



Producing Artistic Director
Roy Steinberg
Director of Development
Mitchell Malnati



2020 - 2025 Strategic Plan

Setting the Scene

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Executive Summary

It was “one of the best days of last year,” wrote award-winning writer Bill Cain after his latest play, “Reds,” was read out loud to fellow playwrights at Cape May Stage’s annual Playwrights Symposium last spring. It was also a red-letter day for the theater. It affirmed a key element of Cape May Stage’s vision that now is codified in our 2020-2025 Strategic Plan—the creation and staging of new works. Cain’s play is scheduled to be performed this fall.

Cape May Stage has presented world-class theater to audiences in Southern New Jersey since 1989. Last year, a record 15,000 people witnessed the playhouse’s artistry and dozens of actors from Broadway, film and television appeared on its stage. One new work, “Sidekicked,” made its world premiere last season, showcasing a Tony-nominated star, Emmy-award winning playwright and Tony-award-winning costume designer. It sold more tickets than any mid-season show in the theater’s history.



Sally Mayes in "Sidekicked", 2019

As our premier Equity theater proudly moves into a fourth decade, Cape May Stage remains firmly committed to producing entertaining, and intellectually and emotionally provocative theater, while striving to perform at the highest level of artistic excellence. Looking ahead, however, the theater’s leadership also recognizes the need to fill a larger, more integrated role in our community—to champion theater; reach wider, more diverse audiences; promote new works and emerging artists; and educate future generations of patrons and performers.

Executive Summary

Last summer, Cape May Stage's Board of Directors, Artistic Producing Director and key staff spent a day in a loaned church hall discussing what the theater did well, what it could do better and how it might close the gap. By day's end, we had whittled down a long list of ideas to six strategic priorities that we agreed would move us forward: Programming and Artistic Community Engagement, Fundraising and Development, Marketing and Communications, Finance, Governance and Human Resources, and Board Development.

Each priority is now spearheaded by one of the board's standing committees, which is tasked with advancing its goals and objectives. As we raise the curtain on Cape May Stage 2020-2025, we look forward to a future that is more inclusive, more diverse, more emboldened and more connected to our community.

We will save a seat for you.



Kate McCauley Hathaway in "Erma Bombeck: At Wit's End", 2018

Our Mission, Vision and Values

Our Mission

Cape May Stage is Southern New Jersey's premier Equity theater. We are committed to producing entertaining, and intellectually and emotionally provocative theater, while striving to achieve the highest level of artistic excellence.

Our Vision

Cape May Stage is recognized as one of the Mid-Atlantic's leading Equity theaters and most significant cultural assets. We are a place where audience members can experience plays with timely themes that resonate with our nation and the world. We inspire nationally recognized actors and artists to perform on our stage, and provide a dynamic incubator for the creation and staging of new works. We are also a leader in championing theater arts in our community and driving economic growth in the region.

Our Values

- Theater has the power to break down barriers, inspire dialogue, find common ground and foster tolerance and compassion.
- Celebrating community is a cornerstone of our identity as a theater.
- Risk-taking and experimentation are central to our pursuit of artistic excellence.
- Developing new plays and nurturing playwrights, actors and directors broadens and enriches our repertoire.
- Theater contributes to the growth and economic vitality of our region.
- Financial health and efficient and effective use of our resources are critical to our operational success and ability to adapt to changing times.



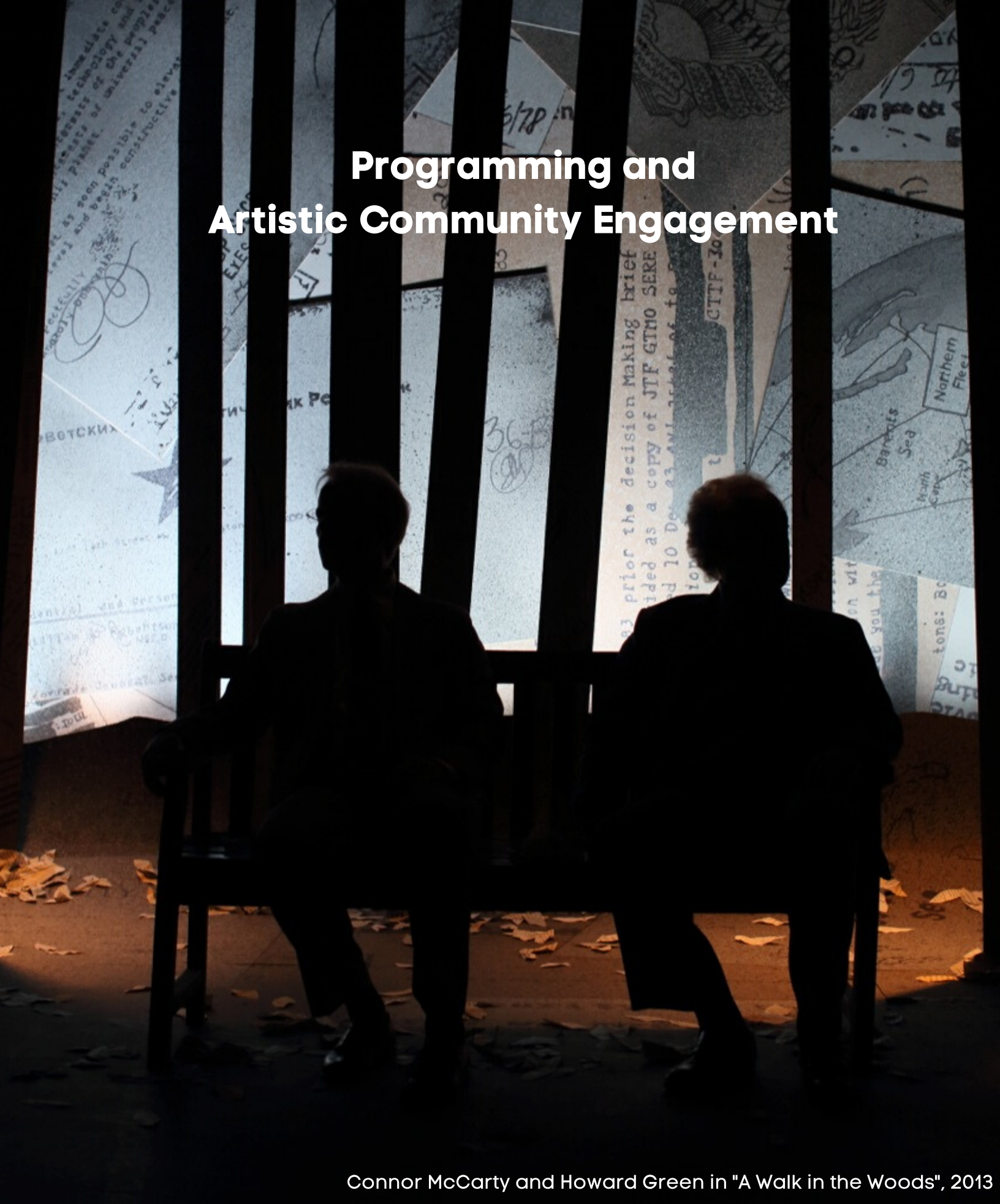
Our Strategic Priorities

- Programming and Artistic Community Engagement
- Fundraising and Development
- Marketing and Communications
- Finance
- Governance and Human Resources
- Board Development



Amanda Forstrom and Roy Steinberg
in "The Lion in Winter", 2018

Programming and Artistic Community Engagement



Connor McCarty and Howard Green in "A Walk in the Woods", 2013

Programming & Artistic Community Engagement

Programming and Community Engagement are two of the most important elements of our 2020-2025 Strategic Plan. Our programming aims high: to provide entertaining, and intellectually and emotionally provocative theater at the top level of professionalism; reflect themes that resonate with our times; debut new works and talent; and embrace risk-taking and experimentation. We are also committed to reaching a wider, more diverse audience with our performances both on and off our main stage.

Goal

Follow our established template in selecting plays for the main stage

Objective

Assess prior seasons' successes and sales data to determine future play choices

Strategy

- Analyze the types of plays that succeeded in their time slots to select future plays and their placement
- Use variations of our proven template: a provocative play in May, entertaining and comedic plays in July and August, a catalyst-for-change play in the fall and a holiday-themed play in December
- Analyze sales data to update our template in response to changing times and patrons' preferences

Goal

Embrace new plays and foster new playwrights

Objective

Stage readings of new plays on dark nights at the theater

Strategy

- Continue "pay-what-you-wish" readings to introduce more people to theater
- Promote talk-backs after readings to provide feedback to playwrights
- Identify plays introduced at the National Playwrights Symposium whose playwrights may benefit from feedback from a wider audience at the theater

Programming & Artistic Community Engagement

Objective

Create a New Works Festival in the fall

Strategy

- Create a formal submission policy and timeline for festival plays
- Form a Reading Committee to select featured plays
- Have the festival's audiences determine the best play
- Award prizes to festival winners such as a National Playwrights Symposium scholarship or a main-stage production

Goal

Offer theater experiences outside of the playhouse and its eight-month season

Objective

Produce a large-scale musical outside of the theater

Strategy

- Identify an alternate venue
- Form a separate production team to manage the project
- Analyze main-stage sales to identify possible times
- for a new production such as a changeover weekend

Objective

Expand the season beyond the theater's current May-December season

Strategy

- Analyze local tourism trends to identify high-volume holiday weekends such as Valentine's Day or President's Day Weekend
- Produce low-cost productions on targeted holiday weekends
- Add a small-scale production in the dark months
- Partner with year-round businesses to cross-promote one another in slower months

Programming & Artistic Community Engagement

Objective

Work with local artists and performers

Strategy

- Book local artists for one-night events
- Produce a local artists' festival off season and hold open auditions for performers

Objective

Make main-stage plays more accessible to year-round residents

Strategy

- Continue to offer "pay-what-you-wish" and "best-value" performances
- Use targeted marketing to advertise affordable performances to year-round residents
- Offer discounted or complimentary tickets to year-round residents through trade agreements, contests and giveaways

Objective

Incorporate innovative and Immersive Theater in our programming

Strategy

- Perform popular plays in unexpected natural environments that are accessible to wider audiences
- Present plays in areas typically not exposed to theater and offer discounts and incentives to promote attendance
- Partner with non-profits such as the Harriet Tubman Museum to perform relevant plays onsite
- Explore grant options to help fund these new initiatives

Fundraising and Development



Rav Val DeNegro, Katie Zaffrann, Marc Geller, and Bliss Griffith in "Disgraced", 2016

Fundraising and Development

It is imperative that Cape May Stage meet its Fundraising and Development goals and objectives to advance its mission over the next five years. To ensure the theater's long-term sustainability, we must identify incremental and achievable goals annually. The philanthropic landscape is changing so our related efforts must continually grow and evolve.

Goal

Ensure patrons know how much their support means to Cape May Stage

Objective

Regularly communicate those areas that need patrons' support and ways in their help has made a difference in the past

Strategy

- Repeat messages in the annual-giving letter to the Producers Circle and in grant proposals
- Reinforce appeals in stage remarks, gala presentation, financial appeal e-blasts, and board and staff communications

Goal

Encourage donors to fund the mission of the organization in increasing amounts annually

Objective

Increase donations from individual donors by 5 percent annually

Strategy

- Encourage donors at a lower level of giving to move to a mid-level range of giving, and the latter to become gala sponsors or Producers Circle members
- Continue to thank donors by listing their names in the Showbill and on the website, and reward higher donation levels with increased benefits and tokens of appreciation
- Create fundraising campaigns around specific programs such as Kids Camp, National Playwrights Symposium or LGBTQ+ Pride readings that correspond with donors' interests
- Train box-office staff to solicit donations of any size during all transactions by offering a round-up donation option for online orders

Fundraising and Development

Objective

Increase Producers Circle members' donations by 5 percent annually

Strategy

- Continue to deliver improved benefits at all Producers Circle levels and reinforce perks the Producers dinner and in correspondence
- Actively solicit feedback from Producers Circle members on ways to revise benefits and maintain and build their support

Objective

Increase donations from foundations by 5 percent annually

Strategy

- Regularly convey the impact of their grant support to foundations and solicit feedback to ensure grants are renewed or increased
- Identify and explore new sources of foundation support such as non-arts organizations with a focus on seniors, new technology or historic preservation

Objective

Increase donations to the annual gals by 5 percent annually

Strategy

- Recruit connected and effective Gala Committee members
- Analyze auction-item categories that have sold well historically as a guide to future gift solicitation, and market higher-end items effectively
- Identify and solicit new gala sponsors and single-ticket buyers, and encourage increased support from renewing sponsors and single-ticket buyers

Fundraising and Development

Objective

Establish and convey donation expectations to the Board of Directors

Strategy

- Designate a giving-level line in the budget for board members
- Define expectations for board members in volunteering their time and providing in-kind services

Goal

Launch a sustainable Planned Giving program

Objective

Recruit five new members to a new Legacy Society annually

Strategy

- Develop a planned-gift-acceptance policy that covers general operations, reserves and the endowment
- Encourage board members and select supporters to seed the program
- Communicate planned-gift opportunities to members and prospects with mailings, program ads and stage announcements
- Develop and deliver planned-gift stewardship policies through annual events, printed and electronic recognition, and donor profiles

Marketing and Communications



Holly Williams and Stephen James Anthony in "Barefoot in the Park", 2016

Marketing and Communications

Innovative and impactful marketing and communications efforts are critical in building greater awareness of Cape May Stage and increasing residents' and visitors' active involvement with the theater throughout Southern New Jersey.

Goal

Increase overall box office ticket sales by 5 percent annually

Objective

Sell incremental tickets through online resale sites

Strategy

- Generate incremental ticket sales through online partners such as Ingresso
- Focus targeted advertising campaigns on best-selling partners

Objective

Develop partnerships with five regional theaters in 2020-2021

Strategy

- Create partnerships with theaters with which we do not compete
- Develop a reciprocal-show package for each partnership

Objective

Increase group ticket sales by 5 percent annually

Strategy

- Advertise group rates on our website and social media to stimulate interest
- Promote Cape May Stage to regional travel companies as a must-see venue
- Partner with local non-profits such as MAC to create co-branded group packages

Marketing and Communications

Objective

Drive ticket sales with increased website traffic and online leads through digital marketing

Strategy

- Increase boosted posts on social media platforms
- Expand the targeted audience base for Google ads
- Use event-response ads to promote awareness of events and drive responses

Goal

Expand awareness of participation with Cape May Stage to more seasonal visitors

Objective

Enroll 10-15 members in a new concierge program in 2020-2021

Strategy

- Create a new concierge program for local B&B's, hotels and real estate offices
- Reach out to local businesses and organizations that cater to our targeted tourist demographics to develop and expand partnership opportunities
- Review and update advertising opportunities that target seasonal visitors

Goal

Build the awareness of and participation by more local and regional residents in Cape May Stage

Objective

Identify and partner with 10 or more local and regional businesses and organizations that appeal to our targeted local demographics

Strategy

- Connect with local residents by partnering with established Cape May social groups, other Cape May nonprofits and regional business organizations
- Launch the Lighthouse Project offering "pop-up" theater at local sites

Marketing and Communications

Goal

Increase local and regional media coverage of Cape May Stage

Objective

Secure 10 or more feature articles in local and regional newspapers and/or print and online magazines during 2020

Strategy

- Pitch story ideas to highlight productions, actors and unique theater events
- Pitch stories showcasing participation in local community events
- Identify at least three new media outlets to contact

Goal

Expand our online presence and engagement on social media and online review sites

Objective

Increase the number of social media followers by 30 percent on Facebook and Instagram

Strategy

- Post “sharable” content including Cape May Stage events, local community activities and theater industry news
- Post engaging content including questions, surveys, videos and contests
- Follow local business partners, regional theaters and arts-focused influencers
- Promote and provide links to social media accounts in all marketing and communications
- Run cross-promotions with local businesses, other arts organization and like-minded brands
- Create and use a consistent hashtag

Objective

Increase the number of patrons who post reviews on sites such as TripAdvisor and Show-Score

Strategy

- Encourage patrons to post reviews via post-show email communications
- Use Show-Score to recruit and develop a new customer base

Marketing and Communications

Goal

Create ways to migrate theatergoers along the patron continuum of from single-ticket buyers to multi-show ticket buyers and package and passport purchasers

Objective

Convince 5 percent of single-ticket buyers to return for at least one other main-stage show

Strategy

- Create special incentives for first-time ticket buyers to attend a second show
- Create a targeted promotion email to send to historic single-ticket buyers for 2020 season packages
- Create a special discount coupon to encourage one-night-only patrons to attend a main-stage show

Objective

Convert 5 percent of multiple-ticket buyers to package and passport purchasers

Strategy

- Use ticket software to identify multi-ticket buyers and send targeted email offerings as incentives to encourage package or passport purchases
- Train box office associates to upsell patrons buying tickets for more than one show
- Train box office staff to mention free exchanges with passports any time a patron exchanges tickets and has to pay an exchange fee
- Highlight savings to patrons in purchasing packages or passports in marketing and email communications

Finance



Jennifer Harmon and Bill Tatum in "The Gin Game", 2017

Finance

Financial Planning is critical to the future success of Cape May Stage. It determines where we spend our money, time and other resources to meet the goals identified in our Strategic Plan. Our financial planning employs tools such as forecasting, budgeting, cash flow analysis and key performance indicators to achieve our goals.

Goal

Create an annual budget that is based on the unique goals identified in Cape May Stage's Strategic Plan and the theater's mission

Objective

Develop the annual budget for review and approval by the Treasurer, Finance Committee and President, and ultimately to the full board for approval

Strategy

- Enlist the Finance Committee and relevant staff to analyze several years' worth of historical financial information dealing with income and expenditures to identify the median or acceptable levels for the annual operating budget

Goal

Create a plan that provides the oversight needed for effective growth in theater attendance and earned income

Objective

Promote a regular exchange of information between staff, seasonal hires and the Executive Committee that promotes enhancements to the existing ticket-sales structure to increase transactions during the season

Strategy

- Review transactions for existing categories for ticket sales to analyze their effectiveness by computing the percentage of total sales and sales during the season's performance period

Goal

Create a plan that provides oversight for the effective growth of the theater's outside income revenue

Objective

Establish an income revenue stream that supports 50 percent of the income in the annual budget

Strategy

- Enlist support from board members and others in the community to promote a revenue flow of outside income from sponsors, special events, grants and corporate contributions

Goal

Create a plan that promotes more effective automated financial systems, methods to mine historical information and communications with stakeholders

Objective

Streamline the flow of information from our automated systems and develop new strategic reports for critical financial information

Strategy

- Establish an annual review of our automated financial, information and ticket systems
- Enlist the support of staff, board members and outside theater communities to assist in analyzing the effectiveness of our automated systems

Goal

Create a plan to streamline and improve our preparation for the annual audit process to maintain the theater's tax-exempt status

Objective

Promote a seamless flow of information, on-site review of business processes, and access to our financial systems required for our annual auditor

Strategy

- Review the current process for preparing the annual audit with stakeholders

Governance and Human Resources



Kate McCauley Hathaway, Kate Berg, and Michael Scott in "Sylvia", 2019

Governance and Human Resources

Successful enterprises require the active and prudent oversight of an enlightened, educated and enthusiastic Board of Directors. Commitment to sound governance, risk management and fiscal responsibility are essential to Cape May Stage's viability as an ongoing theater. The Governance Committee supports the board in upholding the highest standards of conduct in its operation and deliberation. Cape May Stage must remain a recognized and highly valued non-profit employer of choice for the theater's artistic and administrative talent. The Human Resources Committee supports efforts to persuade current and potential hires that associating with Cape May Stage is mutually rewarding and ensures a productive and healthy work environment.

Goal

Ensure Cape May Stage upholds the highest standards of conduct in its operations

Objective

Employ a collaborative, iterative process, by which our by-laws can be refreshed, introduced, and adopted to support the strategic objectives of Cape May Stage

Strategy

- Create an objective and reliable framework and protocol for board governance to serve as the architectural framework for official board decision-making
- Conduct an annual review of the by-laws, incorporating necessary modifications approved by the board
- Serve as a consultant to the Executive Committee in confidentially managing potential conflicts of interest within the board

Governance and Human Resources

Goal

Make Cape May Stage a recognized and highly valued non-profit employer of choice for the theater's artistic and administrative talent

Objective

Retain all top-rated staff and seasonal hires, based on annual performance appraisals; successfully attract and hire the most qualified talent on an as-needed basis

Strategy

- Persuade current and potential hires that associating with Cape May Stage can and will be mutually rewarding, while adding significantly to their professional credentials
- Develop both emergency and long-range succession plans for the Producing Artistic Director and key staff
- Ensure a healthy working environment that is compliant with all federal and state workplace regulations
- Periodically benchmark regional salaries and benefits to remain competitive in the workplace
- Serve as a consultant to the Producing Artistic Director as it may apply to hiring, firing and potential employee relations issues
- Participate in the development of appropriate feedback models and evaluations in concert with the Producing Artistic director to ensure staff development and accountability

Board Development



Trace Pool and Martin Landry in "Murder for Two: Holiday Edition", 2019

Board Development

The engagement, commitment and investment of the Board of Directors is vital to the growth, vibrancy and future success of Cape May Stage. Sourcing qualified candidates to serve on our board; educating members about our mission, vision and goals; and deploying knowledgeable board members as ambassadors throughout our community will greatly enhance the stature and marketability of our premier Equity theater.

Goal

Create and maintain a Board of Directors that provides effective leadership and oversight of Cape May Stage and advances the theater's mission, vision and goals

Objective

Have board members introduce five new potential patrons to Cape May Stage annually

Strategy

- Enlist board members who possess the skills needed to lead the theater now and in the future, and who will broaden the theater's appeal to new as well as existing audiences
- Ensure that the composition of the board reflects the audience we serve now and the wider audience we hope to serve in the future
- Recruit prospective board members with specific skills needed to run the organization such as finance or HR who will also actively serve on one or more of the board's standing committees
- Activate succession plans for all members of the Executive Committee and Board of Directors to ensure continuity in leadership and review plans annually

Board Development

Objective

Train board members to be effective ambassadors and advocates for Cape May Stage in the community

Strategy

- Assess board members' training needs and provide needed training to improve members' skills and knowledge
- Offer new board members a comprehensive orientation that outlines their role and responsibilities; reviews the budget, strategic plan and programming; and assesses their areas of interest
- Include training sessions at select board meetings on theater operations and skills such as fundraising to increase members' understanding of the organization
- Hold an annual teambuilding event for board members and key staff

Objective

Ensure that each of the standing committees of the board spearheads and advances the goals outlined in its assigned section of the Strategic Plan

Strategy

- Have the standing committee chairs regularly report on the progress their teams have made toward achieving their section's goals at board meetings

Objective

Achieve a 75 percent satisfaction rating on a board self-assessment survey

Strategy

- Develop tool to assess board members' satisfaction with board service

Appendix



Anthony Simone in "The Whipping Man", 2016

2020 Board of Directors

Executive Board

Leslie Martel, President
Wendy Collins, 1st Vice President
Lynn Martenstein, 2nd Vice President
Yvonne Kuemmerle, 3rd Vice President
Stephen Miller, 4th Vice President
Lee Bellarmino, Secretary
Fred May, Treasurer

Standing Committee Chairs

Leslie Martel, Executive Committee
Roy Steinberg, Programming and Artistic Community Engagement
Leslie Martel, Fundraising and Development
Wendy Collins, Marketing and Communications
Fred May, Finance
Lee Bellarmino, Governance and Human Resources
Yvonne Kuemmerle, Nominating and Board Development

Board Members

Suzan Chmiel, Irene Darocha, Kate Hathaway, Ken Kirby, Mark Kulkowitz, Yogi Kurtz, Karen LoSasso, Marga Matheny, Fran Rixon, Joe Rogers, Roy Steinberg, Heather Turner



Holly Anne Williams, Dana A. Iannuzzi and Elise Hudson in "The Taming", 2019

History of Cape May Stage



Cape Island Presbyterian Church
before its transformation

From a one-man show in a marsh-bound home in Grassy Sound to a world premiere in a church reborn as a theater in historic Cape May, Cape May Stage has transformed theater in South Jersey and the Mid-Atlantic. Now in its fourth decade, the premier Equity theater has built a legacy of artistic excellence by performing entertaining, and intellectually and emotionally provocative productions, and striving to perform at the highest level of professionalism.

Today, nearly 15,000 residents and visitors witness the theater's artistry annually, and scores of nationally acclaimed actors, playwrights and directors contribute their talents to shows. Last year's world premiere of "Sidekicked," for example, showcased an Emmy-Award-winning writer, Tony-Award-nominated actor and Tony-Award-winning costume designer. It sold more tickets than any mid-season show in the theater's history.



The transformed
Robert Shackleton Playhouse

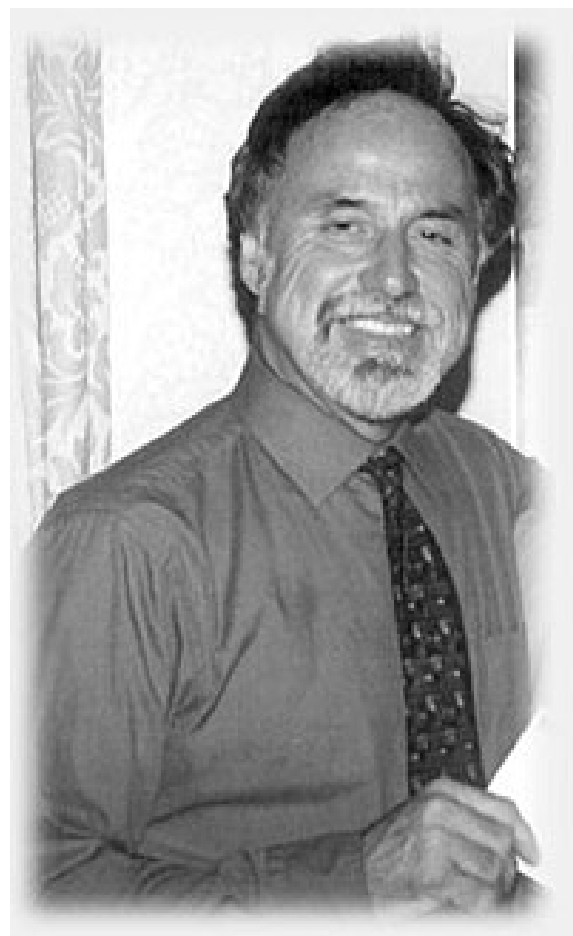
Cape May Stage took root on the banks of Grassy Sound Bay in southern New Jersey in the mid-'80s when Michael Laird moved to the shore in hopes of starting a professional Equity theater. An accomplished actor and director, he initially performed shows for friends in his living room—in exchange for a potluck dinner dish.

History of Cape May Stage

Laird incorporated the company in 1989, and performed its first show, “Sea Marks,” that year at the Chalfonte Hotel and Cold Spring Village. As audiences grew, he moved to the roomier Congress Hall. A more permanent space became available in 1993, when the city of Cape May gave Laird permission to perform at the town’s Welcome Center after hours.

Cape May Stage grew in its new shared quarters. It expanded its season, started theater classes at area schools and community colleges, and launched off-site cabaret shows. It also attracted theater legends Robert Prosky and Estelle Parsons to its stage to perform in “Love Letters” in May, 2000.

Tragically, Laird was diagnosed with terminal cancer months later, and died early the next year. His sudden death was a severe loss for the company and the community. Fortunately, Jim Moffatt, then board president, stepped in as interim Artistic Director to maintain continuity. One of his first acts was forming a search committee, which that spring named Michael Carlton Artistic Director.



Former Artistic Director
Michael Laird



History of Cape May Stage

A housing opportunity also arose during this transition. The city's Welcome Center moved to a new location in 2000, leaving city officials with room to spare at the long-time hospitality site. The building itself was an iconic structure built in 1853 for the Cape May Presbyterian Church by local carpenter, Peter Hand, a descendant of one of Cape May's founding families. The city bought the property in 1952. Today, the former church is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It also played a leading role in Cape May's designation as a National Historic Landmark.

Entering its second century, however, the property was in critical need of repairs. Regrettably, neither the city nor the theater had the means to renovate the building but Cape May Stage had a bold vision—to resurrect the former church and create a professional theater space. Enlisting the help of preservationists, architects, engineers and local businesses, the project's leadership team spent months assessing the feasibility and cost of such an undertaking. Ultimately, the community endorsed the project and the board approved it.



Momentously, on January 2, 2004, Cape May Stage signed a 25-year lease with the city of Cape May for the exclusive use of the historic property, with an option to renew for a second quarter century. Soon afterwards, it launched Project Encore, a three-year fundraising campaign to raise \$1.2 million to fund the renovation. In total, the drive netted \$1.4 million, a testament to the community's support and generosity. One gift by the Shackleton-Martel family in honor of its patriarch named the theater the Robert Shackleton Playhouse.

History of Cape May Stage



Producing Artistic Director Roy Steinberg

Roy Steinberg replaced Carlton in 2009 in an expanded role as Producing Artistic Director. A four-time Emmy-Award nominee and former producer and director of “Days of Our Lives” and “Guiding Light,” he added the theater’s popular Second Stage and Broadway Series. He also co-founded its prestigious National Playwrights Symposium, and brought award-winning talent to town.

As Cape May Stage proudly enters its fourth decade, it is committed to exploring new avenues to deliver the highest level of artistic excellence.

Staging new works; celebrating community; and providing theater experiences to wider, more diverse audiences are top priorities in 2020-2025. We invite you to join us in our journey.

