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The Legend Of GEORGIA McBRIDE

by Matthew Lopez | Directed by Meredith McDonough





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The Legend of Georgia McBride tells the story of an upstart Elvis impersonator, Casey, and his journey to stardom. The problem is, he isn't finding stardom impersonating The King. The rent is late, the checking account is overdrawn, and his wife, Jo, is frustrated. When Jo tells Casey that she is pregnant, he is not sure how they will make it through.

One night, just as Casey is getting ready to hit the stage at Cleo's, a local bar, a tornado of fab and fierce sweeps into his dressing room in the persons of Miss Tracy Mills and Miss Anorexia Nervosa (Rexy), two drag queens. Tracy is the cousin of Cleo's owner, Eddie, and has come to take over Casey's slot. Casey begrudgingly agrees to continue on and bartend as he and Jo are desperate for money.

The next night, Rexy shows up for the performance completely drunk and unable to go on. Eddie and Tracy implore Casey to go on in her place, and during that first awkward performance, Georgia McBride is born. Casey is then faced with a choice: embrace his skills as a performer in the guise of Miss McBride, or leave and lose his chance at financial stability and artistic fulfillment?

CHARAC^{*}



Kevin Kantor

Casey - A young man trying to find financial security for his family while also fulfilling his artistic dreams of being a performer.



Shavanna Calder

Jo - Casey's wife. Jo is a strong, independent woman, who is often frustrated with Casey's inability to be practical and logical in reference to their basic needs.



Armand Fields

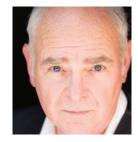
Rexy - A sassy and fierce drag gueen with a bit of a drinking problem. Rexy is not the most responsible, but understands that her existence and performance are revolutionary acts.

Jason - Casey's friend and landlord.



Courter Simmons

Miss Tracy Mills - A veteran drag queen, classy, smart, and kind. Miss Tracy does not suffer fools, but also serves as a mentor and guide for Casey in his journey to finding artistic fulfillment and taking on responsibilities like an adult.



James Pickering

Eddie - The owner of Cleo's. He is abrasive and a bit of a curmudgeon, but is willing to take risks if they make him some cash. As the play goes on and Cleo's thrives, he more fully embraces the fabulousness of his business.

Collette Pollard Scenic Designer **Lindsay Jones** Sound Designer Frank Honts

Sara Sheets*

Stage Manager

Abbi Hess

Patrick Holt

David Roman

Casting Director Stage Management Resident

Costume Designer

Stage Movement Director

Jonathan Hetler **Assistant Director**

Paul Toben Lighting Designer Clare Arena Haden Voice & Text Director

Kira Neighbors* Assistant Stage Manager **Bjorn Nasett Community Consultant**

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT MATTHEW LOPEZ AND THE PLAY



Matthew Lopez was born in Panama City, Florida in 1977. Lopez attended the University of South Florida and had plans to become an actor, but eventually shifted his focus to playwriting and moved to New York.

Lopez is perhaps best known for his play *The Whipping Man* (2006), one of the mostly widely produced plays of the last several years. *The Whipping Man* won Obie and Lucille Lortel awards as well as the John Gassner New Play Award from the New York Outer Circle Critics. Milwaukee Rep produced *The Whipping Man* during our 2013/14 Season. Lopez is also the writer of the plays *Somewhere* and *Reverberation*. His epic, six-and-a-half hour, two-part play *The Inheritance*, premiered at the Young Vic in London in 2018 and earned eight Olivier nominations, winning Best Play and three other awards.

The play has been hailed as a modern classic, and some critics have cited it as one of the most important American plays of the 21st century thus far. It is currently playing on Broadway.

Lopez is writing the book for a Broadway musical version of *Some Like It Hot* and has several films in development. He currently lives in New York with his husband.

ON THE INSPIRATION FOR CASEY:

It actually all started with a playlist, which my thenboyfriend, now-husband, and I got our hands on from friends of a friend. The legend of this playlist has it that ...the roommate of a friend had created this playlist for her boyfriend, who was beginning to explore drag as a performance outlet.

The playlist was called "Persona," and it was filled with country-western female vocalists . . .interspersed with covers of Elvis Presley songs and songs about Elvis by female vocalists.

My husband and I listened to it a lot, and I began to see the play. I was attracted to the notion of a straight man exploring drag.... That's where I got the idea of setting it in my hometown and telling the story of this down-on-his-luck straight white guy who is an aspiring Elvis impersonator, who has definitely got performing in his blood, but who has not yet fully actualized as an artist or a person. And he stumbles on this and blossoms as a result, and really comes into his own as an adult through this process.

ON LOPEZ'S EXPERIENCE WITH DRAG:

When I was in my late teens, I had a friend who started doing drag, and I would go to the one and only gay bar in town and watch him perform. I would also hang out in the dressing room before the show and watch the queens get dressed. So my introduction to drag was largely from the inside out. I had a firsthand demonstration of how it came together, how it was built on these queens' bodies and on their faces, and how it became something wonderful and electric onstage.

ON THE SOCIOPOLITICAL INFLUENCE OF DRAG:

She [Rexy] has to remind him [Casey] — or teach him for the first time — that drag once was and still is a dangerous thing, and by the same token, it is the only way for some people to survive in a dangerous world.

I remember when I was a teenager, growing up gay in a very conservative town, that being inside this gay bar did feel safe. Drag, as it's practiced in these small Southern gay bars, enables a sense of transgression, a sense of rebellion, a sense of resistance. And it's also a hell of a lot of fun.

ELVIS IMPERSONATORS: A PROFESSION AND A PASSION

Elvis impersonators (or Elvis Tribute Artists, as many in the community call themselves), like Casey, are a group spanning nations, genders, and ethnicities. There are estimated to be several thousand Elvis impersonators in the world; only the best make significant income from their trade. The Elvis impersonator community holds competitions around the world, although only two are sanctioned by Elvis' estate. Some do it professionally and some just for fun, but all Elvis impersonators have a passion for The King, his music, his look, and his moves. In 2014, 895 Elvises gathered in North Carolina to achieve the Guinness World Record for "Largest Gathering of Elvis Impersonators." From early classic Elvis to the more campy and popular jumpsuited Elvis, Elvis Tribute Artists embrace all phases of The King's life and career.

SOME NOTABLE IMPERSONATORS:

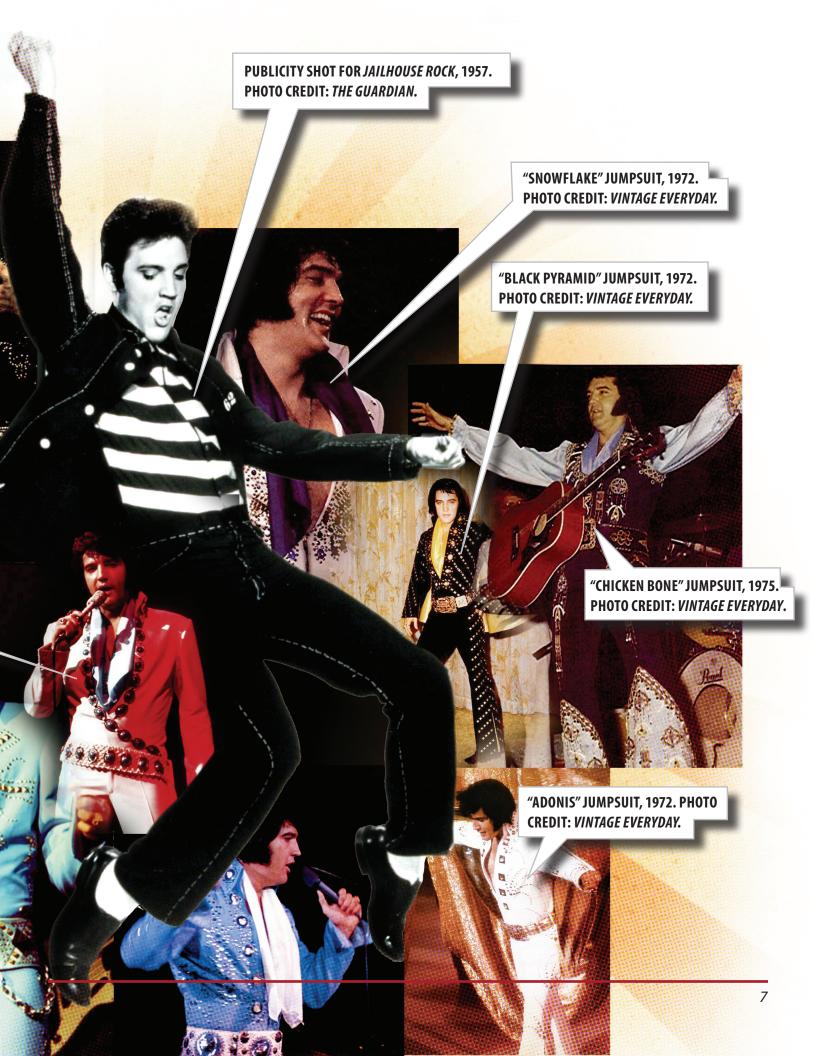






"AZTEC STAR" JUMPSUIT, 1972. PHOTO CREDIT: VINTAGE EVERYDAY.

"TURQUOISE CONCHO" JUMPSUIT, 1971.
PHOTO CREDIT: VINTAGE EVERYDAY.



DESPERATELY SEEKING A DIVA: CASEY'S ICON TRY-ONS

As Casey works to discover his drag persona, he and Tracy try to find his inner queen by exploring some legendary divas in rehearsal. These women have served as inspiration for many drag performers and Casey eventually finds his inner diva after some failed attempts along the way.



ÉDITH PIAF - The diva who draws Casey into the drag life, Piaf was a French chanteuse who was best known for her soulful performances full of strong emotions and heavy drama.



MADONNA - The original "Material Girl," Madonna has been a gay icon since she first burst onto the pop music scene 35 years ago.



JUDY GARLAND - The star of stage and screen of yesteryear, Judy Garland was an icon and diva of the first degree. She has served as a gay icon for many, even being the inspiration for the term "Friend of Dorothy," which was a code phrase which identified someone as gay.



LIZA MINNELLI - Judy
Garland's daughter, Liza
Minnelli, has followed in her
mother's footsteps as a gay
icon. She has been active in
HIV/AIDS charities and has
long been a friend to the
LGBTQ+ community.



BARBRA STREISAND - From the very beginning, Barbra was connected to the gay community and gay audiences, making her an icon for the past fifty years.



BRITNEY SPEARS - Britney is one of a younger generation of gay icons and drag inspirations, but she is nonetheless an icon all the same.



BETTE MIDLER - "The Divine Miss M" has been a favorite and advocate of the gay community since her career's early days. Midler has fully embraced her role in drag performances as well. She has said: "I've been accused of [being a drag queen] many times! But I take it with a grain of salt. To me, it's a supreme compliment."



RIHANNA - Rihanna has been an advocate for her LGBTQ+ fans over the years, and this combined with her talent, immense sense of fashion, and infectious music has secured her place as a gay icon and inspiration for drag performers.



FERGIE - As a solo artist and as a member of the Black Eyed Peas, Fergie has seen continued support from the LGBTQ+ community.



LORETTA LYNN - Loretta Lynn is one of the most well-known and iconic women in country music.



EMMYLOU HARRIS - She is one of the most prolific women in country music and her unique style has made her a major figure in music history.



DIXIE CHICKS - Tracy suggests that she and Casey do a Dixie Chicks number. Dixie Chicks are fiercely political, fiercely pro-LGBTQ+ rights, and fiercely independent women with immense talent.

Edith Piaf Photo Credit: Theatre in Paris. Madonna Photo Credit: Wikipedia. Britney Spears Photo Credit: Smithsonian Magazine. Liza Minnelli Photo Credit: Pinterest. Barbra Streisand Photo Credit: Wikipedia. Britney Spears Photo Credit: Wallhere. Bette Midler Photo Credit: AtoZPhotos. Rihanna Photo Credit: Pinterest. Fergie Photo Credit: Pinterest. Loretta Lynn Photo Credit: Pixels. Emmylou Harris Photo Credit: Rolling Stone. Dixie Chicks Photo Credit: The Globe and Mail.



DRAG QUEENS: FROM THE BALLROOMS TO THE MAINSTREAM

Men playing women onstage is as old as theater itself. From the Ancient Greeks to Shakespearean stages to Beijing Opera, male actors played female characters, often due to the idea that theater was too uncouth for women to partake in as performers. What we know of as "drag" today has its roots in these traditions, but truly started in the 1800s in the world of vaudeville and burlesque. Julian Eltinge, one of the most famous female impersonators of the 19th century, was so in demand that he played on Broadway, toured the U.S. and Europe, and eventually got his own Broadway theater. "Mainstream audiences have always sought out drag," says Frank DeCaro, author of Drag: Combing Through the Big Wigs of Show Business. "Maybe not the kind of drag we have today, where the performer is more honest about themselves. But it's always been a way for straight audiences to walk on the mildly wild side."

Female impersonation was often played for laughs, as seeing men in dresses was seen as humorous and silly. This trope has been reinforced by popular culture again and again through classic films such as *Some Like It Hot*, television shows, and theatrical plays. The term "drag" was not applied to these contexts and has an interesting history of its own.

The term "drag" originated as early as the 1300s, but found its connection to male performers wearing dresses in the 1800s, as their petticoats would drag on the floor, so they referred to dressing up as women as "putting on their drags." The term found its connection to the LGBTQ+ community in the 1920s, possibly emerging from a secret language born out of the criminalization of homosexuality in England. The 1920s also saw a rise in drag balls, which may have dated back to as far as 1867, but found their footing in house parties where Black queer people congregated during the dangerous era of Prohibition.

In the 1950s, drag queens began performing in bars and other queer spaces, and as more gay bars came into being, drag

solidified its place as a queer art form, not just something played for laughs by straight men. In the 1970s, drag became less popular, but Divine scandalized audiences and cemented her place as a drag icon in John Waters' 1972 film *Pink Flamingos*. By the 1980s, the Harlem ball scene was thriving, and the 1990 documentary *Paris is Burning* brought that culture to the masses. In 1984, the advent of the annual Wigstock festival brought drag to the streets of New York and out of the ballrooms.

In the 1990s, drag queens became pop culture darlings for the first time with RuPaul's hit song "Supermodel" and her appearances across mainstream media. Films centered on queens came out, including *The Adventures of Priscilla*, *Queen of the Desert; The Birdcage*; and *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything, Julie Newmar*. During this time, a distinction between drag queens and the other identities in the LGBTQ+community emerged, specifically between queens and the trans community.

In the 2000s, the definitions of "drag" again expanded, with the inclusion of performers who explored the art form in new ways. In 2009, RuPaul's Drag Race premiered and became a huge hit, bringing drag into America's living rooms. The show spawned RuPaul's DragCon in 2015, a huge convention for drag gueens and fans, as well as multiple touring shows. Kinky Boots, a musical about an unlikely pairing between a drag queen and a shoemaker, won the 2013 Tony Award for Best Musical. Today, some churches hold drag worship services, drag bingo is a fixture in some communities, libraries hold drag story times, and Hamburger Mary's, a burger joint known for their drag shows and drag bingo, has franchises across the country (including right here in Milwaukee). Premiering in 2018, the television series *Pose* has brought eighties ballroom culture to television. Drag is still a subversive and powerful art form, but these days, it is reaching people in more ways than ever before.



WALKING THE WALK: STEPS TO SERVING FIERCENESS

In the delightfully campy and equally problematic film *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything, Julie Newmar*, veteran queens dole out the four steps to becoming a drag queen:

- 1. "USE GOOD THOUGHTS AS YOUR SWORD AND SHIELD"
- 2. "IGNORE ADVERSITY."

- 3. "ABIDE BY THE RULES OF LOVE."
- 4. "LARGER THAN LIFE IS JUST THE RIGHT SIZE."

While these words of wisdom may be helpful to the queens in the film, the actual steps that go into creating a drag performance are a bit more involved and specific!

Shave - Nothing ruins a lady's look like a five-o-clock shadow! (Some drag performers are starting to embrace facial and other body hair as part of their personas, but if that's not your thing, shaving is a must!)

Modify Your Bod - Time to tuck, tape, and transform! Hide a little bit there, add a little bit of T&A, and maybe cinch in your lovely waist to reveal those womanly curves!

Makeup Your Mug - Time to put on some paint. Choose your style and your colors, but whatever you do, make sure your face is fierce! Contour, highlight, lashes, sparkles, the sky is the limit!

Fabulous Fashion - Pull on those hose, step into those heels, and grab your gown. You are a queen and you deserve to dress like royalty. Whether campy or glamourous, fishy or flashy, you do you!

Don your Do - All good queens need a fabulous coif to complete their look. Find your wig and secure it on tightly, as you'll be serving up sass and do not need a hair malfunction!

Strut Your Stuff - Like the iconic queen RuPaul says on Drag Race, "Get Out There and Lip Sync for Your Life!" Do your thing, leave it all on the stage, and dazzle that audience with your talents.

Miss Cleo Pockalipps, aka former Milwaukee Rep Acting EPR Armand Fields modeling her fabulous fashion choices. Photo Credit: Adam Ouahmane

Remember fledgling queens, this whole process can take years to perfect and literally hours to complete before a performance. Drag queens are artistes and should be revered as such!

Armand FieldsFEATURED ARTIST

"Sashay away" is not advice Armand Fields would take, even if it was from RuPaul herself. Fields is an established actor and drag queen who has worked nationally on both stage and television. They are currently at the Milwaukee Rep starring as Rexy/Jason in *The Legend of Georgia McBride*. However, things were not always so easy for the Oklahoma native.

"I was in Chicago, trying to figure out my life. I got signed to a bigger agency and was trying to act full time. It wasn't working out and I was miserable," said Fields. That's where drag came in, but not without caution.

"I was apprehensive at first. Being queer and being a performer there is this kind of expectation. I was okay with that not being my thing. I was also afraid of what the industry would think of me because it happened around the same time that my acting career started to take off," said Fields.

They were working on a Milli Vanilli play in Chicago, around the same time met another drag queen, Shea Coulee, Fields found that all the elements were already there for the taking. They saw people in their community doing drag competitions and making money. They decided to make the transition and quit their job to take up drag full time. And it worked. They started winning competitions and making money.

Both acting and drag performances come with their own set of challenges, especially when acting as a drag queen. "When you're acting as a drag queen there is a tight rope you're walking. You still have to carry the storyline. You have to listen, respond, and react. Then when you're a drag queen you are the producer, costume designer, and choreographer, it's all you. So you have no one to blame if the audience doesn't like what you're putting up," said Fields.

Despite the demanding nature of both types of performance, Fields finds productions like *Georgia McBride* incredibly important. "You have the character, Casey, who is a straight, white man coming into this culture thinking everything is great and hunky dory. But it's not all like that, you need to know the harsh realities of this world, especially in this community. My character, Rexy, is the dark character in the play and sets the record straight for him. Yes, the play ties up in a pretty bow, but I love the show because it has its fantasy moments and its reality moments."

Despite their own trials, Fields has managed to stay positive, and it has paid off. "Continue to follow your heart. Listen to that little voice that says "if it sounds crazy, do it." No one else is going to design your destiny for you. And even when someone tells you no, do not let that stop you. Know that there is something greater out there for you."

You can catch Fields off Milwaukee Rep's stage as King on the newly premiered *Work in Progress* or you can watch them on the third season of *The Chi* or premiering on Valentine's Day on Freeform in *The Thing About Harry*.



TALKING THE TALK: ALLUSIONS AND TERMS IN THE PLAY

Throughout the play, Tracy and Rexy drop a lot of pop culture and historical references into their conversations.

A little primer on some of those references.

Driving Miss Daisy - a 1989 film starring Morgan Freeman and Jessica Tandy about the unlikely friendship between a white woman and her black chauffeur.

Graceland - Elvis's estate, which is now a tourist attraction.

Ed Sullivan - an iconic TV host whose show was a launch pad for many legendary artists such as Elvis and The Beatles.

Zima - a malt beverage popular in the 1990s and early 2000s.

Carol Ann - a character in the *Poltergeist* franchise of films. Young Carol Ann was taken to the other side and could communicate with the spirits in the films.

The Golden Girls - a TV show that aired in the 1980s and for many years thereafter in syndication about the lives of four older women who were roommates, best friends, and hilarious.

Lifetime Television for Women - a cable network that has long been considered programmed specifically for women, even though they dropped the "for women" years ago.

"Leave us alone!" - when helping Casey and dealing with hangers, Tracy channels an iconic scene in *Mommie Dearest* where Faye Dunaway as Joan Crawford screams at her daughter about wire hangers.

Janet Reno - former Attorney General of the United States.

"Et tu, Brute?" - a line from Shakespeare's Julius Caesar which references the betrayal of Caesar. "At last my arm is complete again!" - a line from Sweeney Todd that the title character utters when he once again has a razor in his hand.

Frances Gumm - Judy Garland's birth name.

"Drag Queensters" - a reference to the Teamsters, one of the most powerful labor unions in the United States.

The Crying Game - a 1992 thriller which examined issues of race, gender, sexuality, and nationality against the backdrop of the conflict in Northern Ireland.

"I'm going to turn into Jessica Lange any second." - a reference to award-winning and highly talented actress, Jessica Lange who is known for depth in her portrayal of dramatic roles.

Von Trapp Family Singers - a real-life family singing troupe that inspired the iconic musical *The Sound of Music*.

Lady Chablis - a notable transgender actress and performer who was one of the first drag performers accepted by a wider audience due to her exposure from the book and film adaptation of *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*.

Hedda Lettuce - a well-known drag queen who has been performing since the early 1990s in film and television.

Lypinska - Lypinska performs highly-edited showlength pieces from 20th century performances in music and song. Her drag performances are groundbreaking and unique.

Divine - Divine was one of the first drag queens to be brought to a wider audience through the films of John Waters. She was best known for her filthy and shocking performance in *Pink Flamingos*, but also appeared in several other films.

Barbette - Barbette was a drag performer and aerialist in the early twentieth century. She would perform in full drag and then do a reveal at the end of her aerial act. Truly a pioneer in the world of drag who was popular in the United States and abroad, especially Paris.

Stonewall - On June 28, 1969, police raided the New York gay bar the Stonewall Inn. Patrons did not go quietly and instead resisted the police and fought for their rights. Trans women of color led the call, and the catalyst for the LGBTQ+ rights movement went down in history as a pivotal moment in the fight for equal rights.

Mattachine Society - founded in the 1950s, the Mattachine Society was one of the earliest LGBTQ+ rights groups in the United States.

ACT UP - the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power was founded in the 1980s and is an organization that fights for the rights of people living with HIV/AIDS. The organization was one of the first highly vocal and highly confrontational groups advocating, protesting, and taking direct action during the early AIDS epidemic.

Christopher Street - a legendary street in New York's West Village which is the location of the Stonewall Inn, and also serves as a symbol of gay pride.

Maggie and Brick - characters from Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.*

Lord of the Flies - a classic novel which tells the story of school boys stranded on an island who turn against each other.



GEORGIA MCBRIDE RESOURCES

ABOUT THE PLAY/PLAYWRIGHT

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ELVIS TRIBUTE ARTISTS

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DRAG CULTURE AND HISTORY

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GAY ICONS AND DIVAS

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VISITING MILWAUKEE REP

Milwaukee Repertory Theater's Patty and Jay Baker Theater Complex is located in the Milwaukee Center downtown at the corner of Wells and Water Streets. The building was formerly the home of the Electric Railway and Light Company.

The Ticket Office is visible on the left upon entering the Wells Street doors. The Quadracci Powerhouse is located on the Mezzanine and can be accessed via escalator or elevator.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT ENABLES MILWAUKEE REP TO:

- Advance the art of theater with productions that inspire individuals and create community dialogue;
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- ★ Educate over 20,000 students at 200+ schools in the greater Milwaukee area with Rep Immersion Day experiences, student matinees, workshops, tours and by making connections with their school curriculum through classroom programs such as Reading Residencies;
- ★ Maintain our commitment to audiences with special needs through our Access Services that include American Sign Language interpreted productions, captioned theater, infrared listening systems and script synopses to ensure that theater at Milwaukee Rep is accessible to all:
- ★ Educate the next generation of theater professionals with our EPR Program which gives newly degreed artists a chance to hone their skills at Milwaukee Rep as they begin to pursue their theatrical careers. We value our supporters and partnerships and hope that you will help us to expand the ways Milwaukee Rep has a positive impact on theater and on our Milwaukee community.

Donations can be made on our website at **www.MilwaukeeRep.com** or by phone at 414-290-5376.

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