

WHAT'S NEXT

THE NEWSLETTER OF NEXT ACT THEATRE

VOLUME 34, ISSUE 5
JULY 2024

Building Forward

The Past, Present and Future of Our Reimagined Next Actors Program

Next Actors: Summer Theatre for Teens celebrates its 26th year this summer. The free summer arts program has evolved since it first started in 1998. Over the years, however, it has continued to provide a vital community space for young people. We sat down with Education Manager Pia Russo to discuss where the program came from - and where it's going.



The 2003 Next Actors.

The Past

Next Actors: Summer Theatre for Teens began in 1998 when Next Act Theatre absorbed the assets and program structure of the Schneider Arts Academy. The program was "briefly called Next Actors: Summer Theatre for Youth, until we found out that the acronym was NASTY," says Pia. She also notes that, at 26, the Next Actors program is two years older than she is.

The program has always been offered completely free to any interested students, a point of pride for Pia. "For most of its history, it's been a four-week program, Monday through Fri-

day, where students create their own musical, about an hour in length, with the help of a couple of adults that know a lot about musical theatre: a composer, a director, a choreographer, that sort of thing. That's been followed by one week of tour."

The tour has taken students to Boys & Girls Clubs, senior living facilities and other venues around the City of Milwaukee where the Next Actors have presented their original work to members of the community.

The week has been capped off by a public benefit performance at Next Act.

"In more recent years, it has switched [from a musical] to an hour-long play or an hour of

programming made up of a bunch of smaller plays," says Pia.

Over the years, the program has enjoyed the leadership of recognizable artists including Ray Jivoff, Doug Jarecki, Karen Estrada and Grace DeWolff as well as Pia herself.

The Present

"This year, we are breaking up the four weeks before the tour into two two-week sessions. Students can do one or both of them, and any student who does is invited for tour. We have some kids doing just session one, but they'll come back for tour at the end," says Pia.

"This was for a couple of reasons. Mostly, I was noticing that a lot of students were visiting family or doing this or that, and would have to miss more than a week of [the four weeks of] camp. So, this allowed students to join later while not having them miss anything."

Pia has been developing and changing the Next Actors model to respond to the evolving needs of students in a post-pandemic world.

While enrollment in the program had declined since 2020, this year "we had 27 kids audition, so clearly, they like this new format. This will be the most kids we've had since 2015."

Continued on page 3

Pia Russo (L) and Teaching Assistant Kelsie Paige Kasky (R) with the 2023 Next Actors. Photo: A.J. Magoon



Still To Come More Rental Shows in Summer 2024

Next Act Theatre has already played host to a wealth of productions in our performance space since our 2023-24 season ended. These productions, put on by renting organizations using the Next Act performance space, are often very different than what you may be used to seeing at Next Act. Since May 30, we've already seen an opera and two musicals in our space! The summer isn't over yet, and there are still three more rental productions to come:



Between **July 17 - 28**, our performance space will host the world premiere of a new musical comedy: **RIP - A MUSICAL COMEDY OF LIFE & DEATH**. Playwright Robert Grede has assembled a group of remarkable artists, including a "homecoming" for director Alan Piotrowicz, who previously designed nine shows with Next Act.



Then, Bombshell Theatre Company returns for **THE PROM** between **August 8 - 18**. Four eccentric Broadway stars are in desperate need of a new stage. So when they hear that trouble is brewing around a small-town prom, they know that it's time to put a spotlight on the issue... and themselves.



Finally, during the run of **THE PROM**, Bombshell Theatre Company will also present **MEAN GIRLS JR**, running **August 12 - 14**. Adapted from Tina Fey's 2004 blockbuster film and the Broadway smash hit, Mean Girls JR is packed with keen wit, an undeniably catchy score and a sincere message for everyone.

Get your tickets for all of these productions at nextact.org or by calling (414) 278-0765!

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BUILDING FORWARD, continued

Despite the evolution of the program, the heart of Next Actors is staying the same. "Next Actors, as far as I've been around it, has been a camp that is focused primarily



The 2015 Next Actors.
Photo: Timothy Moder

on community and collaborative creation. That is still very much at the core," says Pia.

"This past year, we talked with other theatre education professionals to begin working on a more specific mission, and we know that the collaborative piece and the creating piece were really important to us."

"We are still going to be making a theatre piece. It will likely be a variety show with a couple of smaller pieces. We're really trying to place accessibility at the forefront of what has always made Next Actors good. It's for anybody that wants to come together and make stuff with other people."

"It's whatever they want to do. I show up with some ideas, and usually they have better ideas. We still go on tour, which will be super fun."

When asked what she's most excited about for the summer, Pia lights up: "the puppets!"

"We have one guest artist almost every single day that's going to come in and teach the kids something that I can't teach them. I don't know anything about puppets, so we're getting some guys who know stuff about puppets in. As well as a bunch of other skills, including some taught by friends of the Next Actors program Karen Estrada and Doug Jarecki. Plus, other theatre educators from around town, theatre designers, actors, directors and more."

"I'm very excited to be able to work with adults with different disciplines to see what the kids respond to. Hopefully, we can incorporate some things into our piece that we haven't been able to in previous years. I'm really looking forward to that."

The Future

"I think that Next Actors is a unique place to build community," says Pia. "I feel very lucky that we are able to place accessibility at the forefront so that the kids can have this opportunity to share what they need to share."

"We are uniquely situated to build a really impactful community. The kids who are coming back [from last year] have expressed so much gratitude and so much joy. One has said, "this is the first place where I really feel like I can be myself all day." It's about theatre, but it's also about that. It's theatre as a tool to work with other people, talk about the stuff you want to talk about and work on the stuff you want to work on. I'm very proud to do that. For free, especially, because that means anyone can do it. And the kids I've met already are delightful! It's going to be a really fun summer."

Join us on Saturday, July 27 at 2:00 p.m. for the finale performance of Next Actors: Summer Theatre for Teens 2024! Purchase tickets online (nextact.org) or over the phone (414-278-0765). Tickets start at \$5 but, if you are able, we encourage you to add a further donation at checkout to support the future of our program.



The 2022 Next Actors.
Photo: A.J. Magoon

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IT KEEPS GETTING BETTER

2024-25 SEASON NEWS

By A.J. Magoon, Marketing Director

What's the latest news on our 2024-25 season? Since we announced our upcoming season in February, things have only gotten better! If you haven't been keeping up with recent developments, here's what you may have missed:



Annabel Armour and Reese Madigan in THE TREASURER. Photo: Michael Brosilow

ALMOST, MAINE by John Cariani has a full cast! **Bree Beelow** (THE REVOLUTIONISTS and THE TAMING, as well as assistant directing SCARECROW) and **Rudy Galvan** (THE MOUSETRAP) will return to the Next Act stage alongside **Jake Horstmeier** and **Rachael Zientek**, both making their Next Act debuts.

These four actors will bring more than 20 characters to life in this charming modern classic directed by **Karen Estrada**. It'll take the stage **November 20 - December 15, 2024**, just in time for the holidays.



Rudy Galvan and Lillian Brown in THE MOUSETRAP. Photo: Michael Brosilow

We've also completed the cast for our **Cody Estle**-directed production of CIRCLE MIRROR TRANSFORMATION by Annie Baker. **Reese Madigan** will return after his acclaimed appearance as The Son in last season's production of THE TREASURER by Max Posner, also directed by Cody, and his past appearances in SILENT SKY and LOMBARDI. **Chloe Attalla** will round out the cast, making her Next Act debut in our season closer, which plays **April 23 - May 18, 2024**.

Plus, a whole crew of talented designers and other creatives

are bringing their talents back to Next Act, including: **Maaz Ahmed** (Lighting Designer, KILL MOVE PARADISE) **Em Allen** (Scenic/Props Designer, THE TREASURER, SPLASH HATCH ON THE E GOING DOWN) **Jason Orlenko** (Costume Designer, THE MOUSETRAP) **Josh Schmidt** (Sound Designer, THE TREASURER, THE MOUSETRAP, SPLASH HATCH ON THE E GOING DOWN) **Jim Guy** (Props Designer, THE MOUSETRAP) **Lisa Schlenker** (Scenic Designer, THE MOUSETRAP, THERE IS A HAPPINESS THAT MORNING IS) **Amy Horst** (Costume Designer, THE TIN WOMAN, RED HERRING, PIPELINE) **Madelyn Yee** (Props Designer, THE LAST WHITE MAN) **Noele Stollmack** (Lighting Designer, THE MOUSETRAP, SPLASH HATCH ON THE E GOING DOWN, GOD'S SPIES) **Gregory Graham** (Costume Designer, THE TREASURER) **Natasha "Nat" Goeller** (Stage Manager, THE TREASURER) ...and even more designers and creatives will make their Next Act debuts this upcoming season, bringing our shows to life with passion and dynamic creativity!

With so many great familiar and new faces, now is the time to get your subscription - or, after July 15, single tickets!

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WHAT ELSE IS NEW?

New actors, designers and other artists are hardly the only new things we're bringing to Next Act in the 2024-25 season! Here's what else to look forward to in the coming season:

New Wednesday Matinee

Wednesdays at 1:30 p.m. are one of our most popular showtimes, so we're bringing you even more chances to enjoy shows at that time in the 2024-25 season. Each play this coming season will have three Wednesday matinees at 1:30 p.m. instead of two: we've added a Wednesday matinee to the last week of each run. Now is a good time to mark your calendar for those final Wednesdays - or, even better, claim all four with a fixed subscription! Wednesday matinee tickets are some of the least expensive seats of the season (second only to pre-opening Preview tickets), making these performances some of the most affordable ways to enjoy Next Act Theatre shows!

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Crossing the Finish Line

Finishing Our 2023-2024 Season Strong By Tawnie Thompson, Development Manager

A Fitting Tribute

Next Act Theatre reached and exceeded our goal on our Tribute Campaign this past season, and we are so incredibly grateful to all of the donors who have given any amount! Started in 2022 to support Next Act's transition from the retirement of Producing Artistic Director *emeritus* David Ceccarini to the leadership of Artistic Director Cody Estle and Managing Director Libby Amato, every dollar has gone to making Next Act a stronger and more sustainable company for years to come. We couldn't have done it without all of you!

Our Generous Tribute Campaign Donors

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Riding for the Arts

Next Act was excited to get into gear on **Sunday, June 2** for the **United Performing Arts Fund Ride for the Arts!** With a team of eight cyclists (and one non-riding supporter) consisting of current and former staff, partners and close friends, we were able to collectively complete 200 miles on the 20-mile closed loop from Lincoln Memorial Drive to Cudahy along with more than 3,400 other bikers! It was a beautiful day to take in the sights from the top of the iconic Hoan Bridge, and we were able to bring in more than \$4,000 for UPAF! Next Act also staffed a table at the Summerfest grounds to welcome cyclists back after completing their rides, and Marketing Director A.J. Magoon was onsite to heckle them with Shakespearean insults! If you're interested in participating in the 2025 Ride for the Arts, reach out to Tawnie Thompson, Development Manager, at tawnie@nextact.org!



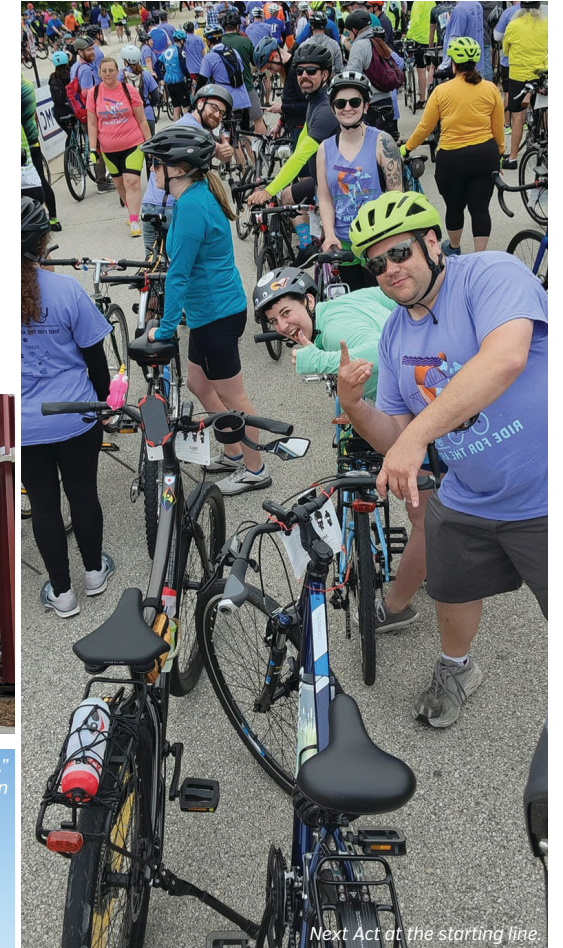
The Next Act Ride team.



David Ceccarini and "Da Crusher." Photo: A.J. Magoon

Crushing Our Final Goal

In addition to being the focus of our Tribute Campaign and joining us to Ride for the Arts, Producing Artistic Director *emeritus* David Ceccarini helped us close our 2023-24 season strong and start next season off on the right foot! David filmed an appeal for our End of Season Campaign at the statue of professional wrestler Da Crusher ("The Man Who Made Milwaukee Famous") in South Milwaukee, paying homage to David's upcoming appearance in the professional-wrestling-focused play *THE ELABORATE ENTRANCE OF CHAD DEITY* this fall. David invited the Next Act audience to help us "crush" our \$3,000 end of season giving goal, and with his (and your) support, we smashed right through it! Thank you to everyone who gave, starting us off on a great note for our exciting 2024-25 season!



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Tickets start at \$5 with further donations encouraged

Next Act Theatre 2024-25 Season

THE ELABORATE ENTRANCE OF CHAD DEITY
by Kristoffer Diaz | Directed by Michael Cotey
Sept. 11 - Oct. 6, 2024

ALMOST, MAINE
by John Cariani | Directed by Karen Estrada
Nov. 20 - Dec. 15, 2024

THE CHILDREN
by Lucy Kirkwood | Directed by Marie Kohler
Feb. 12 - Mar. 9, 2025

CIRCLE MIRROR TRANSFORMATION
by Annie Baker | Directed by Cody Estle
Apr. 23 - May 18, 2025

Season tickets now on sale
at (414) 278-0765 or online at nextact.org
Single tickets on sale July 15, 2024

