



WHAT'S NEXT

THE NEWSLETTER OF NEXT ACT THEATRE

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Getting Out of the Way

Reese Madigan on Coming Back to Next Act Theatre

Actor Reese Madigan returns to Next Act Theatre in the role of The Son in THE TREASURER by Max Posner, running April 24 - May 19, 2024. He was previously seen in our 2017 production of SILENT SKY and our 2008 production of LOMBARDI. We caught up with him to learn more about his return to Next Act and what he's looking forward to with this play.

Tell us a little about your history with Next Act Theatre.

It spans a pretty significant period of time: from [Eric Simonson's play] LOMBARDI. David Ceasarini was central to my experience. The fact that he did everything and completely led by example. I have this one memory: he's in LOMBARDI, we're a full house, and a lightbulb needed to get changed in the men's room - and David was going down the hall to make sure that happened. I was so taken with the kind of artist that he is. A real man of the theatre.

Reese Madigan in LOMBARDI



Cut to the new space [at 255 S Water St], which is gorgeous. I had the pleasure of playing there this fall in WITCH for Renaissance [Theaterworks]. There's such a good energy in the building!

But obviously, SILENT SKY was a few years prior, and that was so cool to take this new-ish theatre, at the time, on a test drive. It's a great space to be in. It's so intimate. You feel like you're being hugged by the audience. And the audience arrived ready to enjoy the show.

That's been my experience with both productions, and I think [that's] because such love, and such craftsmanship and such care has gone into the stewardship of this theatre. I couldn't be more elated that Cody is now at the helm. [His] enthusiasm is infectious, and I am absolutely thrilled to be a part of this production.

How do the directness of this play and the intimacy of Next Act's space work together?

I think this is a brilliant play. It's a great opportunity to begin the show having the actor say, "hey, I'm here with you. We're breathing the same air. There's no line between me and you."

It deals with things that, if we haven't dealt with them, we're all going to have to deal with them: mortality and responsibility and fear and love and, to a degree, faith, regret, remorse and, beneath all of it, it's written with such a light touch that it's about love. How do we love each other? And how do we reconcile difficult emotions? And how do we go through life with each other, making great mistakes and trying

to mend them? And keeping going forward.

The way the dialogue is written, it is so conversational, it is so much like people talking, [The Son] has so many fits and starts, he has so many parentheticals, he has so many digressions. To be able to find the character's rhythms just by trying to memorize the words has been a real treat. In some ways, the playwright has given you the heartbeat of this guy in the first eight to ten minutes. I feel like we have an enormous opportunity ahead of us to be able to start the play like that. If I don't fuck it up. So, I'm really excited to not fuck it up.

Continued on page 3.

Reese Madigan in SILENT SKY
Photo: Ross Zentner



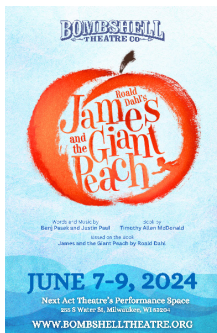
Coming This Summer



Next Act's 2023-24 season ends on May 19 when our production of *THE TREASURER* closes. In the nearly four months before our 2024-25 season opens, however, there's still plenty happening at our building! Next Act Theatre will be home to a number of rental productions during the summer of 2024 - learn about some of the shows that will keep our space busy!

From May 30 to June 1, **Brew City Opera** will present Mozart's *COSI FAN TUTTE*. This comic masterpiece of an opera is full of lust, confusion, deceit and lots of laughs.

Then, **Bombshell Theatre Company's** summer season begins June 7 with their production of *JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH*. A delightfully offbeat adaptation of the classic Roald Dahl adventure, this musical is the first of five productions offered by Bombshell at Next Act Theatre's performance space this coming summer.



Next, Bombshell will present *FROZEN JR.*, based on the hit Disney animated movie and subsequent Broadway musical. This production will feature students from the Bombshell Youth Theatre Program.

On June 15, Bombshell will present *THE 24 HOUR MUSICAL*, a fundraiser where performers and production team members will mount a full-scale musical production with only 24 hours of rehearsal.

From July 17 to 28, **Robert Grede's** *RIP - A MUSICAL COMEDY OF LIFE & DEATH* makes its premiere. It is directed by Alan Piotrowicz, who previously designed lighting for nine Next Act productions.

There's even more to come this summer, including two more Bombshell productions in August. Tickets for all these rental productions are now on sale on our website, nextact.org. Visit now to find more information and purchase tickets!



At the McCobb Mortuary, a lonely attendant seeks purpose in his life, while The Dead regret their mistakes and yearn for redemption. "A fun frolic, with love, laughter, suspense ... and a twist at the end." July 17- 28, 2024 Tickets on Sale Now! www.RIP-TheMusical.com

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GETTING OUT OF THE WAY, continued

It's interesting how the characters are very indirect with one another, but *The Son* is very direct with the audience. I lost my mom in 2022, and she had a very fast-descending, mysterious case of dementia. She went from being very independent to being incapacitated within weeks. She lost the ability to speak not very long after that. My mother was a National Merit Scholar and a very verbal, brilliant person.

Especially in the last year of her life, I spent a lot of time with her. I would talk to her for hours. I could be very, very candid with her and open up in ways that I never was able to in my life. When you have an audience who's listening to you and is not talking back, there's a way that you can unburden yourself and be more candid than you expected you would be at the beginning of the conversation.

Even though the audience isn't "the mom" and doesn't have that same relationship, I think that's a luxury we have with this play - that easy, conversational way into the middle of something which is impossible.

How do you approach bringing your real-world experience into the play? Or do you?

We have no other tools in this strange art form. We are the instrument. You don't have any other media to use other than what makes you human, which is how you perceive the world, what you see, hear and feel, and then how you are able to communicate that. It's really unadorned. [This play] asks you to be very, very open. It asks you to be as loving as you can be. It asks you to be as imperfect as you can be. It asks you to be cruel. It asks you to beg forgiveness.

I don't really get afraid of indulgence or emotion for the sake of emotion. I would rather see too much of that on stage than too little. Here's what I think: the highest level I can have as a performer, when I'm operating at my best, is to get the hell out of the way. You do all of this work to be a vessel for something which is larger than you. The only way you can do that is to practice being open and being vulnerable and showing up with all of you to rehearsal.

Yeah, it's true that I lost my mom to dementia, but my mom was also very different than [The Son's mother] Ida, and our relationship was different. But here's what I was: I was a son and she was a mother. And that's a universal thing.

It's the prayer of Michelangelo: "Lord, please free me from myself so that I may please you." I read it in an Al Pacino biography, like, 30 years ago. And it's as close to my heart and the way I work as I can be. I'm very much looking forward to doing the work, and then hopefully just trying to be *The Son*. Because we're all sons and daughters, and parents and children, and in that way, this play will remind us what it means to be human. If we get it right. In a very profound way, I think.

You also write plays. How does being a playwright inform how you act?

I think being an actor, if you're trying to write a play, is enormously useful. I've learned so much just about acting: about moments and how they're constructed, how great

actors come and figure their way through. My only qualities that work as a writer are what I've learned as an actor in the theatre about language, about rhythm, about timing.



Acting is a humbling process. Writing is a humbling process. I think the lessons I've learned about trying to be selfless, and getting out of the way of the story, and what's essential here, and what's not, and what's [if you will] indulgent, and what's not, and what building blocks do we need to move this story forward, and to keep it changing and to keep people engaged? All of that stuff I learned as an actor.

What keeps you coming back to Milwaukee?

What brought me to Milwaukee was, in 1999, I was cast in a production of *CAT ON A HAT TIN ROOF*. I was playing a former athlete, and I was trying to get myself into that frame of mind, so I was running with a football. I did not play football growing up, but I bought myself a football, and that was my totem. I was out on the Oak Leaf Trail my first morning in Milwaukee, it was September 30. I will never forget this. I was so stunned by the lake, and then I went running, and I was like, "there is something familiar about this place, and I don't know what it is." To this day, it feels like home to me.

And I've heard that from other people who've come [to Milwaukee] from other places as well. There's something about it that feels like home. And I've felt that kinship in the rehearsal rooms as well. I think what makes Milwaukee "Milwaukee" is the people. You can't buy that. There's a familiarity that everybody has. You get to work with people you know. You get to grow up in many ways. I've never been around such a concentration of talent. I've been fortunate enough to work in a lot of different cities, and I think Milwaukee is the most special.

What do you hope the audience takes away from this play?

"That's me. That's my mom. I recognize that. I recognize myself. I recognize my family." I want them to see themselves in it. And perhaps gain a measure of compassion and forgiveness in themselves of what it means to be human.

Because I think that's what this play is about. This play is about what it means to be human. And what it means to be human is to be flawed. To perhaps have a little compassion for themselves, because life is hard. And it's also extraordinarily beautiful. But it takes endurance to run through the spectrum of all that.

Anything else you'd like to add?

My enormous gratitude, to not only be a part of this play and Next Act once more, but to be continually welcomed as a part of the rehearsal rooms and performance spaces in Milwaukee. It is the most special place in the world to me. It's a privilege to work there.

Reese shared more than we could fit here! For the full interview, check out nextact.org

Four Questions for Cody's Next Act Debut

Artistic Director Cody Estle makes his *Next Act Theatre* directorial debut with *THE TREASURER*. It's his first full season as *Next Act's* Artistic Director. We checked in to see how things are going for him.

How is the season going so far?

Overall, I think it's going really well. All four of the stories are completely different in their own ways, which I think is exciting. I'm also thrilled about the number of artists who have come to know Next Act as a home who are back, as well as opening up the doors for new talent.

Why did you pick *THE TREASURER*?

It's a play that I've been wanting to direct for a while. It struck me because of its complexity towards the relationship that we have with our parents (and vice versa).

There's a line halfway through the script where *The Son* says, "I don't love my mother." I actually don't think that's true. I think that what it really looks at is the complexity of what does it mean to love your parent? If he didn't love his mother at all, would he be giving his own money to be taking care of her? Something to think about with this play is that we don't get to pick our family, but at the end of the day, they're our family.

What about the process excites you?

We've assembled an excellent team of actors and some top-notch designers. I can't wait to get into the rehearsal room and tackle this show with this fine group of people.

I'm also very happy that this is the first time I get to direct a play for Next Act



Photo: Joe Mazza/Brave Lux

Theatre and Milwaukee audiences.

And what about next season?

I'm enthusiastic about all of the stories next season. And I think for me personally, I'm also looking forward to the return of David [Cecsarini]. Beyond him being my predecessor, he has also become my friend. I am thrilled that he's going to be back in the building [as an actor].



Photo: A.J. Magoon

A Tribute to David

Almost two years after its launch, Next Act's Tribute Campaign is at **98 percent** of its goal! This campaign pays tribute to Producing Artistic Director *emeritus* David Cecsarini and his hard work in building Next Act Theatre. It provides vital funds to support new Artistic Director Cody Estle and Managing Director Libby Amato as they lead us through *Our Next Act*. **Help put us over the top** in honor of David and contribute funds to support new staff members, building upgrades and other important improvements. Donate at nextact.org, call (414) 278-7780 or send a donation via mail to PO Box 394, Milwaukee, WI 53201.

Learning from The Best

One of the changes coming to our **Next Actors: Summer Theatre for Teens** program is the inclusion of a number of area theatre professionals! Students will learn valuable skills from Next Act regulars including **Josh Schmidt, Martilia Marechal, Nicole Magnusson** and **Karen Estrada**, as well as many other talented Milwaukee artists. Do you know a high-school aged student who would like to learn musical theatre, sound design, puppetry, poetry, composition, playwrighting, fight choreography and more, all while creating an original piece of theatre alongside their peers? Find more information and sign up for an audition at nextact.org/nastt.

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Next Act Joins Bike Benefits

Plus, Gear Up for UPAF's Ride for the Arts!

By Tawnie Thompson, Development Manager

Through generous donations from the **Chris Kegel Foundation, Michael and Haly Besaw**, and the **Baird Foundation**, Next Act was very excited to have new bike racks installed by our front doors, making biking to the theatre more accessible and more secure!

Along with our friends at Renaissance Theaterworks, we have also joined the **Bicycle Benefits** program! Patrons who are members can show the Bike Benefits sticker on their helmet for **\$5 off a regular season performance with either company** as well as **\$1 off a beverage at the Next Act Bar on show nights**. Bike Benefits stickers can also be purchased at the bar for \$5. Get more info at the theatre on your next visit.

With so much renewed interest and so many of our staff biking to work, we're also thrilled to be putting together a big team for **UPAF's Ride for the Arts**, taking place on June 2nd, this year! If you're interested in supporting our team for the Ride, contact our Development Manager, Tawnie Thompson, via phone at (414) 278-7780 or email at tawnie@nextact.org.



Photo: Tawnie Thompson

YOU'RE INVITED TO BRAVO, NEXT ACT! 2024

OUR ANNUAL FUNDRAISING GALA!

BY TAWNIE THOMPSON, DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

On Thursday, May 23rd, we'll be celebrating the close of our 34th season with our annual fundraising gala! Off-site this year at Broken Bat Brewing, join us from 5-9 pm for live and silent auctions, games, giveaways, light appetizers and performances from some familiar local talent.

Join us for A Night of Firsts, featuring the storytelling stylings of James Carrington, Elyse Edelman, Laura Gordon, Doug Jarecki and Tami Workentin. Under Tami's expert direction, our entertainers will each share tales of their own memorable "firsts." We will also be honoring Outstanding Board Member and Supporter David Anderson for his many contributions to Next Act.

Tickets are available now on the Next Act website! Join us in celebrating A Night of Firsts!



Photo: A.J. Magoon

What's Your Type?

By A.J. Magoon, Marketing Director

Next Act's 2024-25 Season is fast approaching. It contains award-winning plays, the long-awaited return of some amazing talent (David Cecsarini, Marie Kohler, Brian Mani), the Next Act debuts of other local icons (Elyse Edelman, Rachael Zientek) and all the building blocks of *must-see theatre*. We know you, like us, can't wait to see what's in store during the coming season. The question is, how do you like to see it? Here's a guide to getting the most enjoyment out of the 2024-25 season based on what kind of audience member you are:

The Rock-Solid Subscriber

You're the cornerstone of Next Act Theatre's audiences. As a fixed-seat subscriber, you have your preferred seats locked in for every show of the upcoming season. You enjoy some of the lowest ticket prices of the season, a discount on bringing your friends along, free exchanges, a Rewards Card with offers from local merchants (like those advertised throughout this newsletter) and priority renewal of your favorite seats for future seasons. In exchange, your purchases and donations create the foundation for getting our season started on the right foot. If you haven't already renewed your seats, or if you want to buy a new subscription, visit us online or give us a call to get started!



The Flex Pass Fanatic

You want to support Next Act's intimate brand of theatre just as much as any subscriber (while enjoying the same perks and benefits), but you need a little more flexibility with your schedule. We've got you covered! You buy Flex Passes instead of fixed-seat subscriptions, and you get four flexible admissions to use for any shows whenever you want. Maybe you still see all four shows of the season, or maybe you pick and choose. You might reserve months in advance or make your decisions more last-minute. Whatever your style, our Flex Passes make it easy, and if you want more tickets, you just buy more Passes. Whether you still need to renew your Flex Passes or you want to buy new ones, you can get them online or over the phone - no stress necessary.

The Show-By-Show Selector

You're not ready to commit to a whole season yet, and that's okay. You see only what you want to see. They say absence makes the heart grow fonder, and we're even happier every time you choose to come to the theatre. You'll want to keep an eye on our website for single tickets starting July 15, 2024 - that way, you get your preferred seats for any show you want next season.



The Tag-Along

You come with a friend or family member, enjoying their subscription, Flex Pass or single tickets right alongside them. The more, the merrier! With a great new season on the horizon, you'll want to make sure they stay aware of everything coming up at Next Act and get their (and your!) tickets soon. That way, you'll have another season of great experiences ahead.

New subscriptions and Flex Passes, in addition to renewals, are now on sale. Visit us at nextact.org or call (414) 278-0765 to get yours. And mark your calendar for July 15, 2024, when single tickets go on sale!

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ARTISTIC AMBROSIA

Art and Longevity

By James Toth, Curator



Justice by Charles F. Wickler

What determines the quality of our lives as we become elderly? What factors play significant roles in keeping our wits and combatting the feelings of isolation and loneliness? Much has been written about how to stave off the inevitable(?) physical and mental decline we face in old age. How might art play a role? Having an active, creative mindset makes the world forever interesting. It engages all of one's senses as the ordinary is experienced with a refreshed perspective which can serve as inspiration for artistic expression. Could all that have a positive effect? Well, it couldn't hurt!

While the play *THE TREASURER* is about a son's experience in dealing with the needs of his aging mother, it is the word "aging" that caught my imagination as a hook for the lobby gallery exhibit. It made me think about the "aging" artists I know and admire; how they have continued to stay engaged with the world and to create wonderful art well past the time many have retired to rocking chairs in Arizona or Florida.

So, I invited five of my "old" friends to share their art with us as well as an insight or two about the importance of art and art-making in their lives. They are Virgi Driscoll [91], Ann Baer [82], Jean D. Sobon [82], Charles F. Wickler [76] and Kathy Walter [73]. I hope you find them and their art as inspiring as I do.

James Toth [71]
Volunteer Gallery Curator

Come See James' Gallery
Enjoy the art in our lobby gallery during the run of *THE TREASURER*, April 24 through May 19 from noon to 5 p.m. or before/after performances.



Future? by Jean D. Sobon



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A New York Times Critic's Pick!
Cody Estle's Next Act Directorial Debut!

Ida Armstrong is broke, lonely and fading fast. And she's spending all of her children's money, forcing her son to assume the unwanted role of The Treasurer: an arrangement that becomes untenable the more he questions his devotion to her. In this darkly funny, sharply intimate portrait, Max Posner chronicles the strained ties between a son and his aging mother, and the hell of a guilty conscience.

"...blends the mundance and the mystic, slips between the life of the moment and the life of the mind ... quite simply, a marvel!"
-New York Magazine

	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
April 24 - May 19, 2024				24 Preview 7:30	25 Preview 7:30	26 Opening 7:30	27 4:00 P 7:30
	28 2:00 T			1 1:30 7:30	2 7:30 T	3 7:30	4 4:00 7:30
	5 2:00 P/T			8 1:30 7:30	9 7:30 T	10 7:30	11 4:00 7:30
	12 2:00 P/T	13 PWYC 7:30		15 7:30	16 7:30 T	17 7:30	18 4:00 7:30
	19 2:00 Closing	P - Personal Preview T - Talkback PWYC - Pay What You Can					

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