



**31 Years of Theatre**

## 31 Years of Performance (1990-2021)

In June of 1990, Next Act Theatre was created with the merger of Next Generation Theatre and Theatre Tesseract. Next Act began its journey with a subscriber base of 1,000. Leading the ambitious new theatre company were Producer Jane Barclay Mandel, Artistic Director Jonathan Smoots and Associate Artistic Director David Ceccarini.

### 1990 - 1992

Playing in the Public Library's Centennial Hall, the first two years were an exercise in patience for this young theatre company. The work was critically acclaimed but the 8<sup>th</sup> and Wisconsin location proved a challenge for attracting new audiences. Near the end of its second year, Smoots and Ceccarini realized that, to survive, they needed to move Next Act downtown.

### 1992 - 1993

In 1992, Next Act performed in the Todd Wehr and Stiemke Theaters. Despite seeing positive sales and backed by the strong support of angel Jack Rosenberg, Next Act embarked on a reduced, three-production season. At this time, Smoots stepped down as Producing Director and Ceccarini took over the role, while Smoots stayed on as Artistic Associate for another three seasons.

Ceccarini was in need of a business partner and in the summer of 1992, Charles Kakuk, who was working in marketing at the Milwaukee Ballet, reached out. His phone call began a long and successful relationship with Ceccarini and the company as Kakuk brought many administrative talents to Next Act.



David Ceccarini & Charles Kakuk

### 1993 - 1995

The next two seasons saw encouraging growth as the theatre continued to stage three productions per year at the Stiemke Theater.

### 1995 - 1998

By the 1995-96 season, the company added a fourth production to its season. Tight schedules at the Stiemke Theater made it necessary to secure an alternate space for one of the productions each year. The Broadway Theatre Center's Studio Theatre, the Humphrey Masonic Center and Marquette's Helfaer Theatre supplied those additional venues through the years. The Next Act staff grew as C. Michael Wright joined the team as Associate Artistic Director in 1996 and Jonathan West took on Marketing and Development in 1997.

### 1998 - 2000

Seeing a need to establish a home space that could accommodate Next Act's growing number of theatre patrons, a goal was set to build a theatre which would seat between 150-175 patrons. A suitable and affordable venue was not found, however, so an interim, 99-seat theatre space was created at 342 N. Water Street on the second floor. Housed in the same building as Next Act's offices and rehearsal space, the Off-Broadway Theatre (named by Jack Rosenberg) opened in early 2000. The first production was A NIGHT IN NOVEMBER, a contemporary, Irish one-man show starring James Ridge, directed by Wright.

The summer of 2000 also marked the third season of Next Actors: Summer Theatre for Teens. Next Actors is a six-week program that gives up to 20 students the opportunity to experience playwriting and performance. With the guidance of professional teaching artists, the students create, produce and perform an original play. The program culminates in a week-long performance tour to senior and community centers and a final benefit performance at Next Act Theatre. There is no cost to participate in the Next Actors program.



### 2005 - 2010

These five years saw more changes for Next Act, as Wright left to assume Artistic Directorship at Milwaukee Chamber Theatre. In addition, the Off-Broadway building was sold and Next Act once again faced the challenge of creating a new theatre space. In 2010, Next Act staged its final production at the Off-Broadway, the 2010 Next Actors Benefit performance. The Journey Home Capital Campaign to build Next Act's new Walker's Point facility began with critical initial support from subscribers and generous benefactors David and Julia Uihlein.

### 2010 - 2011

Next Act's 2010-11 season was housed at the Tenth Street Theatre while offices and rehearsal space were temporarily located at 219 N. Milwaukee Street. Construction for Next Act's new home began in May 2011 with a tight completion deadline of October 6, 2011, in time for the first performance of the 22<sup>nd</sup> season.

### 2011 - 2012

Next Act opened its new home at 255 S. Water Street with the powerful play THE EXONERATED. Next Act now had a dynamic new home with 152 seats that embraced an intimate, three-sided thrust stage.

The new facility brought with it an expansion of Next Act's mission: to provide affordable performance space for other companies, emerging

groups and independent artists.

### 2012 - present

Shortly before the 2014-15 season began, Kakuk lost his long battle with cancer. "He has truly given us his all and Next Act survives as a testament to his determination and commitment," Ceccarini said.



Within four seasons in its new space, Next Act had retired all construction debt. Recent seasons have seen the company grow into its new space, complete theatre improvement projects and welcome new patrons.

The company faced challenges during its 2020-21 season due to the COVID-19 pandemic, including show cancellations and the need to adapt plays to video format for online viewing. Dedicated artists, patrons, donors and staff helped the company weather the storm, however, and Next Act returned for in-person performances in fall 2021.

In the 2021-22 season, Renaissance Theaterworks, an established local theatre company dedicated to promoting the work of female authors and artists, made 255 S. Water Street its artistic home.

Next Act Theatre continues to offer a four-production season of compelling and thought-provoking plays, enjoying a loyal and growing patron base.

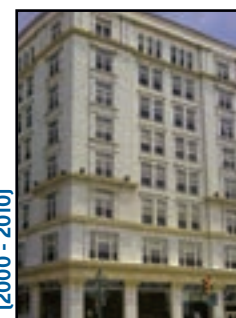
Centennial Hall  
Downtown Library [1990 - 1992]



Stiemke Theater [1993 - 2000]



Off-Broadway Theatre  
[2000 - 2010]



255 S Water St [2011 - present]



#### 2020 - 2021

The Christians by Lucas Hnath<sup>+</sup>  
Principal Principle by Joe Zarrow<sup>+</sup>  
9 Circles by Bill Cain<sup>+</sup>  
Natural Shocks by Lauren Gunderson<sup>+</sup>

#### 2019 - 2020

The Revolutionists by Lauren Gunderson  
Laughter on the 23rd Floor by Neil Simon  
A Small Fire by Adam Bock  
9 Circles by Bill Cain \*

#### 2018 - 2019

Outside Mullingar by John Patrick Shanley  
The Twelve Dates of Christmas  
by Ginna Hoben  
Blood at the Root by Dominique Morisseau  
How to Write a New Book for the Bible  
by Bill Cain

#### 2017 - 2018

Silent Sky by Lauren Gunderson  
The Secret Mask by Rick Chafe  
Equivocation by Bill Cain  
I And You by Lauren Gunderson

#### 2016 - 2017

The Taming by Lauren Gunderson  
UnSilent Night  
by John Kishline and Edward Morgan  
The Other Place by Sharr White  
Bloomsday by Steven Dietz

#### 2015 - 2016

Back of the Throat by Yussef El Guindi  
Bravo, Caruso! by William Luce  
Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992  
by Anna Deavere Smith  
Motherhood Out Loud  
Conceived by Susan R. Rose & Joan Stein

#### 2014 - 2015

Welcome Home, Jenny Sutter  
by Julie Marie Myatt  
Heresy by A.R. Gurney  
No Child... by Nilaja Sun  
TEN QUESTIONS to Ask your Biology Teacher  
about Evolution by Stephen Massicotte

#### 2013 - 2014

Perfect Mendacity by Jason Wells  
Groucho: A Life in Revue  
Book, lyrics & music by Arthur Marx &  
Robert Fisher  
Race by David Mamet  
Three Views of the Same Object  
by Henry Murray

#### 2012-2013

microcrisis by Mike Lew  
It's a Wonderful Life Live Radio Show  
Adapted by Mary MacDonald Kerr  
The Clockmaker by Stephen Massicotte  
Grace by Craig Wright

#### 2011-2012

The Exonerated  
by Jessica Blank & Erik Jensen  
Sylvia by A.R. Gurney  
Vigil by Morris Panych  
One Time by Richard Lyons Conlon

#### 2010 - 2011

Four Places by Joel Drake Johnson  
Big Boys by Rich Orloff  
A Sleeping Country by Melanie Marnich

#### 2009 - 2010

Mary's Wedding by Stephen Massicotte  
7 Stories by Morris Panych  
Purgatorio by Ariel Dorfman  
The Value Of Names by Jeffrey Sweet

#### 2008 - 2009

Lombardi: The Only Thing by Eric Simonson  
Murderers by Jeffrey Hatcher  
Going to St. Ives by Lee Blessing  
The Pavilion by Craig Wright

#### 2007 - 2008

An Interview with Paul Robeson  
by Paul A. Mabon, Sr. & John Kishline  
Greetings! by Tom Dudzick  
Faith Healer by Brian Friel  
The Mystery of Irma Vep: A Penny Dreadful  
by Charles Ludlam

#### 2006 - 2007

Last of the Boys by Steven Dietz  
Mercy of a Storm by Jeffrey Hatcher  
Paradise by Glyn O'Malley  
Ears on a Beatle by Mark St. Germain

#### 2005 - 2006

Coyote on a Fence by Bruce Graham  
Red Herring by Michael Hollinger  
The Retreat from Moscow  
by William Nicholson  
An Infinite Ache by David Schulner

#### 2004 - 2005

Dear Esther by Richard Rashke  
The Voice of the Prairie by John Olive  
The Goodbye People by Herb Gardner  
Master Harold... and the boys  
by Athol Fugard

#### 2003 - 2004

Mindgame by Anthony Horowitz  
Bravo, Caruso! by William Luce  
Between Men and Cattle by Richard Kalinoski  
Stones in His Pockets by Marie Jones

#### 2002 - 2003

Taking Leave by Nagle Jackson  
Rough Crossing by Tom Stoppard  
Between East and West by Richard Nelson  
Bea's Niece by David Gow

#### 2001 - 2002

Bee-Luther-Hatchee by Thomas Gibbons  
Visiting Mr. Green by Jeff Baron  
What the Butler Saw by Joe Orton  
Side Man by Warren Leight

#### 2000 - 2001

Down The Road by Lee Blessing  
Laughter on the 23rd Floor by Neil Simon  
Blood Knot by Athol Fugard  
Fallen Angels by Noël Coward

#### 1999 - 2000

Hauptmann by John Logan  
Room Service by John Murray & Allen Boretz  
A Night in November by Marie Jones  
My Thing of Love by Alexandra Gersten

#### 1998 - 1999

How I Learned to Drive by Paula Vogel  
Greetings! by Tom Dudzick  
The Dresser by Ronald Harwood  
Below the Belt by Richard Dresser

#### 1997 - 1998

Artis Generis by James DeVita /  
Descent by Tom Patrick  
Stage Struck by Simon Gray  
Someone Who'll Watch Over Me  
by Frank McGuinness  
The Price by Arthur Miller

#### 1996 - 1997

Sylvia by A.R. Gurney  
The Real Thing by Tom Stoppard  
Three Viewings by Jeffrey Hatcher  
Kindertransport by Diane Samuels

#### 1995 - 1996

The Destiny of Me by Larry Kramer  
Noël and Gertie by Sheridan Morley  
Fool for Love by Sam Shepard  
Relatively Speaking by Alan Ayckbourn

#### 1994 - 1995

Marvin's Room by Scott McPherson  
On the Open Road by Steve Tesich  
Billy Bishop Goes to War  
by John Gray and Eric Peterson

#### 1993 - 1994

Lips Together, Teeth Apart  
by Terrence McNally  
The Firebugs by Max Frisch  
Evelyn and the Polka King by John Olive

#### 1992 - 1993

Brief Lives by Patrick Garland  
Incommunicado by Tom Dulack  
Private Lives by Noël Coward

#### 1991 - 1992

The Boys Next Door by Tom Griffin  
And a Nightingale Sang by C.P. Taylor  
Cobb by Lee Blessing  
Italian American Reconciliation  
by John Patrick Shanley

#### 1990 - 1991

A Wrinkle in Time  
from the book by Madeleine L'Engle  
Reckless by Craig Lucas  
The Voice of the Prairie by John Olive  
Haven for the Disillusioned  
conceived by Helena Dynerman  
Sea Marks by Gardner McKay

\*Next Act's 2020 production of Bill Cain's  
9 Circles was cancelled due to the  
COVID-19 pandemic.  
<sup>+</sup>Virtual production