



Footlights

AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 2023

The Players of Utica Newsletter

Wit Offers a Powerful Theater Experience

THERE ARE SOME plays and theater experiences that stick with you for years and years. The Pulitzer Prize-winning drama *Wit* by Margaret Edson is one of those plays. It opens on September 8 at Players of Utica. *Footlights* spoke with director **Mike Beehm** about the production.

FOOTLIGHTS: Some of our patrons might have heard of *Wit* but don't know what it's about. Can you give us an overview?

Mike: *Wit* is a gripping story of a woman who believes that she only needs her own strength and intelligence to defeat cancer. Vivian Bearing, the main character, has only had her work throughout most of her life, forgoing friends, partners, and children for her own prestige. The play itself is Vivian's chance to befriend the audience. Vivian makes the audience her confidant in a final attempt to make a meaningful connection in her life. While *Wit* can be a highly emotional journey that explores the entire spectrum of the human condition, it also has its moments of levity and silliness, just like life.

FOOTLIGHTS: We understand you've been wanting to direct this play for some time. What draws you to this story?

Mike: I wanted to direct *Wit* primarily for three reasons. First, the story is just so eloquently written. It's a play that you have to think about, perhaps even reflect on your own life after watching it. The power of its message is beautifully conveyed in a thought-provoking way that requires the audience to digest what they have seen in order to fully understand it. Second, it is quite a challenging play to direct. But the final reason is probably the most important to me. Cancer touches everyone's life at some point, and it just so happens that this year it touched mine. My appreciation for this piece grew even more upon the battle



and survival of cancer of someone very close to me.

FOOTLIGHTS: Tell us about some of the play's characters and how you looked to cast the roles.

Mike: Vivian has to be portrayed by someone who is engaging, endearing, and entertaining from the moment she steps on the stage. I am blessed to be working with **Marilee Ensign**, who is quite a talented actress. Her work has defined Vivian as a wonderful person, with a stern edge and somewhat of a sassy



attitude. When casting the doctors, I was looking for actors who could portray a dismissive attitude and I found those actors in **Carl DeFranco** and **Steve Maggio**. I needed a strong mentor character and found **Barbara Pratt** to fill those shoes. I required a gentle, caring spirit in **Susie Monahan**, Vivian's primary nurse, and found her in **Hannah Ali**. And finally, I needed four others who could represent several different roles on stage, a complex task for any actor, and found exactly who I needed in **James McNeil**, **Vanessa Jones**, **Brett O'Grady**, and **Mike O'Brien**. This cast is amazing to work with and I can't wait to share all of their talent on stage.

FOOTLIGHTS: What were your biggest challenges in mounting this production?

Mike: This play is filled with medical terminology and procedures that I had to teach myself about. I have been very lucky in finding a group of people who are more knowledgeable than I am about this subject and are willing to take time to teach the cast and crew. Additionally, we had to acquire the medical equipment necessary for this play, and the Mohawk Valley Health System has been indispensable in their donations of medical equipment!

FOOTLIGHTS: What's your best hope for how audiences will experience this play?

Mike: *Wit* wants you to walk out of the theater, go home and keep thinking about it while you brush your teeth the next morning. It is my hope that audiences can not only enjoy the show in the moment but take something personal away from it as well.

Performances for *Wit* are as follows: Fridays, September 8 and 15 at 7:30 p.m.; Saturdays, September 9 and 16 at 2:00 p.m.; and Sundays, September 10 and 17 at 2:00 p.m. For all tickets, go to our website at <http://www.playersofutica.org/order-tickets> or call 315-724-7624. ☆

Remembering Jane Metzger – Actor, Director, and Patron

FOR MANY YEARS, the name **Jane Metzger** was almost synonymous with Players of Utica in the minds of the actors, directors, and crew who worked with her as well as audience members who attended our productions. For 68 years (counting her first appearance on the Players stage), Jane was an accomplished actor, highly regarded director, and a valued and influential member of Players' Board of Directors.

Jane passed away on July 1, 2023 at the age of 96.

Jane's first acting role with Players of Utica was in *The King of Hearts* in 1955. She moved away from the area for several years, but upon her return to Central New York resumed her passion for theatre and began her long association with our community theatre. Jane appeared as an actor in 26 Players of Utica productions, including *Blithe Spirit* (1978), *Sweeney Todd* (1981), *The Gin Game* (1984), *Steel Magnolias* (1991), *Arsenic and Old Lace* (1992), *Three Tall Women* (2000), *The Children's Hour* (2006), and *Enchanted April* (2012). Her last appearance was in *Over the River and Through the Woods* in 2012. She also performed with other theatre groups in the area.

Despite her long list of acting credits, Jane was perhaps even prouder of her accomplishments as a director. She directed 27 productions for Players from 1987 to 2018, including *No Sex, Please, We're British* (1987), *The Dining Room* (1992), *The Novelist* (1997), *Present Laughter* (2000), *Ancestral Voices* (2001, 2010), *The Diary of Anne Frank* (2003), *Art* (2007), *Dandelion Wine* (2009, 2018), *Picnic* (2009), and *Love Letters* (2016). Even in the last few years before her passing she was planning new directing projects.

As a member of Players' Board of Directors, Jane served for 40 years, from 1983 to 2023; she was corresponding secretary from 1986 to 1988, vice president from 1997 to 1999, president from 2000 to 2003, past-president for the 2003-2004 season, and since 2004 was an emeritus board member. As a patron of the theatre, she rarely missed attending one of our shows.

"Some of my earliest childhood memories of Jane," says daughter **Leslie Reilly** (also a veteran Players actor), "were of her performing on stage, and I remember feeling somewhat jealous of that. As I began acting myself, I always counted it a privilege to have acted with her on stage or under her direction."

"Jane has been an actor and director for more years than I can remember," says **Art Felshaw**, Players' president. "Caring and gentle and at the same time firm and no-nonsense. She is woven into the fabric of Players. A leader, a teacher, a mentor, and someone who I will never forget. Thank you for being there when I needed a chat, Jane."

Dan Fusillo, himself a long-time actor, director, and board executive with Players, says, "Jane personified for me the best Players of Utica could offer culturally for our community. At Players, I had the pleasure of directing her as Mrs. Lovett in the play version of *Sweeney Todd* (1981), being on stage with her in *On Golden Pond* (1985), and directed by her in *The King's Balcony* (1988). In each production, her talent, professionalism, and dedication were always genuinely shared with cast and crew."

Players of Utica offers its condolences to Jane's family. We will sorely miss our great theatre friend. ☆



Jane Metzger in *The King of Hearts*, her first play with Players in 1955 (with Harry Mayer).



In *Walt of the Toreadors*, 1960.

Hey, You Could Join the Players of Utica Board

PLAYERS OF UTICA's Board of Governors is the core of our organization — the lifeblood of the season's performances and the stewards of our theatre building. You are invited to bring your skills to our board. We value your experience and savvy in such functions as volunteer coordination, marketing, programming, community advocacy, grant writing, financial management, fund-raising, building operations... or however else you believe you can contribute to our theatre.

What's in it for you? As a board member, you'll become a part of our fascinating history — we're the oldest continually operating community theatre in New York State! Help guide us to an even brighter future. Your voice will be heard and have impact because you'll have a seat behind the wheel of a vibrant organization. You'll have the honor, challenge, and responsibility of understanding how everything works together for Players to accomplish its goals.

And you know what? Being part of a community theatre is fun! For more information or to schedule a tour of the Players of Utica theatre, contact Kelly DeGrace at: kellydegraceplayers@aol.com. We'll be thrilled to hear from you! ☆



PLAYERS OF UTICA

2023–2024 Season

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Players of Utica
1108 State St., Utica
315-724-7624
www.playersofutica.org

FREE SEASON PREVIEW



AUGUST 20

PRESENTING SCENES FROM PLAYERS' 2023-2024 SEASON



Don't Miss Our Free Season Preview on August 20

JOIN US ON Sunday, August 20 at 2 p.m. for a free preview of our 2023-2024 Season! You'll enjoy select scenes from all five of our upcoming shows:

- *W;t*
- *Last of the Red Hot Lovers*
- *She Kills Monsters*
- *Laughing Stock*
- *Funny Girl*

It will be an entertaining afternoon of drama, comedy, adventure, and music presented by the shows' directors and featuring some of the area's best performers.

Once you see this preview, we're certain you'll want to subscribe to the entire season so you don't miss any one of these terrific productions.

No tickets or reservations are required, but you might want to arrive early because seating is limited and the theatre is sure to fill up quickly for this special event. ☆

Call for Directors

PLAYERS OF UTICA is seeking directors for full-length plays for our 2024-2025 season. To provide audiences with the best possible entertainment, Players is seeking shows that have strong audience appeal or recognition, are commercially successful, and appeal to a diverse age range.

Prospective directors can apply by using the [Director's Proposal Form](#).

Get details at <https://www.playersofutica.org/call-for-directors> or scan the QR code below.

Submission deadline: November 1, 2023.

Send scripts and proposals to:

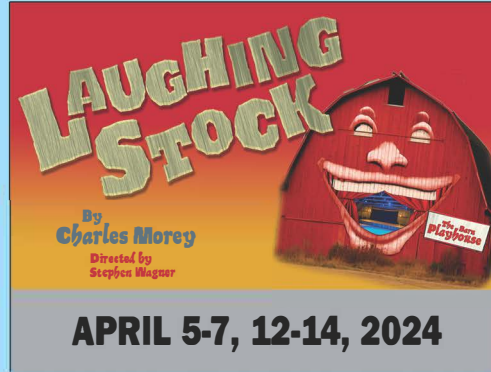
Players of Utica – Proposals
PO Box 29
New Hartford, NY 13413

Or email (with pdf of script) to
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and great
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Players of Utica 2023-2024 Season Subscription Form

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Complete this form and mail with payment to: Players of Utica, Subscriptions, PO Box 29, New Hartford, NY 13413

Name: _____ Address: _____

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Each subscription gets you 5 Flex-Pass tickets. Use one at each show or two at two shows, or any other combination. Select the # of subscriptions at the desired level below. An additional tax-deductible donation is always appreciated!

of Adult @ \$80 ea. = _____

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