

**YOUR
THEATRE**
Relevant.
Intimate.
Professional.



PICTURED: CHARISSA BERTELS

2016-17

MERRIMACK REPERTORY THEATRE 2016-17



THE COMPANY

MERRIMACK REPERTORY THEATRE PRODUCES VIBRANT CONTEMPORARY PLAYS THAT EXPLORE THE HEART, HUMOR, AND COMPLEXITY OF OUR RELATIONSHIPS.

Founded in 1979, Merrimack Repertory Theatre is a professional, non-profit theatre company that has become known for its outstanding productions of mostly regional and world premieres.

Acknowledging that artists are at the core of all creative work, MRT hires the best-available professional directors, designers, and actors from major theatre centers around the country. These artists are attracted to Lowell by MRT's reputation for its unwavering commitment to the highest artistic standards.



Penny Fuller in *13 Things About Ed Carpollotti*.



Cheryl McMahon, Joel Van Liew, Jordan Brodess, John Gregorio, and Karen MacDonald in *Home of the Brave*.



Veronika Duerr, Celeste Olivia, Joel Colodner, Nael Nacer in *It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play*.



Michael Rosete and Juliet Hing-Lee in *Year Zero*.

ABOUT MRT

MRT'S MISSION

"To advance the cause of human understanding by creating theatrical productions at the highest level of artistic excellence and making them affordable to the broadest possible community."

Consistent with its mission, MRT is dedicated to:

- Developing and presenting new plays that **address contemporary issues and reflect the community's diverse heritage** with a broad range of topics and styles
- Ensuring the **most expansive reach** by subsidizing ticket costs where possible.
- Creating a **collaborative environment for artists and staff** in order to **encourage artistic growth and excellence**
- Maintaining a **deep involvement in the community** and building a **young, diverse audience** through a variety of outreach programs and educational initiatives.

MRT is a member of the League of Resident Theatres (LORT) and employs members of the Actors' Equity Association, the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society, and the United Scenic Artists. MRT is an Associate of the National New Play Network. A recipient of the New England Theatre Award for Excellence, its productions have also received awards from the Independent Reviewers of New England, The Elliot Norton Awards, the Boston Drama Critics Awards, and more. Since 1979, MRT has served over one million theatergoers with 250 productions, including 25 world premieres and 41 regional premieres.

MRT produces seven plays each year from fall through spring. Each production rehearses for three and a half weeks, followed by a four-week run of 27 performances in the Nancy L. Donahue Theatre.



Benjamin Scheuer in *The Lion*.



Terrell Donnell Sledge and Diomargy Nuñez in *The Realness: a break beat play*.

PERFORMANCE VENUE



MRT's Sage Bank Lobby in Liberty Hall

The **Nancy L. Donahue Theatre** is located in Liberty Hall, at 50 E. Merrimack St. in Lowell. The 279-seat theatre offers views of its proscenium stage from three tiered sides, without a bad seat in the house. From the hall's colorful interior, audiences are treated to intimate theatre with world-class production values.



The Nancy L. Donahue Theatre.

LEADERSHIP

SEAN DANIELS, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Sean has directed at Manhattan Theatre Club (NYC), Lynn Redgrave (NYC) The Kennedy Center (Washington, D.C.), St. James (West End, London), Actors Theatre of Louisville, Portland Center Stage, Geva Theatre, Playmakers Rep, Cleveland Play House, Alliance Theatre, California Shakespeare, Dad's Garage Theatre Company, Swine Palace, Neo-Futurists, Aurora Theatre, Crowded Fire and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe.

His direction and shows have won: "Best New Musical" in London, The Drama Desk Award in NYC, & "Best Play" and "Best Director" in the Bay Area, Rochester and Atlanta. His shows have also been nominated for the Lucille Lortel and Outer Critics Circle Award in NYC. Sean has been named "one of the top fifteen up & coming artists in the U.S., whose work will be transforming America's stages for decades to come" & "One Of 7 People Reshaping And Revitalizing The American Musical" by American Theatre magazine.

He's previously served as the Artist-At-Large for Geva Theatre Center and spent four years at the Tony Award-winning Actors Theatre of Louisville as the theatre's Associate Artistic Director (where he directed 17 productions including five Humana Festivals). Mr. Daniels is the former Associate Artistic Director/Resident Director of the California Shakespeare Theater and before that spent a decade as the Artistic Director and Co-Founder of Dad's Garage Theater Company in Atlanta.



ELIZABETH KEGLEY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Elizabeth joined MRT as Executive Director in 2013. She previously served as Managing Director of Kitchen Dog Theater in Dallas, TX. Elizabeth received her MBA from Southern Methodist University's Cox School of Business and her Master of Arts in Arts Management from Meadows School of the Arts where she worked with The Dallas Opera, Dallas Business Council for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts in Washington, D.C. She spent a semester at Bocconi University in Milan studying cultural policy and international arts funding systems. An AEA Stage Manager for 10 years, Elizabeth worked with nationally-renowned companies including SIT Company, Signature Theatre, Atlantic Theater Company, Public Theatre/New York Shakespeare Festival and celebrated artists such as Anne Bogart, Bill Irwin, Philip Glass and David Henry Hwang. Elizabeth lives in downtown Lowell with her tiny dog, Paco.



BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Nancy L. Donahue, *Chair*
Donald Bedard, *President*
Judith Benson, *Vice-President*
Dennis P. Jones, *Treasurer*
Terry T. Howard, *Secretary*

Denise Bey
Richard E. Bolton, Jr.
Yun-Ju Choi
Michael Conway
Daniel R. Frantz

Denise Glaser
Debra Grossman
Frank Hopkins
Stephen Irish
Ann P. Kazer
Arnold M. Kerzner
Tom Larkin
Jeff Maclaren
Patricia McCafferty
Keith B. Mitchell
Susan Mitchell

Alyce Moore
Jack Moynihan
Steve Normandin
Dr. Marisa Ramos
Joellen Scannell
Stefan C. Schatzki
Ruth White
Bill Wyman

BOARD OF OVERSEERS

Ronald M. Ansin
Robert A. Caruso
Susan Cooney
Winslow H. Duke

Carol Duncan
Michael W. Gallagher
Arnold S. Lerner
Jack O'Connor

Barbara Savitt Pearson
John H. Pearson, Jr.
Brian J. Stafford, CPA
Nicola Tsongas



2016-17 SEASON



45 PLAYS FOR 45 PRESIDENTS

September 7 – October 2, 2016

Written by Andy Bayiates, Sean Benjamins, Geneva Gallo-Bayiates, Chloe Johnston, and Karen Weinberg

Directed by Sean Daniels

Hail to the Chief!

A hilarious-yet-thoughtful celebration of our nation's great story—one we continue to write with every election season. *45 Plays for 45 Presidents* sets us on the roller coaster ride of American history, with each Commander in Chief getting two minutes in the spotlight. And fittingly, it ends with You the Audience choosing the 45th play! Spanning 227 years of triumph and adversity, it's a joyous American civic lesson in just two hours.

Press Performances:
Saturday, Sept. 10
8:00 pm
Sunday, Sept. 11
2:00 pm

Running Time:
Approximately
2 hours with
one intermission



AGIBAIL/1702

October 12 – November 6, 2016

Written by Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa

Directed by Tlaloc Rivas

Old demons and new beginnings.

Ten years after the Salem witch trials, a notorious young accuser seeks salvation in Boston, only to find her new life haunted by terrors of the past. She'll face pirates, the devil, and worse in this eerie and quintessentially New England tale from one of America's master horror writers. For Abigail, forgiveness is everything—but it may come at an unthinkable price.

Press Performances:
Saturday, October 15
8:00 pm
Sunday, October 16
2:00 pm

Running Time:
Approximately 1 hour,
45 minutes with
one intermission



GOING TO SEE THE KID

November 30 – December 24, 2016

Written by Steven Druksman

Directed by Alexander Greenfield

Holiday Spirit, from Fenway to Florida.

On the assignment of a lifetime, two reporters head for Florida at Christmastime, trying to land a final interview with aging Red Sox legend Ted Williams. One's a rookie; the other, a seasoned pro. And both will learn the inestimable value of teammates—on and off the field. A loving testament to the light that shines on long after the last pitch is thrown, and the holiday spirit that overcomes any distance.

Press Performances:
Saturday, December 3
8:00 pm
Sunday, December 4
2:00pm

Running Time:
TBD



THE MAKING OF A GREAT MOMENT

January 4 - January 29, 2017

Written by Peter Sinn Nachtrieb

Directed by Sean Daniels

Big dreams travel best on two wheels.

Actors Mona and Terry are on an ambitious quest: tour their play *Great Moments in Human Achievement* across the country... by bicycle. Surely they'll bring inspiration to millions! But as they pedal across the nation reenacting history's high points,

Press Performances:
Saturday January 7
8:00pm
Sunday, January 8
2:00 pm

Running Time:
TBD

finding laundry facilities proves just as tough as their unruly audiences. When the day is done, can our heroes manage a great moment of their own? An exuberant comedy about all the potholes on the road to sheer brilliance.



WOMEN IN JEOPARDY!

February 15 - March 12, 2017

Written by Wendy MacLeod

Directed by Sean Daniels

Screw the mid-life crisis; let's solve some crimes.

Middle-aged mom Liz has a new man. And let's face it... he's just plain creepy. When a mysterious disappearance sets the community on edge, Liz's best friends leap to the rescue as the zany caper flings them from the 'burbs to the wilds of Utah; because there's no danger great enough to stop women from solving crimes if they want to! A riotous comedy about trading in wine glasses for spy glasses when the mid-life crisis just isn't your speed.

Press Performances:
Saturday, February 18
8:00pm
Sunday, February 19
2:00 pm

Running Time:
Approximately 1 hour,
45 minutes with
one intermission



CHILL

March 22 – April 16, 2017

Written by Eleanor Burgess

Directed by Megan Sandberg-Zakian

For all life throws you between 18 and 28.

Brookline Massachusetts, 2001: With graduation on the horizon, four high schoolers assemble for an epic hangout, laying bare their dreams for life ahead. Ten years later, they gather to do it all again—but find that in a world swept by change, friendship is hardly as simple as it once seemed. Their story boldly captures the joy and heartache of becoming a grownup in the America that no one saw coming.

Press Performances:
Saturday, March 25
8:00pm
Sunday, March 26
2:00 pm

Running Time:
Approximately 2
hours, with
one intermission



MY 80-YEAR-OLD BOYFRIEND

April 26 – May 21, 2017

Conceived and Performed by Charissa Bertels

Book and Lyrics by Christian Duhamel

Music and Lyrics by Edward Bell

Directed by Sean Daniels

Time goes fast. Say "Yes."

In this delightful new musical, Charissa, a quirky, twenty-something actress, meets Robert, a quick-witted, eighty-something millionaire who loves Schubert, Shakespeare, and Dallas BBQ. From a chance encounter to the unlikely of friendships, Charissa discovers there's much she can learn from her surprising new companion. Based on the true story of performer Charissa Bertels, *My 80-Year-Old Boyfriend* reveals the thrill of chasing a dream, the power of living in the now, and all that can happen when we let ourselves say "yes."

(Pictured: Charissa Bertels)

Press Performances:
Saturday, April 19
8:00pm
Sunday, April 20
2:00 pm

Running Time:
TBD

THE PATRIOT PROGRAM

The Patriot Program is MRT's unique approach to establishing a network of artists associated with the theatre. The program is designed to benefit playwrights, directors, actors, designers, and others from across the theatre field, as well as enhance MRT's network of collaborators.

The Patriot Program is revolutionary in its approach to the artistic associate programs that are typical at many theatre companies. It differs in scope – MRT's program is larger than most both in the number of participants and the diversity of roles represented. Patriots can make use of MRT's physical resources, including the rehearsal hall, theatre, and artist housing. In addition to space, the Patriots will also have access to a community of fellow theatre-makers, both those on staff at MRT and the other members of the program.

MRT's Artistic Director Sean Daniels developed the program as he thought about ways to incorporate his large national network into the work he's doing at MRT and his future goals for the company. "As we talked to these artists - we kept hearing 'I'd love to just have a place to come write', or 'I'd love to be writing when other writers are there so we gather for dinner for each night and compare notes' or 'I'd love to just start with some designers and dream up a project'. This program aims to provide those generative opportunities."

Daniels aims to put Merrimack Repertory Theatre and Lowell on the national radar by originating work here that goes on to have future life in the American Theatre.

THE COMPLETE LIST OF THE MRT PATRIOTS

James Albrecht, Creative Director, St. James Theatre (London)

May Adrales, Director

Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa, Playwright/Writer ("Spiderman" "American Psycho", "Glee", "Big Love", Marvel Comics) Chief Creative Officer for Archie Comics

Jill A. Anderson, General Manager O'Neill Theatre Center

Dan Bakkedahl, Actor ("Life in Pieces", "Veep", "The Daily Show", "Legit")

Charissa Bertels, Singer and actor currently on the national tour of "If/Then", conceiver and performer of MRT's 2016-17 "My 80-Year-Old Boyfriend"

Ilana Brownstein, Dramaturg, Director of New Work at Company One

Eleanor Burgess, Boston-native, currently New York-based playwright whose production of "Chill" will be featured in MRT's 2016-17 Season. Winner of the Alliance/ Kenededa National Graduate Playwriting Award

Monica Byrne, Novelist, Playwright

Jen Caprio, Costume Designer

Aysan Celik, Actor, Educator, NYU Abu Dhabi, Founding Member Theatre Mitu

Jeremy Cohen, Artistic Director, Playwrights Center

Jennifer Cody, Actor

Joel Colodner, Boston-based actor who appeared in "It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play"

Mark Cuddy, Artistic Director, Geva Theatre & Cape Playhouse

Celina Dean, Actor

Kristoffer Diaz, Playwright, Pulitzer Prize Finalist

Julie Dubiner, Dramaturg

Veronika Duerr, Actor, Director, Producer

Steve Drukman, Pulitzer Prize-nominated playwright whose world premiere production of "Going to See the Kid" will be MRT's holiday production next season

Reginald Edmund, Playwright

Jessica Ford, Costume Designer whose work

was recently seen at New York's Atlantic Theatre Company and at MRT in "Home of the Brave." She is also on the faculty at UMass Amherst.

Nick Gandiello, Playwright

Michael John Garces, Director and playwright, artistic director of Cornerstone Theater Company in Los Angeles

Wendy Goldberg, Artistic Director, O'Neill Playwright's Conference

Idris Goodwin, Playwright

John Gregorio, Actor

Lauren Gunderson, Playwright, Steinberg/ATCA Award winner

Leah Hamos, Agent, Gersh Agency

Jon Jory, Artistic Founding Director of Long Warf Theatre, Former Artistic Director of Actors Theatre of Louisville, Creator of the Humana Festival of New American Plays, Winner of the Special Tony Award for Regional Achievement

Lila Rose Kaplan, Playwright

Tom Kirdahy, Five-time Tony Award-nominated Producer

Greg Kotis, Two-time Tony Award-winning Playwright ("Urinetown")

Victor Lesniewski, Playwright

Brian J Lilienthal, Lighting Designer

Karen MacDonald, Actor

Wendy MacLeod, Playwright

Kristin Marting, Artistic Director, HERE Art Center

Cheryl McMahon, Boston-based actor appearing in MRT's "Home of the Brave"

Lisa McNulty, Producing Artistic Director, Women's Project Theater

Kristen Mengelkoch, Actor

Kelly Miller, Dramaturg/Producer

Allison Moore, Playwright, currently a Core Member of the The Playwrights' Center. Television writer for "Powers", "Da Vinci's Demons", "Beauty and the Beast".

Aaron Munoz, Actor

Nael Nacer, Boston-based actor who appeared in MRT's "It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play"

Peter Sinn Nachtrieb, Playwright

Stowe Nelson, Sound designer whose work was heard at MRT during "Tinker to Evers to Chance." Drama Desk Award-nominee. Company member of the award winning theatre company the Mad Ones and Wingspan Theatrical Design.

Celeste Oliva, Boston-based actress who appeared in MRT's "It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play"

A. Rey Pamatmat, Playwright

Topher Payne, Playwright

christopher oscar Peña, Playwright

Heather Provost, Tony Award-nominated Producer

David Remedios, Sound Designer

Tlaloc Rivas, Director, Educator

Leon Rothenberg, Tony-Award winning sound designer ("The Nance") whose credits also include Cirque du Soleil and MRT's "The Lion" and "The White Chip"

Mike Sablone, Dramaturg

KJ Sanchez, Director

Megan Sandberg-Zakian, Director

Benjamin Scheuer, Writer/Composer– Drama Desk and New Theatre World Award Winner

Wendy Seyb, Choreographer

Mat Smart, Playwright

Niegel Smith, Artistic Director, The Flea Theatre

Molly Smith Metzler, Playwright

Justin Townsend, Lighting and set designer whose work can currently be seen on Broadway in "American Psycho" and "The Humans", and was seen by MRT audiences in "The White Chip"

Sam Willmott, Composer, Kleban Award Winner

Reggie D. White, Actor who appeared the Lowell and New York runs of MRT's "I and You"

Jessica Wortham, Actor

Lucky Yates, Actor ("Archer"), Puppeteer

Karen Zacarias, Playwright



EDUCATION

STUDENT MATINEES AND PARTNERS IN EDUCATION (PIE)



Students get an inside look at of The Devils Music: The Life & Blues of Bessie Smith, January 2014

Merrimack Repertory Theatre's Student Matinees

provide many students with their first exposure to professional theatre. It gives them the opportunity to experience literature in a different way, often resulting in a deeper connection to the story and characters. Attending MRT meets many **MCAS** and **NHCF** requirements.

Student Matinees start at 10:30 am, allowing plenty of time for the students to be bussed to MRT and back to school again by the end of the day. Student

Matinee tickets are \$8.50 each. Teachers are provided with copies of the script and our PlayGuides, which contain background material so that the play may be easily integrated into the classroom curriculum. Following each performance there is a Post-Show Discussion with members of the cast.

Each year, Merrimack Repertory Theatre receive generous support that allows MRT to provide student tickets to schools facing economic hardships. Through the **PIE program**, students attend a matinee at low or no cost. The program may even cover the cost of transportation.

YOUNG COMPANY

MRT's Young Company is a unique year-long program for young people in grades 6-12 interested in theatre. The experience begins with an intensive two-week summer program working with leading theatre artists from around the country and continues through the following spring with access to rehearsals, master classes, and workshops with MRT's staff and visiting artists.

MRT's Young Company:

- Provides opportunities for young people to communicate their ideas, define their unique voice, and build community through theatre creation.
- Offers fun, fully-immersive opportunities for students to better understand the inner workings of a professional theatre.
- Builds strong connections between the next generation of theatre artists and leaders in the American theatre.
- Brings together a broad range of students with a variety of interests and varying degrees of theatrical experience.

In the Summer:

Students receive instruction from professional theatre artists in acting, improvisation, playmaking, writing, movement, design, and dramaturgy. Students then create their own play. Each session concludes with a showcase of the students' original work, open to the public, on the final day of the session.

FALL-SPRING PROGRAM

The Young Company regularly meets during MRT's producing season to fully understand the inner workings of a professional theatre company and increase their skill sets. Access is limited to students who participated in the summer Young Company program.

The Fall-Spring Program includes:

- Rehearsal and tech observation throughout MRT's producing season.
- Attendance at MRT's workshops of plays in development with a variety of nationally-renowned playwrights and artists.
- Master Classes and Artist Talks with guest artists and MRT staff.

2016-17 YOUNG COMPANY PARTICIPANTS





COMMUNITY OUTREACH

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



Community Conversations in the Nancy L. Donahue Theatre. Following a performance of Year Zero.

MRT is deeply committed to pursuing eye-opening and fruitful relationships in the Greater Lowell community. With its Community Conversations series, co-sponsored events with local organizations, open houses, and visits to the theatre from nearby youth groups, MRT enthusiastically fills its role as a cultural anchor for the city of Lowell and the Merrimack Valley.

In the last two years, MRT has:

- Hosted speakers from local youth poetry groups, cancer survivors organizations, animal shelters, addiction recovery centers, and more.
- Joined forces with UMass Lowell and Middlesex Community College to workshop world premieres *Home of the Brave* (2015-16 Season) and *Chill* (2016-17 Season)
- Co-presented film screenings, music performances, and more with local businesses and nonprofits.
- Welcomed hundreds of people in recovery from addiction to a performance of *The White Chip* for free.
- Become the regular home of the Angkor Dance Troupe, Lowell's Cambodian classical dance group
- Opened its doors for backstage tours, celebrations, and open houses, free and open to the community.

MRT's community partners have included:

The Angkor Dance Troupe
Community Family Day Health
D'Youville Life & Wellness Center
FreeVerse
Girls, Inc.
The Improbable Players
Juvenile Court Restorative Justice Coalition
Lowell Community Health Center
Lowell General Hospital
Lowell House, Inc.
Lowell Humane Society
The Lowell Spinners
The Luna Theatre
Mass Poetry
The Megan House
Merrimack College
Middlesex Community College
Right Turn
Therapy Dogs International
University of Massachusetts Lowell
UTEC Lowell (United Teen Equality Center)

AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT EVENTS

Merrimack Repertory Theatre hosts a number of events during the run of its shows. Audience members can enhance their theatre experience with:



Ask the Artists

Following every Thursday performance, stick around after the performance for a Q&A with members of the cast or creative team.



Community Conversations

On most Wednesday nights, join leaders of local organizations for an insightful discussion that explores the play's relevance to the Greater Lowell community.



Wine Down Fridays/Opening Nights

Stick around for a complimentary glass of wine after the Friday night preview; join the artists and staff for a party with food and drinks after the Saturday night opening.



Cookie Matinees

Join us for complimentary cookies and coffee in the lobby before the Wednesday Matinee performance. Courtesy of Brew'd Awakening Coffeehaus.



Ladies Nights

Enjoy a pre-show reception with wine and sweet treats from local confectioner Sweet Lydia's. Stay after the performance for the Post-Show Discussion.

On select Thursdays during *Abigail/1702* (October 27), *Women in Jeopardy!* (February 23), and *My 80-Year-Old Boyfriend* (May 11).



Executive Director, Elizabeth Kegley with staff and students from MassPoetry during MRT's production of *I and You*, October 2015.

THE COHORT CLUB

The Cohort Club is a group of 15-20 people from around the Lowell community and the Merrimack Valley—people of all types and interests. Cohort Club members are a part of the creation of professional theater, through observations of the rehearsal and production process, and conversations with the artistic team.

THE 2016-17 COHORTS FOLLOW FOUR SHOWS FROM START (FIRST REHEARSAL) TO FINISH (OPENING NIGHT)

45 Plays for 45 Presidents

The Making of a Great Moment

Women in Jeopardy!

My 80-Year-Old Boyfriend

MRT provides the Cohorts with unprecedented access to the artistic process – and access to learning opportunities (chats with staff, tours, behind-the-scenes events, etc). They're welcome at all rehearsals (including technical rehearsals and preview performances), "Meet and Greet" where the actors meet each other for the first time, and other events. They have opportunities to chat with the directors, playwrights, designers and actors to gain a deeper level of understanding.

As part of their Cohort responsibilities, all members write about their experience in whatever medium they find the most exciting (blog, pen and paper, Twitter, Facebook), and MRT spreads their writing by posting it on its own blog.

THE 2016-17 COHORTS

Lisa Arnold

Susan Elberger

Ann Kazer

Richard Pitkin

Brenda Boomhower

Aurora Erickson

Jack Malnati

James Ravan

Christa Brown

Paul Galinis

Terri Munson

Geoff Bryant

Tim Greenwood

Nancy Weber

Mindy Dopler Nelson

Marianne Gries

Timna Nwokeji



(Pictured: Charissa Bertels)

MRT TIMELINE

1979

MRT founders John R. Briggs, Mark Kaufman, and Barbara and Al Abrahamian meet at a summer stock theatre in Salem, NH and form the "Committee for Legitimate Theatre in Lowell." Nancy L. Donahue becomes the first Board President.



1979

Opens first production: Bob Hall and David Richmond's *The Passion of Dracula*. The company is named "Merrimack Regional Theatre" and housed in Mahoney Hall at the University of Lowell. Without heat in the theatre, patrons keep warm around trash barrel fires outside.



1980

Presents free summer theatre on Mack Plaza, including Stephen Sondheim's *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. During one performance a passing storm drenches props, and an attempt to remedy the situation with a hair dryer causes a power outage.



1983

Moves to its current home at Liberty Hall (now called the Nancy L. Donahue Theatre), changing its name to "Merrimack Repertory Theatre."



1986

Stages its first world premiere: Jack Neary's *First Night*.



1993

Launches "Partners in Education" program, offering free and subsidized tickets for middle and high school students, with a donation from Robert M. Ansin.



1997

Opens children's summer theatre program, now called MRT Young Company.



2001

Charles Towers hired as Artistic Director.



2004

On MRT's 25th anniversary, Mayor Rita Mercier presents the theatre a key to the City of Lowell.



2012

Completes major renovation of its performance, seating, and lobby space. The improved theatre includes wider seats with more legroom, fresh carpeting and paint, and new house lighting.



2013

Elizabeth Kegley hired as Executive Director.



Presents world premiere staged reading of *Beat Generation*, the only play by Lowell native Jack Kerouac. The production garners attention from *Rolling Stone*, *The New York Times*, and NPR.



2014

As part of its outreach surrounding Michael Golamco's *Year Zero*, MRT establishes partnership with the Angkor Dance Troupe, Lowell's Cambodian classical dance organization.



2015

Named "Best Live Theatre Venue" by Northshore Magazine.



2015

Sean Daniels hired as Artistic Director.



2015-16

Benjamin Scheuer's solo musical *The Lion* launches national tour from MRT.



2016-17

MRT to produce record number of world premieres four—in 2016-17 Season.





HISTORY

PRODUCTION HISTORY

***World Premier**
+Regional Premiere

2015-16

+*The Lion* Written and performed by Benjamin Scheuer
Directed by Sean Daniels
+*I and You* by Lauren Gunderson
Directed by Sean Daniels
It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play Adapted by Joe Landry
Directed by Megan Sandberg-Zakian
**The White Chip* by Sean Daniels
Directed by Sheryl Kaller
+*Tinker to Evers to Chance* by Mat Smart
Directed by Sean Daniels
**The Realness: a break beat play* by Idris Goodwin
Directed by Wendy C. Goldberg
**Home of the Brave* by Lila Rose Kaplan
Directed by Sean Daniels

2014-15

+*Year Zero* by Michael Golamco
Directed by Kyle Fabel
+*Dusk Rings a Bell* by Stephen Belber
Directed by Michael Bloom
+*13 Things About Ed Carpolotti* Book, music, and lyrics by Barry Kleinbort
Based on a play by Jeffrey Hatcher
Directed by Barry Kleinbort
+*The Best Brothers* by Daniel MacIvor
Directed by Charles Towers
**Oceanside* by Nick Gandiello
Directed by Melia Bensussen
+*Out of the City* by Leslie Ayvazian
Directed by Christian Parker
+*The Outgoing Tide* by Bruce Graham
Directed by Charles Towers

2013-14

God of Carnage by Yasmina Reza, Translated by Christopher Hampton
Directed by Kyle Fabel
Mrs. Mannerly by Jeffery Hatcher
Directed by Mark Shanahan
+*Stella and Lou* by Bruce Graham
Directed by Charles Towers
+*The Devil's Music: The Life and Blues of Bessie Smith* by Angelo Parra
Direction, Concept, and Musical Staging by Joe Brancato
+*Equally Divided* by Ronald Harwood
Directed by Charles Towers
Talley's Folly by Lanford Wilson
Directed by Kyle Fabel
+*The Complete History of Comedy (abridged)* by Reed Martin and Austin Tichenor
Directed by Reed Martin and Austin Tichenor

2012-13

**Homestead Crossing* by William Donnelly
Directed by Kyle Fabel
**Beat Generation* (Staged Reading) by Jack Kerouac
Directed by Charles Towers
Memory House by Kathleen Tolan
Directed by Melia Bensussen
+*Half 'n Half 'n Half* by John Kolvenbach
Directed by Kyle Fabel
Shakespeare's Will by Vern Thiessen
Directed by Miles Potter
Red by John Logan
Directed by Charles Towers
Proof by David Auburn
Directed by Christian Parker
Glengarry Glen Ross by David Mamet
Directed by Charles Towers

2011-12

The Persian Quarter by Kathleen Cahill
Directed by Kyle Fabel
This Verse Business by A.M. Dolan
Directed by Gus Kaikkonen
**The Ultimate Christmas Show (abridged)* by Reed Martin & Austin Tichenor
Directed by Reed Martin and Austin Tichenor
The Voice of the Turtle by John Van Druten

Directed by Carl Forsman
+*Daddy Long Legs* by Paul Gordon & John Caird
Directed by John Caird
+*Mrs. Whitney* by John Kolvenbach
Directed by Kyle Fabel
+*Ghost-Writer* by Michael Hollinger
Directed by John Kolvenbach

2010-11

**The Complete World of Sports (abridged)* by Reed Martin and Austin Tichenor
Directed by Reed Martin & Austin Tichenor
Four Places by Joel Drake Johnson
Directed by Charles Towers
+*Beasley's Christmas Party* by C.W. Munger
Directed by Carl Forsman
Tryst by Karoline Leach
Directed by Joe Brancato
**The Exceptionals* by Bob Clyman
Directed by Charles Towers
+*Two Jews Walk into A War...* by Seth Rozin
Directed by Melia Bensussen
+*A Picasso* by Jeffrey Hatcher
Directed by Charles Towers

2009-10

**Flings & Eros* by The Flying Karamazov Brothers
Directed by Paul Magid
The Seafarer by Conor McPherson
Directed by Charles Towers
+*Heroes* by Gerald Sibleyras, adapted by Tom Stoppard
Directed by Carl Forsman
Fabuloso by John Kolvenbach
Directed by Kyle Fabel
+*Black Pearl Sings!* by Frank Higgins
Directed by Benny Ambush
**The Last Days of Mickey & Jean* by Richard Dresser
Directed by Charles Towers
+*The Blonde, the Brunette and the Vengeful Redhead* by Robert Hewett
Directed by Melia Bensussen

2008-09

The Fantasticks by Tom Jones and Harvey Schmidt
Directed by Jonathan Silverstein and John Bell
Skylight by David Hare
Directed by Charles Towers
+*A View of the Harbor* by Richard Dresser
Directed by Charles Towers
+*Tranced* by Bob Clyman
Directed by Kyle Fabel
Bad Dates by Theresa Rebeck
Directed by Adrianna Krstansky
A Moon for the Misbegotten by Eugene O'Neill
Directed by Edward Morgan

2007-08

+*The Pursuit of Happiness* by Richard Dresser
Directed by Charles Towers
**Tunney/Shakespeare in Six Rounds* by David E. Lane
Secret Order by Bob Clyman
Directed by Charles Towers
2 Pianos 4 Hands by Ted Dykstra and Richard Greenblatt
Directed by Richard Greenblatt
+*The Missionary Position* by Keith Reddin
Directed by Tracy Brigden
A Delicate Balance by Edward Albee
Directed by Charles Towers
**The Four of Us* by Itamar Moses
Directed by Kyle Fabel

2006-07

+*Augusta* by Richard Dresser
Directed by Charles Towers
Aunt Dan & Lemon by Wallace Shawn
Directed by Melia Bensussen
Completely Hollywood (abridged) by Reed Martin, Austin Tichenor
Directed by the Reduced Shakespeare Company
Trying by Joanna McClelland Glass
Directed by Kyle Fabel
Dinah Was by Oliver Goldstick

Directed by Charles Towers
Syncopation by Allan Knee
Directed by Maggie Mancinelli-Cahill
+Secret Order by Bob Clyman
Directed by Charles Towers

2005-06

The Breadwinner by W. Somerset Maugham
Directed by Carl Forsman
**The Art of Sacrifice* by Anthony Clarvoe
Directed by Charles Towers
Squeeze Box by Ann Randolph
Directed by Alan Bailey
+Intimate Apparel by Lynn Nottage
Directed by Jane Page
+Auntie and Me by Morris Panych
Directed by Munson Hicks
+Real Hush Hush by John Corwin
Directed by Charles Towers

2004-05

The Complete History of America (abridged) by Adam Long,
Reed Martin, and Austin Tichenor
Directed by the Reduced Shakespeare Company
The Price by Arthur Miller
Directed by Charles Towers
**The Kreutzer Sonata* by Leo Tolstoy, adapted by Larry Pine
Directed by Larry Pine
+Quartet by Ronald Harwood
Directed by Gavin Cameron-Webb
+Constant Star by Tazewell Thompson
Directed by Tazewell Thompson
The Homecoming by Harold Pinter
Directed by Charles Towers
Pouring the Sun (special event) by Jay O'Callahan
Directed by Jay O'Callahan

2003-04

Three Songs by Craig Warner
Directed by Michael Canavan
+Boy Gets Girl by Rebecca Gilman
Directed by Charles Towers
+Looking Over the President's Shoulder by James Still
Directed by Seret Scott
+An Infinite Ache by Jon Marans
Directed by Greg Leaming
Boston Marriage by David Mamet
Directed by Charles Towers
+Something in the Air by Richard Dresser
Directed by Melia Bensussen
+Rounding Third by Richard Dresser
Directed by Charles Towers

2002-03

**Fallen* by Craig Warner
Directed by Charles Towers
The Woman in Black by Stephen Malatratt
Directed by Charles Towers
Sanders Family Christmas by Connie Ray and Alan Bailey
Directed by Alan Bailey
Old Wicked Songs by Jon Marans
Directed by Martin Platt
Women Who Steal by Carter W. Lewis
Directed by Martha Banta
The Drawer Boy by Michael Healey
Directed by Charles Towers
The Pavilion by Craig Wright
Directed by Brendon Fox

2001-02

Cookin' at the Cookery by Marion J. Caffey
Directed by Marion J. Caffey
+Three Days of Rain by Richard Greenburg
Directed by Charles Towers
+Sanders Family Christmas by Connie Ray and Alan Bailey
Directed by Alan Bailey
**Short Haired Grace* by Bill Bruehl
Directed by Charles Towers
The Bible: The Complete Word of God (abridged) by Long, Martin & Tichenor
Directed by Reed Martin
The Weir by Conor McPherson
Directed by Burke Walker
Gun-Shy by Richard Dresser
Directed by Charles Towers

2000-01

Last of the Red Hot Lovers by Neil Simon
Directed by David Zoffoli
A Walk in the Woods by Lee Blessing
Directed by Alex Dmitriev
The Founder of the Feast by David G. Kent
Directed by David G. Kent
From the Mississippi Delta by Dr. Endesha Ida Mae Holland
Directed by Kaia Calhoun
King of the Moon, Over the Tavern Pt II by Tom Dudzick
Directed by Steve Stettler
Visiting Mr. Green by Jeff Baron

Directed by Danny Gidron
ART by Yasmina Reza
Directed by David G. Kent

1999-2000

Picasso at the Lapin Agile by Steve Martin
Directed by David Zoffoli
Awake and Sing by Clifford Odets
Directed by David G. Kent
The Rainmaker by N. Richard Nash
Directed by Tom Markus
Cloud Tectonics by José Rivera
Directed by David G. Kent
Avenue X by Ray Leslee & Jon Jiler
Directed by John Ruocco
The Front Page by Ben Hecht & Charles MacArthur
Directed by Russel Treyz
Defying Gravity by Jane Anderson
Directed by David Zoffoli

1998-99

+Don't Dress for Dinner by Marc Camoletti, adapted by Robin Hawdon
Directed by David Zoffoli
Racing Demon by David Hare
Directed by David G. Kent
The Boys Next Door by Tom Griffin
Directed by Danny Peak
+Full Gallop by Mark Hampton & Mary Louise Wilson
Directed by David Zoffoli
Twelve Angry Men by Reginald Rose
Directed by David G. Kent
K2 by Patrick Meyers
Directed by Robert Walsh
A Midsummer Night's Dream by William Shakespeare
Directed by Russel Treyz

1997-98

Laughter on the 23rd Floor by Neil Simon
Directed by David Zoffoli
Long Day's Journey Into Night by Eugene O'Neill
Directed by David G. Kent
Shirley Valentine by Willy Russell
Directed by David Zoffoli
Nixon's Nixon by Russell Lees
Directed by David G. Kent
+Over the Tavern by Tom Dudzick
Directed by Geraldine LiBrandi
Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune by Terrence McNally
Directed by Vincent Murphy
Lady Day at Emerson's Bar & Grille by Lanie Robertson
Directed by Rob Ruggiero

1996-97

Italian American Reconciliation by John Patrick Shanley
Directed by Eli Simon
'night Mother by Marsha Norman
Directed by David G. Kent
A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens
Directed by David Zoffoli
Three Viewings by Jeffrey Hatcher
Directed by David G. Kent
Lady Day at Emerson's Bar & Grille by Lanie Robertson
Directed by Rob Ruggiero
Later Life by A.R. Gurney
Directed by Robert Walsh
Travels With My Aunt by Graham Green, adapted by Giles Havergal
Directed by David Zoffoli

1995-96

Light Up the Sky by Moss Hart
Directed by David Zoffoli
Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? by Edward Albee
Directed by David G. Kent
The Nightingale by Hans Christian Anderson
Directed by John T. Farrell
The Great Holiday Dinosaur Mystery by Dino Rock
Directed by Dino Rock
The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe by Jane Wagner
Directed by David Zoffoli
Speed-The-Plow by David Mamet
Directed by David G. Kent
All in the Timing by David Ives
Directed by David Zoffoli
Hamlet by William Shakespeare
Directed by David G. Kent and David Zoffoli

1994-95

The Illusion by Tony Kushner
Directed by David G. Kent
**Open Window* by Brad Korbesmeyer
Directed by David G. Kent
Holiday Memories by Truman Capote
Directed by Robert Walsh
All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten by Robert Fulghum
Directed by David Zoffoli
Oleanna by David Mamet
Directed by David G. Kent

Once Removed by Eduardo Machado
Directed by David Fox
Avner the Eccentric by Avner Eisenberg
Directed by Avner Eisenberg

1993- 94

A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum by Stephen Sondheim & Larry Gelbart
Directed by Daniel L. Schay
God's Country by Steven Dietz
Directed by David G. Kent
A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens
Directed by Richard McElvain
The Convict's Return by Geoff Hoyle
Directed by Tony Taccone
Medea by Robinson Jeffers
Directed by Ted Kazanoff
**Maggie's Riff* by Jon Lipsky
Directed by David G. Kent
Jake's Women by Neil Simon
Directed by Paul Plum

1992-93

Rumors by Neil Simon
Directed by David Fox
Our Town by Thornton Wilder
Directed by David G. Kent
A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens
Directed by Richard McElvain
Twelfth Night by William Shakespeare
Directed by Steven McConnell
Talley's Folly by Lanford Wilson
Directed by Grey Johnson
**The Survivor: A Cambodian Odyssey* by Jon Lipsky
Directed by David G. Kent
Amadeus by Peter Shaffer
Directed by Ted Kazanoff

1991-92

A Moon for the Misbegotten by Eugene O'Neill
Directed by Jonathan Epstein
Round and Round the Garden by Alan Ayckbourn
Directed by Robert Walsh
**A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens
Directed by Richard McElvain
Pack of Lies by Hugh Whitmore
Directed by Steven McConnell
Uncle Vanya by Anton Chekov
Directed by David G. Kent
**Living in Exile* by Jon Lipsky
Directed by Jon Lipsky
Shirley Valentine by Willy Russell
Directed by Richard Rose

1990-91

Ring Round the Moon by Jean Anouilh
Directed by Richard Rose
The Glass Menagerie by Tennessee Williams
Directed by David G. Kent
A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens
Directed by Richard McElvain
Filumenia by Eduardo de Filippo
Directed by Steven McConnell
Lovers by Brian Friel
Directed by Nora Hussey
An Enemy of the People by Henrik Ibsen
Directed by David G. Kent
Table Manners by Alan Ayckbourn
Directed by Robert Walsh

1989-90

**The Anastasia Game* by Robert Wright & George Forrest
Directed by Larry Carpenter
The Nerd by Larry Shue
Directed by Michael Allosso
A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens
Directed by Daniel L. Schay
Village Heroes by Jay O'Callahan
Directed by Richard McElvain
Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett
Directed by David G. Kent
The Mystery of Irma Vep by Charles Ludlam
Directed by Patrick Swanson
The Immigrant by Mark Harelik
Directed by Daniel L. Schay

1988-89

As You Like It by William Shakespeare
Directed by Daniel L. Schay
Noises Off by Michael Flynn
Directed by Michael Allosso
A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens
Directed by Daniel L. Schay
Pill Hill Stories: Coming Home to Someplace New by Jay O'Callahan
Directed by Richard McElvain
**To Forgive, Divine* by Jack Neary
Directed by Daniel L. Schay

Betrayal by Harold Pinter
Directed by David G. Kent
Blithe Spirit by Noel Coward
Directed by Richard McElvain

1987-88

The Diary of Anne Frank by Frances Goodrich & Albert Hackett
Directed by Daniel L. Schay
A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens
Directed by Daniel L. Schay
Sizwe Bansi is Dead by Athol Fugard
Directed by Tom Markus
Mrs. California by Doris Baizley
Directed by Peter H. Clough
Angel Street by Patrick Hamilton
Directed by Richard Rose
**Bertha, The Sewing Machine Girl* by Robert Emmett & Gordon Connell
Directed by Maggie L. Harter

1986-87

The Foreigner by Larry Shue
Directed by Daniel L. Schay
A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens
Directed by Daniel L. Schay
The Adding Machine by Elmer Rice
Directed by Richard Rose
**First Night* by Jack Neary
Directed by Joan Courtney Murray
Hostage by Brendan Behan
Directed by Daniel L. Schay
The Importance of Being Earnest by Oscar Wilde
Directed by Richard Rose

1985-86

The School for Wives by Moliere
Directed by Daniel L. Schay
A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens
Directed by Daniel L. Schay
Educating Rita by Willy Russell
Directed by Richard Rose
Requiem for a Heavyweight by Rod Serling
Directed by Daniel L. Schay
Crimes of the Heart by Beth Henley
Directed by Judy Brahh
Something's Afoot by James McDonald, Robert Vos & Robert Gerlach
Directed by Daniel L. Schay

1984-85

A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens
Directed by Larry Carpenter
Monday After the Miracle by William Gibson
Directed by Ted Davis
Stage Struck by Simon Gray
Directed by Nora Hussey
A Raisin in the Sun by Lorraine Hansberry
Directed by Daniel L. Schay
Strange Snow by Steve Metcalfe
Directed by Grey Cattell Johnson
A Little Night Music by Stephen Sondheim and Hugh Wheeler
Directed by Richard Rose

1983-84

Arms and the Man by George Bernard Shaw
Directed by Daniel L. Schay
A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens
Directed by Larry Carpenter
Mass Appeal by William C. Davis
Directed by Terence Lamude
Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck
Directed by Brian Smiar
Chapter Two by Neil Simon
Directed by Gavin Cameron-Webb
Working by Studs Terkel, et al
Directed by Richard Rose

1982-83

Da by Hugh Leonard
Directed by Daniel L. Schay
The Seven Year Itch by George Axelrod
Directed by Larry Carpenter
Talley's Folly by Lanford Wilson
Directed by Josephine Abady
Veronica's Room by Ira Levin
Directed by Robert W. Tolan
Tintypes by Mary Kyte
Directed by Daniel L. Schay

1981-82

The Miracle Worker by William Gibson
Directed by Mark Kaufman
The Lion in Winter by James Goldman
Directed by Nora Hussey
Two for the Seesaw by William Gibson
Directed by Ted Davis
The Price by Arthur Miller
Directed by Mark Kaufman
The Gin Game by D.L. Coburn
Directed by Arif Hasnain

The Mouse Trap by Agatha Christie
Directed by Mark Kaufman

1980-81

Sleuth by Anthony Schaffer
Directed by Mark Kaufman

Side by Side by Sondheim by Stephen Sondheim, et al
Directed by Bick Goss

The Sea Horse by Edward J. Moore
Directed by Stephen Zuckerman

The Gingerbread Lady by Neil Simon
Directed by Sandra C. Hastie

Gentle Catapults by Bill C. Davis
Directed by Mark Kaufman

On Golden Pond by Ernest Thompson
Directed by Mark Kaufman

1979-80

The Passion of Dracula by Bob Hall & David Richmond
Directed by Mark Kaufman

A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens
Directed by D.J. Maloney

Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare
Directed by John R. Briggs

The Glass Menagerie by Tennessee Williams
Directed by Mark Kaufman

Same Time, Next Year by Bernard Slade
Vanities by Jack Heifner



Lowell from above. Photo © Higgins + Ross



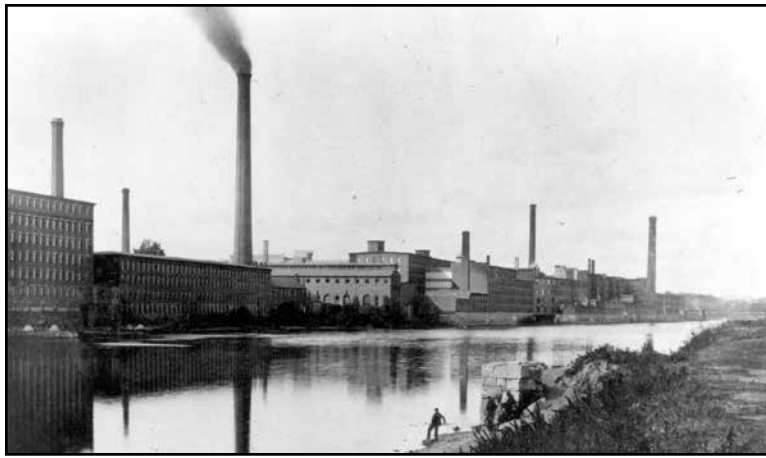
If you were a Lowellian in the late 1970's, you were witness to the formation of a National Historical Park, a wave of immigration from South Asia, and the establishment of the region's first—and to this day, only—professional theatre. For \$6.50, you could buy a ticket to top-notch live theatre from a company dedicated, from day one, to hiring the best professional actors, designers, directors, and stage managers.

The early years were funded on a shoestring and a prayer, but the company's unflagging commitment to contemporary, relevant work of the highest artistic quality kept it going, season after season. Today, **MRT remains a professional, Equity, non-profit company committed to bringing great contemporary theatre to the city of Lowell**—with a special emphasis on **new work** that's both exciting and accessible. It is now one of three LORT theatres in Massachusetts, with an over \$2,000,000 operating budget and nearly 4,000 subscribers, living up to its reputation as a true cultural treasure of the Merrimack Valley.

LOWELL'S THEATRE

When Merrimack Repertory Theatre opened its doors in 1979, the city of Lowell was in the early stages of an economic revival that would help it become the vibrant cultural center it is today. The Lowell National Historical Park had opened the year before with the mission of preserving the city's industrial past, and in the decades ahead, the city would welcome a host of new cultural institutions to its streets: the Lowell Folk Festival; a multitude of museums and art galleries; the Angkor Dance Troupe; the Lowell Spinners minor league baseball team. An ever-evolving city, its motto rings true: "Art is the Handmaid of Human Good."

(Left to Right) Jack O'Connor, Niki Tsongas, Nancy L. Donahue, and David Kent at the 1992 Lobby Dedication.



Lowell, ca. 1910. Courtesy of Lowell National Historical Park.

Set on the banks of the Merrimack River, ten mill complexes once sprawled over Lowell's nearly six miles of canals, employing thousands upon thousands; the city was the breeding ground of both the Industrial Revolution and the Labor Movement in America.

And while the river drove the city's rise, Lowell's heart has always been its people. Many early workers were "mill girls" who left their farm homes for the mills' boardinghouses. As the country's demographics shifted, so did Lowell's, as immigrants from scores of nations came to live and work in its brick buildings. Though manufacturing began its decline in the late 1920's, **Lowell has survived, and flourished.** Over

90% of its downtown mill space is now rehabilitated for new use, and art galleries, performance spaces, restaurants, businesses, and housing fill the long brick corridors. A tremendously diverse city, **Lowell is committed to letting creativity and art drive its business and its future**, providing resources for artists and an environment where creative work can thrive. Merrimack Repertory Theatre is the only professional theatre in the Merrimack Valley, and it finds itself right at home in Lowell; like the company's namesake river, powering the city, and nurturing the citizens that are its heart.



Audience gathers near Shattuck Street for "Lowell Summer Theatre," 1980.



PRESS COVERAGE

northshore
THE BEST OF THE NORTH OF BOSTON

APRIL 2015

Fresh Face: Sean Daniels



Sean Daniels is taking over the reins of artistic director at Merrimack Repertory Theatre
PHOTOS BY MEGHAN MOORE

Dad's Garage might seem an unlikely name for a theatre company, until one of its cofounders is revealed to be director Sean Daniels, who, at the time of its inception, was 22 years old, flying by the seat of his pants and holding fast to fraying purse strings. That was nearly 20 years ago. The money never ran out, and the show still goes on.

An accomplished director and creator of new works, Daniels was recently appointed Merrimack Repertory Theatre's (MRT) new artistic director. Named by American Theatre magazine as "one of the top 15 up-and-coming artists in the United States, whose work will be transforming America's stages for decades to come," Daniels brings to MRT's stage a trove of ideas, a cache of connections, and an enthusiasm impossible to contain.

His most recent credits include a stint as artist-at-large at the Geva Theatre Center in Rochester, New York; four years as associate artistic director at the Tony Award-winning Actors Theatre of Louisville, where he directed 17 productions including five Humana Festivals; and time as associate artistic director and resident director of the California Shakespeare Theater, where he was in charge of all the young audience programs (while there, he quadrupled the number of young people attending the theatre).

The secret to his success? Excellent audience engagement. "People always want to see themselves on stage," notes Daniels, who started staging plays written and acted by people in their 20s at Dad's Garage. At work was his notion that if you want people to come see your shows, you need to speak their language, or teach them yours.

Imperative to Daniels's objective as a director is this idea of how to engage not just the audience but also the community at large, particularly on behalf of a larger institution like MRT.

While at the Geva Theatre, he conceived and implemented the Co-hort Club—a group of 20 Rochester residents of various ages, races, and socioeconomic backgrounds who were granted access to the entire creative process. Participants went to rehearsals, saw previews, attended openings, and spoke directly with Daniels, the playwright, and the actors in order to gain a fuller understanding of what’s involved in producing a show.

“Each of those cohort members [acquired] such a fluency in terms of what it takes to make theatre— who does it, the difference between local theatre and a tour, a League of Residential Theatres venue versus a nonprofit...all these things that we say, but they don’t always understand,” explains Daniels.

Inspired by a Chinese proverb that translates to, “Tell me and I’ll forget; show me and I may remember; involve me and I’ll understand,” Daniels plans to bring the nationally recognized audience engagement programs he developed at Geva to MRT. “I want to figure out a way to really use this place as a community center, where people can get involved and learn more about what the art form is,” he says. “Then, they [will] invest more in it because they can understand it. Education breeds excitement.”



MRT Interiors / Photo by Meghan Moore

As he did at Geva, Daniels will look for 20 to 30 individuals who reflect Lowell’s demographics. In this way, he hopes to engage new community members, in addition to those already attending the theatre. “There are two ways to create audience engagement: One is to attract new people, the other is to deepen your engagement with the people you already have. This is a way to do both.” Opening the doors and offering a greater level of transparency will help keep the audience they have and diversify future audiences.

Cohort participants will be asked to write about their experiences and “publish” them in their communities— whether that’s via social media or a church newsletter or through storytelling. “That’s a way for us to get the word out...it markets the theatre in their own language,” notes Daniels, who believes this approach is the difference between friends’ recommendations and mass media messaging. “It’s not just us saying it’s great— someone involved in it is saying so.”

With respect to MRT’s current audience, Daniels shows much admiration. “The thing that is different and a plus about this audience is that [they] are committed to the theatre, not just the names of the shows, which is why I think the theatre is able to do so much contemporary work and take risks in terms of its programming.” It seems most large theatres are forced to do familiar plays in order to keep a full house. According to Daniels,

MRT's audience, though it may look like other audiences, differs in terms of the depth of their dedication to the company.

It's that commitment that has him feeling hopeful MRT can become one of the great theatres for new play production in the country. "We can start programming plays we think are going to take off and travel to the rest of the world." Of particular interest to Daniels are comedic works. The entire regional theatre movement "grew up as serious theatre" in order to be taken seriously. Daniels thinks an opportunity has been missed. There are many theatres producing new plays, but, says Daniels, "There are not a lot of joyful new plays being done." Comedy writers are instantly swept into television. "Getting writers to come back to the theatre to write comedy is something nobody else is doing," he notes. But it is something MRT will actively look to do when planning future seasons.

In terms of putting together a winning season, variety is key. "Planning a season is a bit like planning a great dinner party," says Daniels. "You have to figure out who goes with whom—one loud guy is fine, but two loud guys is a disaster." When lining up shows, Daniels considers what it would mean to watch all the plays and looks for "the conversation" happening between them. "We hear from our audience that they love to be challenged and they also love to have fun. They never want to have a season where it is just one or the other."

Daniels plans to work, not only with the internationally recognized artists with whom he already has relationships, but with Boston-based artists as well. "It's very important to me that the [greater] Boston community feels like we are engaging with them, and this is a home for area artists." Daniels and his colleagues track where the next great artists are coming from and where plays are being produced. "For us to position ourselves as that [place] is an exciting thing for the theatre to do." His aim is to do work that will have a long life in the American theatre canon. "Some shows should start here," he says, "and then, in a year or two, everyone will be doing them."

Gathering people together to see the world through somebody else's eyes and to experience empathy is also very important to Daniels, who thinks turning off one's phone and listening to someone's story for two hours is one of the most radical acts that can happen these days. "I love to be able to be a revolutionary in that [way]."

Daniels is quick to credit former artistic director Charles Tower with having built the theatre into one in which the audience knows the shows will always be good—full of high-level writing and fantastic acting. He also readily recognizes the people of Lowell: "This community has such civic pride around the town and around the theatre," enthuses Daniels. "By giving them more information and allowing them to run with it, I think we can make big things happen here."

ABOUT THE THEATRE

MRT has been the only professional theatre in Massachusetts' Merrimack Valley since its founding in 1979. The 36-year-old company attracts more than 35,000 audience members each year. Its September through May season of seven productions features primarily contemporary work and frequently regional and world premieres. It has become known for its high production standards and is a centerpiece of the region's cultural identity.

Director of marketing and public relations Kate Brandt says, "MRT is easily accessible and there's plenty of parking. You don't have to drive to Boston to get really high-quality, affordable theatre. We are for people who want to add a little variety to their theatrical diet, and are looking for something that is more intimate—who want to get a bit adventurous. But it is going to be something familiar, too." mrt.org

New Merrimack Repertory Theatre chief hopes to raise curtain to spotlight success

By Alana Melanson, amelanson@lowellsun.com

UPDATED: 12/16/2014 07:52:23 AM EST

LOWELL -- Merrimack Repertory Theatre has often been called the region's best-kept secret, and its new artistic director is hoping to shed that title.

Looking to raise the profile of MRT is Sean Daniels, who was announced Monday as the organization's fourth artistic director. He replaces Charles Towers, who is stepping down from the position he has held for 14 years at the end of the current season. Daniels has already begun to work with MRT staff to plan the 2015-2016 season, and will be on site full time beginning July 15. He has signed a five-year contract.



Sean Daniels, the new artistic director at the Merrimack Repertory Theatre in Lowell. Photo by Meghan Moore

"I truly believe there is no other theater as prepped for growth as Merrimack Rep is," Daniels said in an exclusive interview with The Sun. "Everybody does new plays, but most people do them in April, in a second space, as part of a festival. There's really no other theater in the country I know that does new work all year long and has an audience which is game for that."

He said the audience's trust in the programming of MRT is a tribute to the work and vision of Towers, who laid the strong foundation Daniels now has the opportunity to build upon.

According to Kate Brandt, director of marketing and public relations for MRT, the 36-year-old organization worked with Albert Hall & Associates, a national search firm that specializes in the arts, to seek candidates following Towers' announcement in the spring that he would be stepping down.

There were more than 100 applicants for the position, Brandt said.

In a six-month process, that number was then pared to 15 by a search committee consisting of members of the board of directors, which chose seven to interview in the first round, Brandt said. Only three finalists were invited back for second interviews, and from there, Daniels was unanimously chosen to be Towers' successor, she said.

"The entire board is confident that Sean will build upon the exceptional reputation MRT has earned for artistic excellence over the years, bringing the theater to new heights and instilling a new sense of excitement that our subscribers, patrons and supporters are bound to enjoy," said Stephen Irish, trustees' president and search-committee chairman.

Executive Director Elizabeth Kegley said Daniels has "an impressive breadth of experience," and she's excited to have someone coming on board that is committed to doing new work and raising the national profile of MRT while remaining focused on its local and regional artists.

"He will be a terrific asset to our community, nurturing the work of talented artists and enthusiastically engaging with our audiences, and a fantastic partner, as he recognizes and is ready to take on the challenges and opportunities of managing a nonprofit theater company," she said.

Daniels, 41, has a theater career spanning two decades and holds a bachelor degree in theater from Florida State University. In 1995, in partnership with eight friends from college, Daniels co-founded Dad's Garage Theatre Company in Atlanta, which quickly became nationally known and recognized for its youthful, edgy flair. At the time, the average theater audience member in the country was a 57-year-old married woman, but at Dad's Garage, the average was a 27-year-old single male, he said.

"I think the reason we had so many young audiences was that we were young, and we looked around and we couldn't see ourselves anywhere on stage," Daniels said. "So we started creating work and finding playwrights that were doing that, and the great lesson was, everyone wants to see themselves on stage -- but if you ever come and you watch a series of shows and you're not up there, eventually you stop coming."

Daniels stayed there for nine years before moving on to become the associate artistic director/resident director at the California Shakespeare Theater in Berkeley. He has also served as associate artistic director of the Actors Theatre of Louisville in Kentucky, known for its Humana Festival of New American Plays, and most recently held the title of artist-at-large at the Geva Theatre Center in Rochester, N.Y.

Daniels said his aim is to bring to MRT the best components of his last two jobs, which were to "figure out how to make a world-class organization for new work, and also one where the audience feels like they own it and they get to be a part of it, and that it's their theater."

One of the initiatives he plans to institute at MRT is the Cohort Club, a nationally recognized model for inspiring audiences, started at Geva.

"It's like an audience immersion program, where we let 20 community members be a part of the entire process of putting a play together, from beginning to end," Daniels said.

"They get to be in the rehearsal room, they get to come to production meetings, they get to watch previews -- and I know for the Geva Theatre, it's really reoriented how they respond to the community and what that community thinks about it."

Follow Alana Melanson at [facebook.com/alana.lowellsun](https://www.facebook.com/alana.lowellsun) or on Twitter @alanamelanson.

Read more: http://www.lowellsun.com/todaysheadlines/ci_27145667/new-merrimack-repertory-theatre-chief-hopes-raise-curtain#ixzz3Yc9Z3mal



MEDIA RELATIONS

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Reviewers, journalists, bloggers, and others writing about MRT are encouraged to request more information about the theatre. To request complimentary tickets for reviewers or to be added to our press list, email your name, affiliation, and contact information.

Contact

Kate Brandt
Director of Marketing & Development
978-654-7595
kate.brandt@mrt.org

Reviewing

Reviewers and bloggers interested in publishing a review of a production are encouraged to attend press performances on the first Saturday evening (Opening Night) or first Sunday matinee of each production.

News

Read press releases at **mrt.org/news** and blog posts at **mrt.org/blog**
Access press resource pages for each production at **mrt.org/media-relations**

Download High Res Photos

1. Visit <https://www.flickr.com/photos/123842815@N04/sets/>
2. Select a photo from the Photo Stream or the Albums
3. Click on the thumbnail and let the image load in your browser on the Flickr site.
4. Click the “Download” button in the lower right-hand corner of the window and select “View All Sizes.
5. Select the size you wish to download from the choices listed across the top of the image.
6. Click the “Download the ____ size of this photo...” link at the top. The image will download to your computer.