Third consecutive world premiere and three residencies by nationally acclaimed artists highlight Syracuse Stage’s 48th season

Season also includes two musicals, two classics and a contemporary new play

SYRACUSE, NY – Two Tony Award-winning musicals, an American classic, a smart new comedy, a haunting new adaptation of a literary masterpiece and a world premiere are at the heart of Syracuse Stage’s 48th season. Artistic director Robert Hupp said the shows in the season all in some way address ideas of home “in all its idealized, romanticized, messy and real manifestations.”

In addition, three nationally acclaimed artists will participate in residencies at the theater throughout the season. Playwright Kate Hamill will be the playwright in residence at Syracuse Stage’s annual Cold Read...
Festival of New Plays. Activist and artist Mark Valdez will develop his new work “Exiled in America” at Syracuse Stage as part of a four city project that also includes St. Paul, Minnesota, Washington, D.C. and Los Angeles. Actor and writer Stephan Wolfert will perform his adaption of “Macbeth” and create a new work based on “Richard III” called “The Head of Richard.”

The season is scheduled to begin Oct. 14, 2020 and continue through June 20, 2021. Subscriptions are on sale now. Single tickets will be available July 25.


“It’s a season that speaks to me because it’s full of heartfelt and heartwarming stories that transport us beyond the everyday,” Hupp said. “These plays and musicals give our artists and our actors a rich canvas to create something special for our audience, the kind of unforgettable theatre experience you can’t get anywhere except at Syracuse Stage.”

With its final performances falling on Halloween weekend, “Mary Shelly's Frankenstein” offers the perfect spooky autumn treat. In this new version by David Catlin of Chicago’s renowned Lookingglass Theatre, audiences experience the full blown power of the famous tale while encountering the sensitive human heart behind the story’s creation.

Catlin sets his play on a stormy night in 1816 where in a villa on Lake Geneva five young friends gather to tell ghost stories. Among them are the famous Romantic poets George Gordon Lord Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley, as well as Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin (later Mary Shelley). Challenged by Byron to devise the scariest of horrors, 18-year-old Mary unspools her tale of Victor Frankenstein and his unholy experiment. As the friends eagerly enact her characters, the story strikes closer to home than any might have imagined. Risa Brainin who directed the much acclaimed “The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time” returns for this eerie, original retelling of “Frankenstein.”

The holiday presentation celebrates the deliciously twisted sense of fun and the singular genius of the great Roald Dahl with “Matilda The Musical.” Originally produced by Britain’s Royal Shakespeare Company, this Tony Award-winner is a captivating treat that revels in the anarchy of childhood, the power of imagination and the inspiring story of a girl who dreams of a better life. (Not to mention there’s a gloriously vile villain, Miss Trunchbull.) Packed with high-energy dance numbers, catchy songs and featuring an unforgettable little girl with astonishing wit, intelligence and psychokinetic powers, “Matilda” is a delightfully thrilling musical for children and adults alike. Donna Drake (“The Wizard of Oz,” “Elf The Musical” and “Disney's Beauty and the Beast”) and an outstanding team of designers return to Syracuse Stage to delight audiences of all ages. Co-produced with the Syracuse University Department of Drama.

In January, Syracuse Stage offers the perfect counterpunch to cold weather and post-holiday blues with the rousing, Caribbean inflected musical “Once on this Island.” Written by Syracuse University alumna Lynn Ahrens, the warm-hearted, Tony Award-winning fairy tale tells the moving story of young Ti Moune and her love for Daniel, a wealthy boy from the “other side of the island.” Spirited choreography and colorful (albeit temperamental) gods make “Once on this Island” a celebration of the extraordinary way love can tear down walls and transform our lives. Steve H. Broadnax III (“Thoughts of a Colored Man”) directs.
An extremely funny and thoughtful new comedy, Jonathan Spector’s “Eureka Day,” is the fourth show in the season. A recent hit off-Broadway, the play premiered at the Aurora Theater Company in Berkley, California, in 2018. The Eureka Day of the title is a progressive school in Berkley. It is a place where all decisions are made by consensus, diversity and inclusion are valued and vaccinations are a personal matter. When a mumps outbreak hits the school, it turns out that not everyone in the community has the same definition of social justice. Now the board of directors must confront the central question: how do you find consensus when you can’t agree on the facts? Melissa Crespo, who directed the comic hit “Native Gardens,” returns to Syracuse Stage to helm this contemporary satire.

Artistic director Hupp has long been a fan of Thornton Wilder’s classic “Our Town,” and he has chosen it to be the show he directs in the 48th season. Heralded as “... one of the finest achievements of the current stage” when it opened in 1938, “Our Town” has endured as a poetic and graceful masterpiece, a heartfelt call to cherish every unimportant moment we’re together and to embrace the true wonder and brevity of being alive. Whether in Grover’s Corners, New Hampshire at the turn of the 20th century, or Syracuse, New York in 2021, Wilder’s enduring classic asks us to stop and ponder what truly matters, and to consider that for a great many of us the answers will be the same.

The season concludes with a world premiere, “salt/city/blues,” by Syracuse Stage associate artistic director Kyle Bass. Yolonda Mourning is an independent consultant on a vast project to take down a span of highway that has long divided Salt City. When she leaves her husband and teenage son and moves to the heart of trendy downtown, a diverse cast of characters forces Yolonda to confront Salt City’s complicated history around race, class and urban renewal, and to reckon with her role as architect of the broken bridges in her own family. Moving, funny, poignant and current, “salt/city/blues” is a fresh, contemporary new play set in a fictionalized Syracuse and to the music of the blues. Produced under the Cold Read umbrella of new work, “salt/city/blues” is the second world premiere for Bass at Syracuse Stage. The company produced “Possessing Harriet” in 2018 directed by former artistic director Tazewell Thompson. Thompson returns to direct “salt/city/blues.”

“We've invited the directors of some of our most popular productions to craft the storytelling in our new season,” Hupp said. “It’s an entertaining, thought provoking and engaging line up of new and classic plays and musicals that I’m excited to share with Central New York.”

Off the mainstage, the Cold Read Festival of New Plays (March 24 – 28, 2021) returns for its fourth year, curated by associate artistic director Bass. Kate Hamill will be the playwright in residence. An acclaimed playwright and accomplished performer, Hamill wrote and appeared in 2018/2019 season’s “Pride and Prejudice” and also appeared in “Noises Off.” She has been one of the most produced playwrights in the country for the past three years. This year she has productions at The Old Globe, Dallas Theater Center, Cygnet Theatre, the Guthrie and South Coast Rep among others. Her adaptation of “Dracula” recently opened at off-Broadway’s Classic Stage Company. Her plays have been produced internationally, including productions in Canada, Israel and Australia. Music and theater performer Chesney Snow will be the Festival’s Solo Performer and Evan Starling-Davis will be the featured local writer.

The company also plans two residencies in the season that will bring new original work to the theater. In the fall, actor and writer Stephan Wolfert will perform his adaptation of “Macbeth” and develop a new piece, “The Head of Richard” based on “Richard III.” Wolfert appeared as Mrs. Darcy in 2018/2019 season’s “Pride and Prejudice.” He is best known for his one-man show “Cry Havoc,” which draws on his personal experience in the military and as a veteran contending with post-traumatic stress. He is also the creator of DE-CRUIT®—a program to reintegrate military veterans using Shakespeare, psychology and classical actor training.
In the spring, Los Angeles based writer, director and producer Mark Valdez arrives with his production of “Exiled in America,” based on the book “Exiled in America: Life on the Margins in a Residential Motel” by sociologist Christopher P. Dum. Originating at Mixed Blood Theatre in St. Paul, Minnesota, “Exiled in America” is a multi-year, multi-city project that aims to impact housing policy utilizing performance, cultural organizing and creative community development strategies. In addition to Syracuse Stage, the production will travel to Washington, D.C. and Los Angeles.

Syracuse Stage’s education department will offer multiple in-school and public performances beginning with the Bank of America Children’s tour in the fall. “Danny, King of the Basement” by David S. Craig and directed by Ricky Pak will tour to area elementary schools. Other education programs include student matinees of mainstage productions, the living history program “Backstory,” Theater for the Very Young and summer classes for middle school students.

SHOW DETAILS

“Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein”
Written by David Catlin
From the book by Mary Shelley
Directed by Risa Brainin
Oct. 14 – Nov. 1, 2020

“Bone-chilling, visceral, emotionally gripping, visually stunning and strikingly elegant... It is a Halloween treasure that should not be ignored!” – “The Star-Ledger”

“Roald Dahl’s Matilda The Musical”
Book by Dennis Kelly
Music and Lyrics by Tim Minchin
Based on the book “Matilda” by Roald Dahl
Directed by Donna Drake
Choreography by Andrea Leigh-Smith
Musical Direction by Brian Cimmet
Co-produced with the Syracuse University Department of Drama
Nov. 20, 2020 – Jan. 3, 2021

“An explosion of joy, the most exhilarating and flat-out best musical...” – “Variety”

“Once on this Island”
Book and Lyrics by Lynn Ahrens
Music by Stephen Flaherty
Directed by Steve H. Broadnax III
Jan. 20 – Feb. 7, 2021

“Just what the world needs now—inspired and uplifting.” – “Variety”

“Eureka Day”
By Jonathan Spector
Directed by Melissa Crespo
March 3 – 21, 2021

“Prepare to be triggered into fits of laughter by ‘Eureka Day,’ an extremely funny and ultimately thoughtful new comedy.” – “New York Stage Review”
Cold Read Festival of New Plays
Playwright-in-Residence Kate Hamill
Solo Artist Chesney Snow
Write Here Featured Author Evan Starling-Davis
Curated by Kyle Bass
March 24 – 28, 2021

“Our Town”
By Thornton Wilder
Directed by Robert Hupp
April 21 – May 9, 2021

“…one of the finest achievements of the current stage.” – Brooks Atkinson, The New York Times, 1938

“salt/city/blues”
World Premiere
By Kyle Bass
Directed by Tazewell Thompson
June 2 – 20, 2021

ABOUT SYRACUSE STAGE
Founded in 1974, Syracuse Stage is the non-profit, professional theatre company in residence at Syracuse University. It is nationally recognized for creating stimulating theatrical work that engages Central New York and significantly contributes to the artistic life of Syracuse University, where it is a vital partner in achieving the educational mission of the University's Department of Drama. Syracuse Stage’s mission is to tell stories that engage, entertain and inspire people to see life beyond their own experience. Each season 70,000 patrons enjoy an adventurous mix of new plays, and bold interpretations of classics and musicals, featuring the finest theatre artists. In addition, Stage maintains a vital educational outreach program that annually serves more than 15,000 students from 14 counties. Syracuse Stage is a constituent of the Theatre Communications Group (TCG), the national organization for the American theatre, and a member of the Arts and Cultural Leadership Alliance (ACLA), the University Hill Corporation and the East Genesee Regent Association. Syracuse Stage is a member of The League of Resident Theatres (LORT), the largest professional theatre association in the country.