musicals are not safe.

RETURNING TO THE THEATRE

The bad news is that in almost every study being done nationwide, returning to concert halls and theatres is at or near the bottom of everyone's to-do list. The good news is that the theatre industry is quickly developing a set of guidelines and policies that will help us create a safe, socially-distanced environment for both artists and audiences. In addition, the emerging livestream license market offers us ways to reach more of our patrons than we will with our limited-capacity live performances. It's going to be a multi-media season in every way!

BE CREATIVE

This is what we do best! This year is going to require a lot from us, and the theatres who innovate and are willing to explore new models are the ones who will be successful. So find a space for an outdoor show, experiment with appointment-based performances, put everyone inside a glass box, try a drive-in theatre production in a parking lot, do an entire season of 1-person shows... the options are infinite! And at some point in the distant future, we will look back and realize that the innovation and experimentation that came from this period were critical to all the great things we are about to do!

If you have any follow-up questions to any of the things I mentioned above, feel free to reach out to me at brigham@midlandcenter.org. I'm happy to share any resources I have.



Twin City Players shift gears to maskmaking

Despite having to cancel its final two productions this season due to COVID-19, the Twin City Players is still busy answering a call for needed face masks for local organizations.

With the Emergency Order by Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer (that everyone wear masks when going to public places), local executives contacted the Twin City Players to find out if their costuming department would be able to head up the project with the Berrien Community Foundation and the Frederick S. Upton Foundation offering grants for supplies.

Julie Smiy, a lead costumer at TCP, immediately agreed to take on the project. Julie quickly put together an awesome team of 29 volunteers, all eager to take on the task to help seniors and others in the community who needed but couldn't afford to buy masks retail. On-hand supplies were quickly distributed to the volunteers so they could begin working their magic on masks. Donated fabric was also received to help with this monumental project.

As of mid-May, they have created 1,500 washable face masks for the Area Agency on Aging, 45 for the Salvation Army Homeless Shelter and are now working on 1,200 masks for the Berrien County Health Department.



TCP stalwart Julie Smiy chaired the project, here surrounded by some of the new masks created by the volunteers. Nice job, everyone!

Audio Air Force changed to Zoom for Comedy Concert

CTAM affiliate The Audio Air Force does audio theater, usually live on stage, but with the stay-at-home orders, they put on the show they were scheduled to do in May anyway. Re-written slightly and then performed on Zoom on May 15, the program featured the Greater Lansing Food Bank - and because the performance was on Zoom (also YouTube and Facebook live), they encouraged those listening and watching to support the food banks and food pantries near where they live.

According to founder Dave Downing, it was a very successful evening and they will probably be doing additional Zoom shows until the quarantine is lifted. They are headquartered at the Robin Theatre, located at 1105 S. Washington in REO Town Lansing.



Most produced plays in last five years

AACT published their list of the most produced plays in the last five years:

1. Steel Magnolias
2. Best Christmas Pageant Ever
3. Calendar Girls
4. Dixie Swim Club
4. The Foreigner (tie)
4. To Kill a Mockingbird (tie)
4. Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike (tie)
5. A Christmas Carol
5. Diary of Anne Frank (tie)
6. Don't Dress for Dinner
7. Arsenic and Old Lace
7. A Christmas Story (tie)
8. Fox on the Fairway
9. Leading Ladies
10. Silent Sky

The Scoop on Scripts

By Tara Western



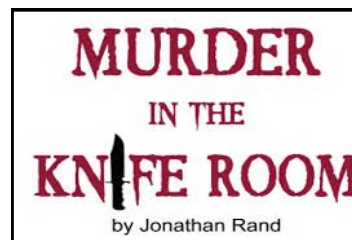
June is here! Hope this newsletter finds you safe, healthy, and busy.

These two scripts have been read but not seen. As you can read scripts for yourself, I hope to guide you to shows that might be suitable for your group. By listing the production's cast requirements, tech challenges, and summarizing the plot, you may be interested enough to do further research. But one group's challenge is another group's Tuesday! Larger theatres may have a huge pool of talented technicians while smaller groups may have one go-to gal and a bunch of enthusiastic (hopefully!) beginners. So, I do my best!

We Gather Together, the 2015 CTAM Playwriting Contest winner, written by Maripat Allen, is a humorous family drama set in northern Michigan in 1998. The focus is three sisters: Karen, 38, independent, sarcastic; Linda, 29, the middle child always trying to make everyone happy, and Suzy, 28, self-centered and smugly Christian, mother of two. The cast also includes Karen's daughter, Taylor, 20, Suzy's Ben, 7, and Lucy, 5. Three men play Linda's husband, Suzy's husband, and Taylor's beau, Ryan. Act I begins Thanksgiving 1998 as the sisters and their families gather for the first time since their parents' sudden death two years ago. We learn: 1) Karen, eldest by nine years has been estranged from her sisters, 2) Linda and Bill want, but have no children, 3) Linda and Suzy are close, and thus, upset and confused by Karen aloofness, 4) Karen was a second mom to her sisters because her mom was drinking, 5) Taylor's boyfriend, Ryan, comes on to Linda, and 6) Taylor is pregnant. Act II, one month later, the three sisters counsel Taylor. Taylor overhears the siblings discuss the Karen's unplanned pregnancy and is more confused. Ryan, the baby's father, is not on board. The sisters heal and understand how the family's problems repeat themselves through the generations. Act III, a

year later, the family gathers to celebrate baby Chelsea, who is being raised by Linda and Bill. This is a lovely, realistic family drama. Although set in the late '90s, the conversations, the dysfunction, and the relationships seem very contemporary. The frank discussion of the consequences of an unplanned pregnancy shows us that some things never change. Told mostly with a light touch, funny bits and humor keep the play from being a soap opera. The 1998 set requires a large room which includes a kitchen, living room, dining room and a stairway leading to a landing with a sofa and a doorway to a bedroom. *We Gather Together* in 2020 would be suitable for ages 13 and up. If you'd like to read this show, contact Maripat at mpallen323@gmail.com. She also has written two COVID-19 ten-minute short plays that are available also.

Murder in the Knife Room—a Murder Mystery Parody by Johnathan Rand ©2007, published by Playscripts, is an outrageous take on today's ubiquitous murder mysteries. Hilarious popular culture jokes and similarities to Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express* abound. The stereotypical roles are named with their stereotype: Wealthy Dowager, Respected General, Pompous Millionaire along with Spooky Pirate, and Boy Band Reject. This 80-90-minute



spoof has a single set: the "knife" room of a mansion, suggested or realistic. The cast is huge (22-58) with gender fluid options. Costumes can be simple or complicated. Simple lights, but lots of cues. Each character has a motive to kill the Mysterious Host, of course. These scenarios are frequently acted out by a separate group called the Re-enactment Players. The Mysterious Host is a dead body on the stage throughout, *and* leads the interrogations. You will need some sloth to play the corpse. This play is perfect for middle or high school where a large cast with juicy parts (although small) is sought. A one-act version is also available.