

A History of AACTFest

Since the 1960s, the national community theatre festival has gone through an evolution to become today's AACTFest, an official program of the American Association of Community Theatre (AACT).

AACT has its roots in the National Association of Community Theatre (NACT), an organization founded in the 1950s. In 1958 the American Community Theatre Association (ACTA) was founded and later became a division of the American Theatre Association (ATA). Then, in February 1986, ACTA disassociated from ATA to become AACT, an independently incorporated nonprofit organization, which it remains today.

The first national theatre festival for community theatre (FACT) was held in 1971 by AACT's predecessor, ACTA. The first festival to be named AACTFest was hosted in 1987.

Today, the festival's current goals are:

- To provide an optimum learning experience through festival entry, which affirms, supports, and nurtures community theatre companies as they strive toward excellence in theatrical productions.
- To stimulate and inspire community theatre companies to strive for the best work possible and to recognize them for their achievement through an appropriate adjudication process.
- To provide a learning experience in artistic, technical, and management areas for people in attendance through performances, adjudication, and workshops.
- To develop enlightened and discerning audiences for community theatre.

Beginnings

AACTFest had its roots in the 1957 World Festival of Amateur Theatre (*Le Festival Mondiale du Théâtre Amateur*) was held in Monaco under the patronage of Prince Ranier and Princess Grace. This was the first official festival of the International Amateur Theatre Association (AITA/IATA), and random theatres from America took turns representing the U.S. at this quadrennial international event.

(It should be noted that the definition of “amateur” used by AITA/IATA is the traditional one, derived from the Latin word *amare* (love). In this sense, “amateur” refers to a person who does something for love and pleasure, rather than someone who acts as a profession (thus ,the original meaning of the term, “professional.”)

1960-1969

After eight years, the World Festival organization contacted the American National Theatre and Academy (ANTA), asking it to provide input as to which theatres from the U.S. should attend the World Festival. ANTA felt it would be more appropriate to pass the invitation on to the American Community Theatre Association (ACTA)—at that time, the community theatre division of the seven-year-old American Theatre Association (ATA). In 1965 ACTA consisted of approximately 12 to 14 community theatres.

Howard Orms, the President of ACTA, contacted several theatres, with no success. Then Art Cole of Midland (TX) Community Theatre agreed to take a production of Edward Albee's *An American Dream* to the 1965 World Festival as the U.S. representative. The Monaco festival would provide free lodging to 10 company members for three days, plus \$1,200 for travel expenses.

Cole's plan was to find a one-act play that could be cast with three or four people willing to pay their own way for a chance to perform in Monte Carlo. At first skeptical, Midland's board of directors soon realized that this was not the way that Midland (or the U.S.) should be represented, and pledged to support the entire project.

While pondering the entire experience on the return flight from Monaco after that first festival, Cole came to a conclusion: There ought to be some sort of qualitative selection process to pick the theatre that will represent the U.S., and that theatre should not have to pay its way. But what would that process be? A national festival? He knew nothing about running such a festival, but knew that something had to be done before 1969 and the next Monaco festival. He began with a West Texas Festival in 1966, with theatres coming from five other cities to perform for one hour (a la Monaco). He followed that up in 1967 with a Texas state festival, funded by one of the first grants given by the Texas Commission on the Arts.

Cole's next endeavor was not as successful—a national festival that would take place at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. This venue would allow community theatres to showcase their talents for members of Congress and other funding sources. His comments on the experience? "I came away with my head bloodied and bowed. I soon discovered that amateur theatre was almost a dirty word when it came to raising money." A trip to New York to interest airlines in funding the project also came to naught.

By now it was 1968 and the proposal for a national festival in Washington had been dropped. If the theatres couldn't come to the festival, the festival would be taken to the theatres. Jim Cavanaugh of the Omaha (NE) Community Playhouse agreed to chair the project. He contacted interested theatres and set up a loosely structured festival to be held in five regions. In all, 49 theatres participated, performing plays by American playwrights, as a salute to our national cultural resources.

Three judges, Art Cole (president of ACTA), Kay Fliehr (with both Guthrie Theatre and



Theatre-In-The-Round of Minneapolis, MN) and Norman Nadel (theatre critic and columnist for Scripps-Howard newspapers, NY), traveled 11,000 miles in five weekends viewing the entries. The five theatres hosting the regional festivals were the Polka Dot Playhouse in Bridgeport, CT; the Abbeville (SC) Little Theatre; the San Antonio (TX) Little Theatre; the Stockton (CA) Civic Theatre; and the Omaha (NE) Community Playhouse. At the end of the festival, the production of *Chamber Music* by Arthur Kopit, produced by Entr'actors of Worcester, MA, was chosen to represent the U.S. in Monaco in 1969.

Relying upon assurances from the Executive Secretary of the American Theatre Association, ACTA made its own assurances that it would pay most of the winner's Monaco expenses. However, after the winner had been selected, ATA informed ACTA that funding was not available, and ATA's executive director advised Entr'actors to cancel the trip. Art Cole, having given his word that there would be money for the winner, took out a \$5,000 personal loan to fund *Chamber Music's* travel expenses. Fortunately for Cole, a number of generous donations helped repay the loan.

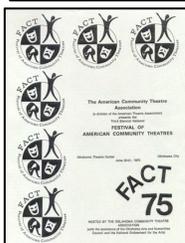
Following that, ACTA organized nine festival regions and set up operating rules, following the Monaco regulation of 60-minute productions. It was decided to hold an official ACTA National Festival every two years, with participants who had previously won state and regional festivals. This system was inaugurated in 1971. (In non-festival years, a production would be chosen to represent the U.S. in Monaco.)

1970-1979

The first National Festival of American Community Theatre (FACT) was held at the Theatre of Western Springs, IL. Top honors went to the Tulsa (OK) Little Theatre for its production of Holman's *The Baptizin'*. Judges were Henry Fonda, William Glover (New York drama critic), and Michael Langham (Artistic Director of the Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis, MN). Kay Fliehr was the festival chair.



In 1973, at the festival held at the Lincoln (NE) Community Playhouse, Theatre-in-the-Round Players of Minneapolis was selected to represent the U.S. in Monaco with its production of an original play *The Unknown Soldier* by Warren Frost. Judges were Barry Nelson (Los Angeles, CA), Norman Nadel (theatre critic for Scripps-Howard newspapers, NY); and Richard Christensen (drama critic, Chicago, IL). John Wilson, the Lincoln (NE) Community Playhouse director was the festival chair.



Theatre Memphis' (TN) production of Bovasso's *Schubert's Last Serenade* received top honors at the 1975 FACT in Oklahoma City's Theatre Center. Judges were Jerome Lawrence (playwright), Edgar A. Wright (actor-director of Hollywood, CA), and Lloyd Richards (Hunter College, NY). The festival chair was Betty Wagner from Stillwater, OK. The Oklahoma festival was honored by the attendance of the members of the IATA Governing Council, which held its official meetings prior to the festival. Immediately following

FACT, the international visitors attended one of the first world amateur theatre festivals in the United States, in Detroit, Michigan, where the International Theatre Olympiad was held. Theatre Memphis presented its festival production as one of the 30 theatre performances in eight different theatres, with nine international companies participating. Chair of the Olympiad '75 was Shirley Harbin, assisted by Chancey Miller, both ACTA members.



The 1977 FACT at Spokane (WA) Civic Theatre received \$10,000 in funding from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). The Footlighters of Cincinnati (OH) was named as the Monaco representative with its production of Hoffman and Gasman's *What's a Nice Country Like Us Doing in a State Like This?* Judges were actress Rosemary DeCamp (Hollywood, CA), Ronald A. Willis (University of Kansas), and David Ball (Lawrence University, Appleton, WI). Festival chair was Betty Tomlinson of the Spokane Civic Theatre.



The 1979 FACT was held at Theatre Memphis (TN), co-chaired by Mickey Laukhuff and Bea Miller. The festival was also recipient of a grant from the NEA—the last money received from the National Endowment for the Arts, which had decided to fund only professional endeavors. First honors went to Topeka (KS) Civic Theatre's production of Neil Simon's *The Good Doctor*. Judges were actress Barbara Cason (Los Angeles, CA), Theodore E. Kalem (Time Magazine, NY) and Craig Noel (Old Globe Theatre, San Diego, CA). With FACT '79 came a concerted effort to provide the "non-Monaco" year's winner an opportunity to participate in an international festival. Thus, began FACT's increased involvement with festivals around the world. The winner in 1979 went to Dundalk, Ireland; a runner-up went to Villach, Austria.

1980-1989



In 1981, the festival host was Kalamazoo (MI) Civic Players with Jim Carver, Managing Director of the theatre, chairing the event. Judges were Richard Hamburger (Julliard Center, NY), Davey Marlin-Jones (film critic, Washington, DC) and Edwin Procnier (University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario). Their Monaco choice was the Theatre Tulsa (OK) production of an original script, *Stations*, by James Vance. The second-place production of *Suicide in B-flat* by the Garrett (MA) Players represented the United States in Finland.



In 1983, the National FACT was held at the Chilkat Center for the Arts in Haines, Alaska, hosted by the Alaska State Community Theatre Association and chaired by Mimi Gregg of Haines. The decision to hold the festival in Alaska was somewhat controversial at the time, due to the anticipated travel costs.. However, the festival raised enough money to pay all the travel expenses for all the participating companies, as well as a large portion of the expenses of the ACTA board of directors. Adjudicators were Ella Gerber (New York), John Going (Anchorage, Alaska) and Ronald T. O'Leary (University of Maryland). The winner was Omaha (NE) Center

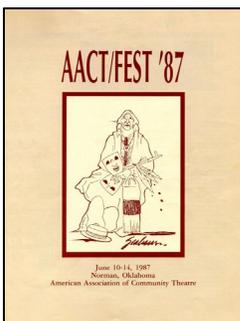
Stage's production of the Fats Waller musical celebration, *Ain't Misbehavin'*. Runner-up was Kalamazoo (MI) Civic Players' production of the Neil Simon comedy, *Fools*. Omaha became the United States representative at the international festival at Toyama, Japan, while Kalamazoo was invited to perform in Manchester, England. Owing to the extreme success of the festival's fundraising, the Haines festival produced a comfortable profit and issued a challenge grant to ACTA for \$3000 to create a separate entity which would raise, invest, and distribute money to groups competing at the national festival. This was the beginning of the Community Theatre Foundation (now the AACT Foundation.)

In February of 1985 the Community Theatre Foundation was officially incorporated, and the ACTA board members pledged enough to match the \$3000 Alaska challenge grant. A policy regarding distribution was also adopted—no principal or interest would be spent until the foundation had at least \$30,000.

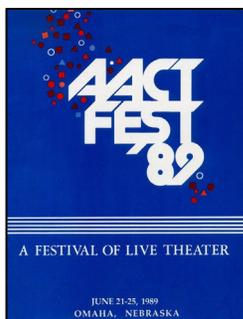


The 1985 National FACT was hosted by the Racine (WI) Theatre Guild. JoAnne Nissen chaired the festival. Art Cole (Director Emeritus of the Midland [TX] Community Theatre), N. Richard Nash (author of *The Rainmaker*), and Richard Coe (Critic Emeritus of the Washington Post) were adjudicators. The winner, which went on to Monaco, was the production of James McLure's *Lone Star* presented by the Mummers Theatre of Oklahoma City (OK). Also receiving international invitations were the second-place production of *Bubbling Brown Sugar* by the Bonfils Theatre of Denver, CO and the Topeka, KS third-place production of *I'm Getting My Act Together and Taking It On the Road*. At the festival, it was announced that the fledgling Community Theatre Foundation had already received over \$20,000.

In 1986, the American Theatre Association dissolved as an entity. Along with this dissolution went both ACTA and the FACT name. Rising from the ashes was the American Association of Community Theatre (AACT). Taking up the torch, AACT continued the FACT tradition with a new name—AACTFest.



The first AACTFest was hosted in 1987 by the Oklahoma Community Theatre Association, under the joint chair of Mary S. Patterson and Gregory Kunesh at the University of Oklahoma in Norman, OK. Judges were Suzanne Bennett (Literary Manager of the Women's Project at the American Place Theatre, NY), Jim Carver (Managing Director of Kalamazoo [MI] Civic Players) and Jack Wright (Artistic Director of Theatre at the University of Kansas). Molly Newman and Barbara Damashek's *Quilters* presented by the Laguna Moulton Playhouse (Laguna Beach, CA) triumphed and represented the U.S. in Dundalk, Ireland. Second place went to the Black Liberated Arts Center of Oklahoma City with its production of *Blood Knot* by Athol Fugard. They also represented the U.S. at Montreal's National Multicultural Festival.

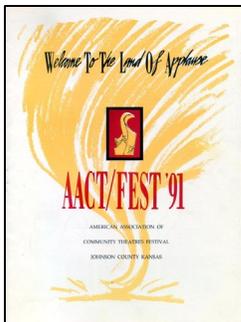


The second AACTFest was held in 1989 at the Omaha (NE) Community Playhouse, co-chaired by Jon Kerkhoff and Ginny Winsor. The judges in Omaha were Patton Campbell (Associate Professor, Columbia University), Martha Wadsworth Coigney (Director of the International

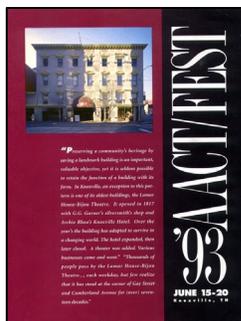
Theatre Institute) and Edwin Procnier (Professor Emeritus, University of Western Ontario). First place went to the Spokane Civic Theatre's production of *Getting Out*. This work by Marsha Norman was also the 1989 United States performance at the World Festival of Amateur Theatre in Monaco. Toyama, Japan was the next stop for the second-place production by the Encore Theatre Company from Washington, D.C., with a production of *Home* by Samm-Art Williams.

1990-1999

In June of 1990, the Community Theatre Foundation reached its milestone of \$30,000 and announced that it would distribute \$3,000 at the next national festival.

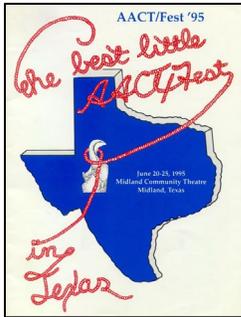


AACTFest 1991 was held in Overland Park, KS at Johnson County Community College. Festival chair Gerald Snider and his team engaged adjudicators, Jerry L. Crawford (Professor of Theatre, University of Nevada - Las Vegas), Mona Synoground Poehling (former Executive Director, Oklahoma Community Theatre Association), and Ron O'Leary (University of Maryland). The first-place production was Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine's *Into the Woods*, presented by the Footlite Musicals from Indianapolis, IN. Topeka (KS) Civic Theatre was the runner-up with its production of *The Taffetas* by Rich Lewis. After AACTFest, *Into the Woods* was invited to Toyama, Japan, and *The Taffetas* was invited to perform in Aruba. The Community Theatre Foundation distributed \$500 to the second- and third-place productions, and \$1,000 to the first-place company. The remaining companies received \$100 each.

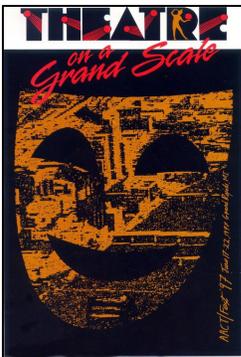


AACTFest traveled to Knoxville, TN, in 1993 to be hosted at the Bijou Theatre Center. Festival chair Stephen Krempasky was assisted by Mary Louise Smith of the Tennessee Theatre Association as a co-host. Adjudicators were Terrance McKerrs (freelance director), Malinda Pacha (scenic and costume designer with the University of Detroit - Mercy), and David Young (former producing director of ACTF at the Kennedy Center). The Vokes Players of Wayland, MA was awarded first place for their presentation of David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross*. The Cheyenne (WY) Little Theatre production of *Terra Nova*, by Ted Tally, received second-place honors. The majority of the theatres were given the opportunity to represent the U.S. at international festivals. The Community Theatre Foundation distributed \$3,000, using the same guidelines as it had at the 1991 festival.

In 1994, the trustees of the Community Theatre Foundation decided to dissolve as a separate legal entity, with the AACT Board agreeing to receive and convert the foundation funds into a separate, legally protected endowment fund within the AACT structure, now known as the AACT Foundation.

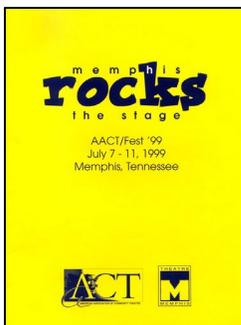


AACTFest 1995, billed as “The Best Little AACTFest in Texas,” was hosted by Midland Community Theatre in Midland, TX. The festival chair was Don Bachmann, with Marilyn Allen as honorary chair. Adjudicators were Kent Brown (professor of drama at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville), Ron Cameron (academic coordinator for the music theatre department at Sheridan College in Oakville, Ontario, Canada). David Young (former producing director of ACTF at the Kennedy Center) was a last-minute substitution for Gresna Dody (alumni professor and former chair of the Department of Theatre at Louisiana State University), who became ill before the first production. The Oak Ridge (TN) Community Playhouse took first-place honors with William Finn and James Lapine’s *Falsettoland*, and accepted a bid to a festival in Aruba. Out North, from Anchorage (AK), took second place with *The Mommy Dance* by Jill Bess. The Kalamazoo (MI) Civic Players’ production of Brian Friel’s *Dancing At Lughnasa* received third place accolades and represented the United States in Monaco. Again, \$3,000 was distributed from the AACT Endowment Fund to the participating national companies. The fund had now grown to \$70,000, with a goal of \$100,000. A policy was adopted to distribute no more than 60% of the accumulated interest, rolling over the other 40% to help build the corpus.



“Theatre on a Grand Scale,” AACTFest 1997, was co-chaired by Randy Hoekstra and Jill Patchin in Grand Rapids, MI, at the Grand Rapids Civic Theatre. The adjudicators for the festival were Annette Proconier (director and designer from Ontario, Canada), Brid McBride (freelance journalist and art critic from Dundalk, Ireland), and Mortimer “Mort” Clark (professor of theatre, Westchester Community College, NY). Their decision gave first place honors to *Smoke on the Mountain*, produced by the Mobile (AL) Theatre Guild. Coming in second was the Spokane (WA) Civic Theatre production of *Mama Drama*. And capturing third place was the La Crosse (WI) Community Theatre’s production of *Cotton Patch Gospel*. Mobile received an invitation to Dundalk, Ireland, and La Crosse received an invitation to Quebec, Canada. The Endowment Fund distributed \$500 to the second and third place productions, and \$1,000 to the first-place company. In addition, \$100 was given to each participating company

In June 1998, the endowment fund trustees decided to calculate the total amount to be distributed at any festival by adding together the endowment's Festival Support Fund value of the two previous fiscal years (audited); the money available would be an amount not to exceed 5% of the total of those two years.



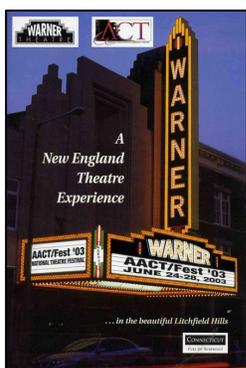
In 1999, AACTFest was back in Memphis, TN. “Memphis rocks,” hosted by Theatre Memphis, was co-chaired by Michael Fortner and Bea Miller. Adjudicating were Bennett Wood (actor, teacher, author, Memphis, TN), Jack Wright (Professor of Theatre and Film, University of Kansas) and Kent Brown (freelance director, Fairfield, CT). First place was awarded to Spokane (WA) Civic Theatre’s production of Steven Dietz’ *Lonely Planet*. Second place went to Charleston (NC) Stage Company’s production of Adam Long, Daniel Singer and Jess Winfield’s *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged)*. The Chameleon Theatre Circle from

Apple Valley, MN, garnered third place with *Assassins*, by Stephen Sondheim and John Weidmen. However, Spokane Civic—feeling that international travel was beyond the resources of their group—asked not to be considered for any international festivals. Instead, Charleston Stage Company received invitations to both Ireland and Aruba, while the Chameleon Theatre Circle accepted an invitation to travel to Nova Scotia, Canada. This festival also saw a change in how the money from the AACT Endowment Fund was distributed: equal amounts of \$750 were distributed to each production at the national festival.

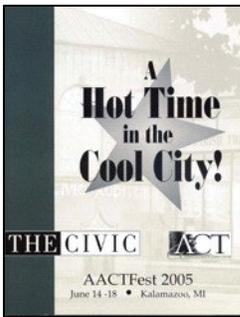
2000-2009



AACTFest 2001 took place in Harrisburg, PA, co-hosted by the Whitaker Center and Theatre Harrisburg, with Stephen Krempasky and Sam Kuba as co-chairs. Serving as adjudicators for “A Capital Affair” were James Carver (retired Managing Director, Kalamazoo [MI] Civic Theatre), Ted Strickland (Executive Producer, Theatre Memphis [TN]), and John Viars (Executive Director, Des Moines [IA] Playhouse). *Wit* by Margaret Edson performed by the Salina (KS) Community Theatre, was selected as the first-place production. In second place was the Burlington County Footlighters from Cinnaminson, NJ with its production of Peter Parnell’s *Scooter Thomas Makes It to the Top of the World*. Traveling from Oklahoma City, OK, Carpenter Square Theatre captured third place with Jo DiPietro’s *Over the River and Through the Woods*. Ireland’s festival issued an invitation to the Salina Community Theatre, while the Burlington County Footlighters received an invitation to Nova Scotia, Canada, and Heidelberg, Germany would be the destination for the Carpenter Square Theatre. At the 2001 festival, the AACT Endowment reached another milestone when it was able to present each national company with \$1,000.



2003 saw AACTFest return to the east coast at the restored Warner Theatre in Torrington, CT, with Barry Hughson as chair of “A New England Theatre Experience.” Adjudication duties were handled by Michael Fortner (past Managing Director of the West Virginia Public Theatre), Annette Procnier (director and designer from Ontario, Canada), and Chuck Sheffield (chair of the Theatre and Dance departments, Richland College, Dallas). The alternate adjudicator was Rod McCullough (Managing Director, The Fulton, Lancaster, PA). Top honors went to the Spokane (WA) Theatrical Group for its production of *I Never Saw Another Butterfly*, by Celeste Raspanti. Second place went to the production of Jeffrey Hatcher’s *Three Viewings*, performed by the Bas Bleu Theatre Company of Fort Collins, CO. Third place went to the musical *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, produced by the Elkhart (IN) Civic Theatre. An unfortunate byproduct of the 2003 world political climate was the scarcity of international festivals, and so no international invitations were made at the festival.



After almost a quarter century, the national festival returned to Kalamazoo, Michigan in 2005. Kalamazoo Civic hosted “A Hot Time in the Cool City,” with Cathy Weir as the festival chair. First place was awarded to the Manatee Players from Bradenton, FL, for their performance of Mary Zimmerman’s *Metamorphoses* (based on David R Slavitt’s translation of *The Metamorphoses* of Ovid). Second place went to *Metamorphoses Nonsense A-men*, by Dan Goggin, performed by the River City Family Theatre. from Elkhart, IN. Tying for third place was *Suburb* by David Javerbaun and Bob Cohen, from the Roadside Theater from Heidelberg, Germany, and the Hard Bargain Players (Accokeek, MD) production of *xphiles unrequited*, by Bob Bartlett. Serving as adjudicators were Alex Chrestopoulos (former Managing Artistic Director for the Rocky Mountain Repertory Theatre), Kevin Gardner (faculty member, St. Paul’s School) and Faye M Price (Co- Artistic Producing Director, Pilsbury House Theatre). John Viars (Executive Director, Des Moines Playhouse) served as the alternate adjudicator.



Charlotte, North Carolina, was the setting for AACTFest 2007, Festival Chairs were Ginger Heath and Keith Martin. The Metrolina Theatre Association served as the festival host, using the Blumenthal Performing Arts Center’s Belk Theatre as the performance venue and the center point of the festival. Serving as adjudicators for the festival were Mary Doveton, (Managing Director of Lawrence [KS] Community Theatre), Steven Slaughter (Director of Theatre, Bossier Parish Community College in Bossier, LA), and Ron Ziegler (freelance director and theatre artist from Des Moines, IA). Serving as alternate adjudicator was L. Ross Rowland (President of the American Center of the International Amateur Theatre Association). Appropriately enough for a festival in the Queen City, the production of *Crowns* by the Denton Community Theatre, from Denton, TX, took the first-place title. Spokane [WA] Civic Theatre’s production of *Assassins* garnered second place. Third place was awarded to Aberdeen [SD] Community Theatre for its performance of *Honk!*

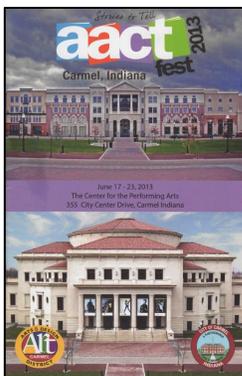


“Come West!” was the theme for AACTFest 2009 as, after more than 30 years, the national festival returned to the Pacific Northwest. Hosts were the Tacoma Musical Playhouse and the Washington State Community Theatre Association. Festival Chairs were Jon D. Rake, Judith Cullen, and Lark Moore. The Pantages Theater, a restored 1918 vaudeville house, was the site for the 12 performances and the adjudications by Mary Britt (Executive Director, Ocala Civic Theatre in Ocala, FL), Morrie Enders (former Managing/Artistic Director of La Crosse (WI) Community Theatre), and L. Ross Rowland (President of the American Center of the International Amateur Theatre Association). Serving as alternate adjudicator was Dennis Gilmore (Executive Director, Henderson County Performing Arts Center in Athens, TX). Garnering first place honors was *Scooter Thomas Makes It to the Top of the World*, presented by the Chino Community Theatre from Chino, CA. In second place was South Bend [IN] Civic Theatre for its production of *Intimate Apparel*. Third place winner, was the Poteet Theatre from Oklahoma City, OK, and its performance of *Jon & Jen*.

2010-2019



2011 saw AACTFest journey to the state of New York for “A Celebration of Community Theatre,” hosted by the Theatre Association of New York State at the historic Geva Theatre in downtown Rochester. Festival chairs were Ruth Legg and Joan Luther, assisted by AACTFest veteran Shirley Cockrell, an Honorary Festival Chair. Taking home top honors was the Ohlook Performing Arts Center (Grapevine, TX) for its production of *Dog Sees God*. Second place went to the performance of *Urinetown: The Musical* from Midland, MI’s Center Stage. Third place went to the Manatee Players from Bradenton, FL, for its production of *Sunday in the Park with George*. Festival adjudicators were Scott Richard Klein (Chair of the Theatre Arts Department at Cameron University in Lawton, OK), Larry Nielsen (Village Manager, Paw Paw, MI), and Annette Procnier (Co-founder, The New Act Theatre, Bala, Canada). Alternate adjudicator was Allen Ebert (Co-Director, Wisconsin Film Festival).



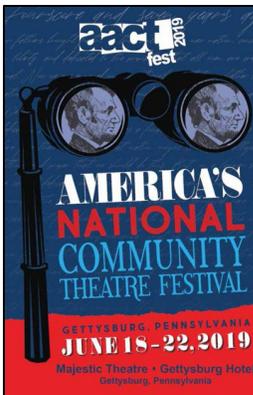
There were “Stories to Tell” when AACTFest 2013 was held in Carmel, IN, making it the first National AACTFest held in Indiana. The Carmel Repertory Theatre served as the festival host under its chair, June Clair, who took over for Larry Creviston. Festival performances took place in the Booth Tarkington Theatre, part of the newly constructed Carmel Center for the Performing Arts. Adjudicators were Tim Jebson (Executive Director of the Midland Community Theatre in Midland, TX), Paul Nelson (Mental Health Registered Nurse from Olean, NY), and Kathy Pingel (Director of Education and Youth Programming at the Des Moines [IA] Community Playhouse). Alternate adjudicator was Keith Martin (Distinguished Professor of Theatre at Appalachian State University in Boone, NC). After making their deliberations, *Radium Girls* from Burlington (MA) Players was chosen as the first-place production. Second place was *God of Carnage*, performed by the Baytown (TX) Little Theatre, and third place was Wisconsin Rapids (WI) Community Theatre, with its production of *Cradle and All*.



Michigan’s Grand Rapids Civic Theatre and School of Theatre Arts hosted AACTFest 2015, June 23-27. Festival Co-Coordinator Jill Patchin and Mary Jo DeNolf oversaw a successful festival that included Dan Goggin (Playwright, Lyricist, and Composer of the *Nunsense* series of musicals) as its special guest and workshop presenter. Adjudicators were Genevieve Aichele (Co-founder and Artistic Director of the New Hampshire Theatre Project in Portsmouth, NH), James Sohre (retired civilian Command Entertainment Director for U.S. Army Entertainment), and John W. Viars (Executive Director of the Des Moines [IA] Playhouse). Kokomo Civic Theatre (Kokomo, IN) was awarded first place for *Freud’s Last Session*, with The New Group West (Cardiff, CA) receiving second place for *I Am My Own Wife*, and Platte Valley Players (Brighton, CO) third place, for *The Nina Variations*.



AACTFest 2017 traveled north to Minnesota and was hosted by The Rochester Civic Theatre Company. Several new elements were added to the festival events, including: YouthFest, Youth Leadership Conference, Monologue Competition, multiple category Design Exhibition and Competition, and AACTFest's first-ever mobile app. Headliners Barry Hughson (Executive Director of the National Ballet of Canada), Michael John LaChiusa (composer, lyricist, librettist), and David Stewart (Director of Production at the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, MN) provided engaging and challenging presentations. YouthFest adjudicators were Bill Anderson, Jr. (Midland, MI), Ron Cameron-Lewis (Ontario, Canada), and Penelope Notter (Grand Rapids, MI). Cameron-Lewis also adjudicated the Monologue Competition. AACTFest adjudicators were Benny Sato Ambush (Boston, MA), Morrie Enders (Executive Director of Lincoln [NE] Community Playhouse), and Kristi Quinn (Dakota City, NE). The award for Outstanding Production was awarded to Tacoma Musical Playhouse (Tacoma, WA) for its production of *The Addams Family*, Act 1.



AACTFest 2019 attendees were immersed in history during their week in Gettysburg, PA. Productions and some workshops were held at the historic Majestic Theater, with the bulk of workshops held next door at the historic Gettysburg Hotel. Other workshops and the Youth Arts Leadership Conference took place nearby at the home of festival hosts, the Gettysburg Community Theatre. In addition to 12 festival productions and over 30 workshops, the festival again included YouthFest (six productions), Youth Arts Leadership Conference, Monologue Competition, multiple category Design Competition, and Adjudication Training Seminar. Playwright James Sherman, who also facilitated a workshop, was the keynote speaker. YouthFest adjudicators were Kristy Meanor (Artistic Director, Wetumpka (AL) Depot Players), Kathy Pingel (North Port, FL), and Dennis Yslas [Executive Director, Texas Nonprofit Theatres, Inc. (Fort Worth, TX)]. Ron Cameron-Lewis (Ontario, Canada) once again adjudicated the Monologue Competition. AACTFest adjudicators were Murray Chase [Producing Executive Director, Venice (FL) Theatre], Joel Jahnke [Professor Emeritus, Montana State University (Bozeman, MT)], and Sara Phoenix [Artistic Director, Theatre Tulsa (OK)]. Alternate adjudicator was Bernard DiCasimirro (Morrisville, PA). The award for Overall Outstanding Production was presented to The Lexington (MA) Players for its production of *Who Will Sing for Lena?*

2020-2029



The Covid pandemic struck with force in the U.S. and around the world in 2021. Following the advice of government health officials and the recommendation of AACT’s Festival and Executive Committees, AACTFest 2021 became the organization's first virtual festival. Initially, there were doubts about going virtual, but it proved to offer advantages many had not considered before—virtual meetups, intimate chat features during workshops and presentations, a vibrant online community where virtual topics were discussed, and the ability to view workshops and presentations after they had streamed live. In addition, there were no travel costs to attend. Instead of the traditional state-to-regional-to-national festival route, theatres notified AACTD of their interest in performing. Eventually, a slate of productions were invited to take part, with AACT providing a professional video recording of each. The virtual setting encouraged a broad variety of instructors, adjudicators, guests, and keynote speakers. A highlight was Broadway legend Rob McClure, explaining how community theatre gave him his start. National Adjudicators were Allen Ebert, Amy Wratchford, Jeff Calhoun, with Richard St. Peter as alternate. The honor of Best Overall Production went to *The Mountaintop*, presented by the Lexington Players of Lexington, MA.



Two years later, the pandemic had lessened its grip on the country, and AACTFest returned to an in-person format in Louisville, KY. “Although the virtual festival was groundbreaking and memorable,” said AACT Executive Director Quiana Clark-Roland, “nothing could compare to the synergy created when we gather in person—in a theatre, boardroom, workshop, or at the bar, exchanging stories and reminiscing.” Preceded by the Community Theatre Management Conference (CTMC), AACTFest 2023 included not only the National Company and Youth Theatre productions, but also the *Belle of Louisville* Sunset Cruise and Monologue Competition, as well as the keynote address by Broadway veteran Ben Cameron. Adjudicators for the National Company productions were Gary Anderson, Jeff Calhoun, and Faye M. Price, with Rick St. Peter as Alternate. The honor of Overall Outstanding Production was awarded to *Pass Over*, presented by Stage Left Theatre of Spokane, WA.

Changing Faces



"Changing Faces" was the symbol of both the Festival of the American Community Theatre Association (FACT) and AACTFest for many years.

The design was originally created as a logo for the 1979 FACT in Memphis TN and was inspired by a performance of the great French mime, Marcel Marceau. He performed on a totally black stage, and was dressed in black with a long flowing black cape. The lights were directed solely on his head, and as he performed, he used the cape to sweep across his masked face and when the cape came down, a new mask was in its place. The masks seemed to fall away, which made the artist think how much this represented the continually changing faces of the characters in theatre.