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PRESS KIT



MERRIMACK REPERTORY THEATRE

2015-16 SEASON



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ABOUT MRT

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.

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 243 productions, including 22 world premieres and 38 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.

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 SITI 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*
Stephen J. Irish, *President*
Judith Benson, *Vice-President*
Donald Bedard, *Treasurer*
Terry T. Howard, *Secretary*

Denise Bey
Richard E. Bolton, Jr.
Michael Conway
Daniel R. Frantz
Denise Glaser

Debra Grossman
Frank Hopkins
Dennis P. Jones
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Tom Larkin
Jeff Maclaren
Patricia McCafferty
Keith B. Mitchell
Susan Mitchell
Linda Monticciolo

Alyce Moore
Jack Moynihan
Steve Normandin
Lincoln Pinsky
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



2015-16 SEASON



THE LION

August 26 – September 20, 2015

Written and Performed by Benjamin Scheuer

Some stories have to be sung.

A good storyteller uses everything he has. So Benjamin Scheuer (pictured) uses his guitar — actually, six guitars — to tell one man's gripping coming-of-age story. The award-winning songwriter inspires and charms with his raw wit and emotional depth as he leads you on a musical journey from boyhood to manhood, through pain and healing, to discover the redemptive power of music. (Pictured: Benjamin Scheuer)

Press Performances:
Sunday, August 30
2:00 pm or 7:00 pm

Running Time:
Approximately
80 minutes with
no intermission



I AND YOU

October 7 – November 1, 2015

By Lauren Gunderson

They have more in common than they know.

Caroline hates poetry. She's also something of a loner. So just about the last thing she wanted was a complete stranger named Anthony walking through her bedroom door to work on a school project about Walt Whitman. But as the two very different teenagers uncover deep bonds, Caroline finds herself opening up in ways she never imagined possible. Their journey is an explosion of thought on art, connection, and identity that will warm your heart, with an ending that will leave you breathless.

Press Performances:
Sunday, October 10
2:00 pm or 7:00 pm

Running Time:
Approximately
80 minutes with
no intermission



IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE: A LIVE RADIO PLAY

November 25 – December 20, 2015

Adapted by Joe Landry

No man is a failure who has friends.

Bring your whole family and come together with the community to celebrate the holiday season. This heartwarming classic is presented as a 1940's radio show, with sound effects performed live on stage. Whether you've heard it a hundred times or never before, George Bailey's timeless story of renewal will surely ring true.

Press Performances:
Sunday, November 29
2:00 pm or 7:00 pm

Running Time:
Approximately
90 minutes with
no intermission



THE WHITE CHIP

January 6 - January 31, 2016

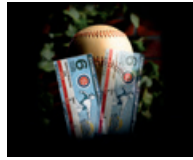
By Sean Daniels

Laughing at a drunk guy, but in a good way.

Things start out so well for our hero. After all, not every Mormon boy gets to be baptized for the dead. By the time he's in his 30's, his career is soaring (the Mormonism, not so much). But somehow sneaking beer in high school has turned into sneaking vodka in staff meetings - and having it all turns into losing everything. A darkly funny take on the science of addiction, recovery, and the importance of finding just

Press Performances:
Sunday, January 10
2:00 pm or 7:00 pm

Running Time: TBD



the right Jews at just the right time.

TINKER TO EVERS TO CHANCE

February 10 - March 6, 2016

By Mat Smart

The power of the love of the game.

Baseball fans know all about commitment and hope. But in life outside the ballpark, that dedication can be harder to hold on to. Lauren is thinking only about the monumentally important playoff game she and her mother are about to attend, but her mother has her own agenda. In this touching play, set against the dual backdrops of the 2003 and 1906 Chicago Cub teams, three die-hard fans and one die-hard player

Press Performances:
Sunday, February 14
2:00 pm or 7:00 pm

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

reveal the redeeming power of baseball.



THE REALNESS: A BREAK BEAT PLAY

March 16 – April 10, 2016

By Idris Goodwin

There's nothing more hip-hop than falling in love.

It's 1996, the hip-hop scene is roaring, and T.O. has arrived in the city, eager to immerse himself in a culture he's only observed from the safety of the suburbs. He falls hard for Prima, an MC who entrances him with her music and her authenticity. When he lies and schemes to stay in her life, is it in the name of true love or just another part of his obsession with the hip-hop lifestyle?

Press Performances:
Sunday, March 20
2:00 pm or 7:00 pm

Running Time: TBD



HOME OF THE BRAVE

April 20 – May 15, 2016

By Lila Rose Kaplan

What happens in the barn stays in the barn.

Senator Bernadette Spence is ready to run for President. Now, she just has to get her family on board. She returns to her Iowa home for the holidays with her dashing British campaign manager at her side. What could possibly go wrong? Just about everything, it turns out. This raucous, big-hearted comedy pits politics against family values and lovingly skewers them both. (Pictured: Karen MacDonald)

Press Performances:
Sunday, April 24
2:00 pm or 7:00 pm

Running Time:
Approximately
90 minutes with
no intermission

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.

Sean Daniels, who is beginning his first season as MRT's Artistic Director, 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 ("Veep", "The
Daily Show", "Legit")

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

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

Mark Cuddy, Artistic Director, Geva
Theatre & Cape Playhouse

Celina Dean, Actor

Kristoffer Diaz, Playwright,
Pulitzer Prize Finalist

Julie Felise Dubiner, Dramaturg

Veronika Duerr, Actor,
Director, Producer

Reginald Edmund, Playwright

Nick Gandiello, Playwright

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

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

Kristen Mengelkoch, Actor

Kelly Miller, Dramaturg/Producer

Aaron Munoz, Actor

Peter Sinn Nachtrieb, Playwright

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

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

Sam Willmott, Composer,
Kleban Award Winner

Jessica Wortham, Actor

Lucky Yates, Actor ("Archer"), Puppeteer

Karen Zacarias, Playwright

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 receives a generous grant from the **Ronald M. Ansin Foundation** and other sponsors 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.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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.

During the 2014-15 Season, MRT

- Partnered with the local Cambodian-American community to co-present film screenings and dance performances
- Helped the Lowell Humane Society find homes for its rescued pets, and hosted a pet supply drive in the theatre lobby
- Welcomed guest speakers on a huge range of topics related to its productions, from restorative justice to alcoholism to pet therapy.
- Opened its doors to insightful exhibits and backstage tours, 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
 Girls, Inc.
 The Improbable Players
 Juvenile Court Restorative Justice Coalition
 Lowell Community Health Center
 Lowell House, Inc.
 Lowell Humane Society
 The Luna Theatre
 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 Sundays

Following the first Sunday evening performance of each production, join the cast, crew, and staff in the lobby for a complimentary glass of wine to celebrate the completion of the first week of performances.



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 *The Lion* (September 10), *I and You* (October 22), *Tinker to Evers to Chance* (February 25), and *Home of the Brave* (May 5).



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

THE COHORT CLUB

The Cohort Club is a group of approximately two dozen 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 2015-16 COHORTS FOLLOW THREE SHOWS FROM START (FIRST REHEARSAL) TO FINISH (OPENING NIGHT)

I and You

Tinker to Evers to Chance

Home of the Brave

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 Greets" 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 COHORTS

Denise Audy

Aurora Erickson

Barbara Lallas

John Rogers

Michael Bacigalupo

Nicole Fontaine

Breanna McLaughlin

Donn Rosensweig

Bruce Browne

Olivia Gavriel

Rogers

Dominic Ryan

Erin Burns

Don Greenwood

Patricia Morris

Helen Tubrett

Eric Chouinard

Dennis Kearney

Bob O'Neil

Nancy Weber

Susan Elberger

Suzanne Keefe

Jim Ravan



(Pictured: Karen MacDonald)

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.



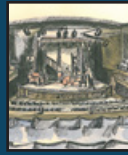
1980

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.



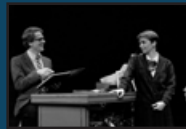
1983

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*.



1987

Wins its first Boston Drama Critics Award for *The Importance of Being Earnest*.



1997

Opens children's summer theatre program, now called MRT Young Company. On hiatus in 2015, Young Company will return in 2016.



1993

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



2004

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



2001

Charles Towers hired as Artistic Director.



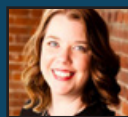
2008

Bob Clyman's *Secret Order* becomes the first MRT production to move to New York, at Off-Broadway's 59E59 Theatres.



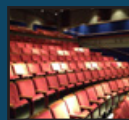
2013

Elizabeth Kegley hired as Executive Director.



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.



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

Sean Daniels hired as Artistic Director.



2015

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



PRODUCTION HISTORY

*World Premier

+Regional Premiere

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 Avvazian
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 Korbemeyer

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. Harrer

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

THE LITTLE THEATRE THAT BELIEVED IT COULD



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

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 one of Massachusetts' theatre LORT members. With an over \$2,000,000 annual operating budget and nearly 4,000 subscribers, the “little theatre that believed it could” has proved not only that it could, but that it did and will continue to for years to come.

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, yet

in the decades ahead, the city would welcome a host of new cultural institutions to its streets: the American Textile History and New England Quilt museum; the Lowell Folk Festival; a multitude of art galleries; the Angkor Dance Troupe; minor league baseball and hockey teams. An ever-evolving city, its motto rings true: “Art is the Handmaid of Human Good.”

Set on the banks of the Merrimack River, the city's life has been perpetually intertwined with its waters. The early 1800's forged its true character, as the recently-dug Pawtucket Canal through rural “East Chelmsford” channeled water for transportation and industry. The first water-powered cotton machinery appeared in 1801, followed quickly by enormous mills and factories. In 1826, the town was officially incorporated, named after industrial pioneer Francis Cabot Lowell.



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



Snow, 2012 (Lei Han) - <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.0/legalcode>

The population boom was astounding: that year (1826), there were 2,500 Lowellians. Just a decade later, that number had grown over six times. Lowell—or Mill City—would become the second city incorporated in Massachusetts as its population skyrocketed for nearly a century, reaching 112,000 by 1920. Cotton and other textiles were Lowell’s primary output, and textile production was the way of life for those who lived here. Ten mill complexes sprawled over nearly six miles of canals, where thousands upon thousands of workers packed the mills, averaging 73-hour work weeks.

While the river drove the city’s rise, **Lowell’s heart has always been its people**. Many were “mill girls” who left their farm homes and went to live in the mills’ boardinghouses. The labor movement found early footing in Lowell with an 1834 strike led by those mill girls, followed by many more fights for fair treatment of the city’s workers. As the country’s demographics began to shift, so did Lowell’s: wave after wave of immigrants

earned a living in Lowell’s red brick buildings: the Irish, Eastern European Jews, French Canadians, Armenians, Portuguese, the Polish and the Greeks.

The legacy has continued: Vietnamese arrivals in 1975 made their home here, as did Cambodians in 1979, the year of MRT’s first season. 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. Lowell is a diverse city, its rich ethnic tapestry enhancing its arts scene.

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.



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



Lowell from above. Photo © Higgins + Ross

SOURCES:
 Lowell Historical Society Timeline: http://www.lowellhistoricalsociety.org/lowell_history.htm
 Park Handbook, Lowell National Historical Park:
<http://www.nps.gov/lowe/historyculture/park-handbook.htm>

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

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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
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Reviewing

Reviewers and bloggers interested in publishing a review of a production are encouraged to attend Press Opening on the first Sunday of each production.

News

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