

Steel Magnolias

BY ROBERT HARLING



JEWELL
MAINSTAGE
PLAY GUIDE

2020 Jewell Mainstage Season
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Directed by Marianne Savell
Jan 22 - Feb 29


**TAPROOT
THEATRE**
COMPANY

WELCOME

Boom! Drum fires another shot into the magnolia trees giving Ouiser's dog a nervous breakdown. Truvy's salon is buzzing as gossip and zingers fly between baby's breath and bouffants. Annelle is new and nervous which is making things a little poofy. Welcome to Chinquapin, Louisiana. Hold on to your rollers and grab your tissues for this hilariously heartwarming American classic.

Steel Magnolias has rapidly become a classic of American theatre. It is a powerful slice-of-life comedy that is as moving and emotional as it is laugh-out-loud funny. Following a small group of women through a series of life events, both large and small, the play is a rich exploration of what makes community, how friendships are built and what it's like to live through trials and triumphs together. We watch these women celebrate together, grow together and grieve together. And we watch as their friendships grow stronger with time.

Community and strong relationships can grow amongst any group of people. Whether it's your school friends, work associates, people at your church or neighbors you encounter at a hair salon, there is an innate desire for connectivity that drives us all. As you watch this play, think of the places you find your community. What is the common bond that holds your friendships together? And what can you do to support your friends through thick and thin?

We'd love to hear from you!

Tag us on any of the social media platforms listed below.

@taproottheatre | #TTCsteelmagnolias

EVERYONE'S A CRITIC ... starting with YOU!

What did you think?

Post, tweet, update, review...
Let us and your friends know
if you liked the show!



Search "Taproot Theatre"
to find us on your favorite
social media websites.

*Be sure to tag us when
you post about us!*

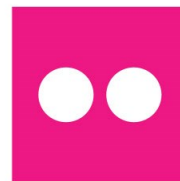
TAPROOT THEATRE
COMPANY

*Professional theatre in
a neighborhood setting*

TAPROOTTHEATRE.ORG

See behind the curtain!

See what inspires and delights
us behind the scenes here at
Taproot Theatre.





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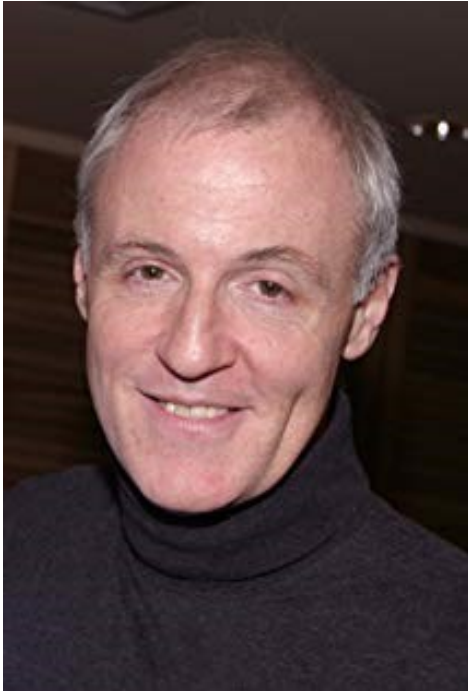
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April Poland, Arika Matoba, Melanie Hampton and Cas Pruitt
in *Steel Magnolias* at Taproot Theatre.

Robert Harling



"I always thought the women in my community were so witty and clever. It was like a witty one-upmanship. In a lot of ways, they talked in bumper stickers."

-Robert Harling, *Country Living Magazine*

Robert Harling was born in Dothan, Alabama in 1951. He attended Northwestern State University in Natchitoches, Louisiana, which became home for Harling. He had plans to become a lawyer, going so far as to attend Tulane University Law School, but instead of taking the bar exam he moved to New York to become an actor. In 1985, tragedy struck the Harling family and Robert Harling's sister, Susan, passed away due to diabetes complications. Similar to the character of Shelby, Susan Harling married and wanted to start a family despite the warnings from doctors. She gave birth in 1983, but shortly after her kidneys and circulatory system began to fail. Harling's mother had undergone a kidney transplant for Susan, but it did little to help. Susan passed during surgery in 1985, she was only 33 years old. Robert Harling then wrote *Steel Magnolias* which is largely based on his family's life in Natchitoches, LA.

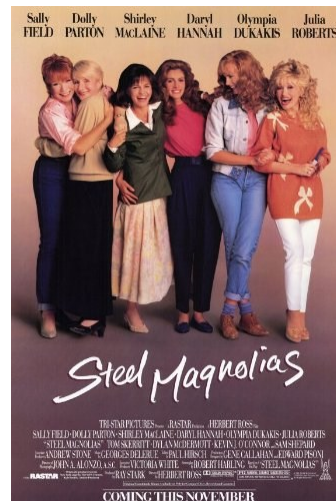
<https://imdb.com/name/nm0363326/>

STEEL MAGNOLIAS PRODUCTION HISTORY

On Stage: Since its conception, *Steel Magnolias* has been produced time and time again. The play originally began as an Off-Broadway show in 1987 at the WPA Theatre in New York. It then had a national tour in 1989. The play made its Broadway debut in 2005 at the Lyceum Theatre. International productions have been performed in countries like the United Kingdom, Ireland, France, Japan, Poland and Sweden.

On Screen: In 1989 the play was adapted into a film. The cast included Julia Roberts, Dolly Parton, Sally Field, Shirley MacLaine, Daryl Hannah and Olympia Dukakis. The film earned Julia Roberts an Academy Award nomination for Best Supporting Actress for her role of Shelby Eatenton-Latcherie. It has had some mixed reviews with a 70% on Rotten Tomatoes, but many critics praised the movie and its comedic moments.

On TV: The play has also been adapted into a Lifetime Television film with an all black female cast including Queen Latifah as M'Lynn, Jill Scott as Truvy, Alfre Woodard as Ousier, Phylicia Rashad as Clairee, Adepero Oduye as Annelle and Condola Rashad as Shelby.



Steel Magnolias film poster (1989)
https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0098384/?ref=ttmi_tt



Steel Magnolias TV movie poster (2012)
<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2328749/>

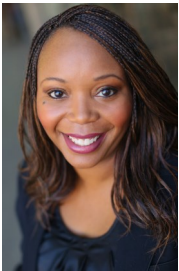
Characters



Annelle *played by Arika Matoba*

Facts From the Script:

- Annelle is new to town (coming from Zwolle, LA)
- She has recently been married and then abandoned.
- She's both trained and skilled in cosmetology and finds a home in Truvy's shop.
- Annelle becomes heavily involved in the community as well as a local church.



Clairee *played by Marlette Buchanan*

Facts from the Script:

- Clairee is the widow of the former mayor of Chinquapin, LA
- She becomes the owner of a local radio station. She also becomes the announcer for the local football team.
- The other characters rely on her for great recipes for sweet treats.



M'Lynn *played by April Poland*

Facts from the Script:

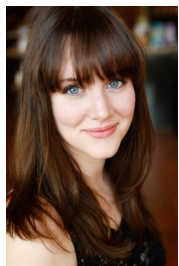
- M'Lynn is the mother of Shelby and two sons, Tommy and Jonathan.
- She is married to Drum Eatenton.
- She works in a mental health clinic and knows a lot of personal information about the people in town that she refuses to share.



Ouiser *played by Kim Morris*

Facts from the Script:

- Ouiser is known as the curmudgeon of Chinquapin.
- She has been married twice and has children, but is single at the time of the play.
- Her closest companion, besides the women in the play, is her dog Rhett.
- Her main form of entertainment is her feud with M'Lynn's husband, Drum Eatenton.



Shelby *played by Melanie Hampton*

Facts From the Script:

- Shelby Eatenton-Latcherie is the daughter of M'Lynn and the bride of Jackson Latcherie.
- She works as a nurse.
- She has diabetes, but does not want that to control her life, especially her family life.



Truvy *played by Cas Pruitt*

Facts From the Script:

- Truvy is the owner of the beauty shop.
- She was a child bride and is still married to her husband, Spud Jones, today.
- Her husband built the carport for her beauty salon.

Setting/Place

Louisiana

Louisiana is a state with an extensive history and a diverse culture. It is the ancestral home of several indigenous groups including the Tchefuncte, Choctaw, Caddo Confederacy, Atakapa, Chitimacha, Tunica and Natchez. European influence and presence began in the 16th century when Louisiana, named in honor of King Louis XIV, became a colony of France until 1763 when it was then passed to Spain. Louisiana officially became a part of the United States in 1812. As a result of this history the culture of many Louisiana regions are a distinctive mixture of Spanish, French, African and Native American influences. In popular Imagination, Louisiana has become known for jazz music, New Orleans' Mardi Gras and unique Cajun and Creole cuisine. Of course, every community's culture is more than the tourism brochure, but the link below gives a good overview of the landscape and some of the history behind the setting for our play:

<https://www.louisianatravel.com/>

Natchitoches

Natchitoches (*pronounced Nack-a-tish*) is the hometown of playwright Robert Harling. The fictionalized town of "Chinquapin" in *Steel Magnolias* is based on his memories of Natchitoches. The town is the earliest permanent settlement of the Louisiana Purchase, established in 1714. This travel guide link has more information and pictures:

<https://www.natchitoches.com/>

Natchitoches has a great many long-standing traditions, but one of their most famous is the annual Christmas Festival. It started out as a one day event in 1927, but has since expanded to be 6 weeks long. The whole town is covered in lights. There are parades, firework shows and special fair cuisine (including alligator). There's also a Santa Clause house and the annual crowning of "Miss Merry Christmas". They're on Instagram too!

<https://www.instagram.com/cityofnatchitoches/>



What is a parish?

Louisiana is divided up into 64 parishes. A parish is the equivalent of a county in another state. Due to their past under French and Spanish rule, Louisiana was a Roman Catholic state. Therefore, they adopted the ecclesiastical terms of parishes and it has remained that way ever since.



Setting/Place

In a novel or a short story, the setting is usually established by the author's description indicating time and place. At most theatrical productions, the program will briefly list the setting and time period of the play, but after that it's up to the scenic designer to create a visual representation of the location in which the story is set. A good scenic designer will create a set that gives the audience clues about the story even before the actors come on stage.

What clues does this set design give you about the play you're about to see?

**Scenic Design
by Mark Lund.**



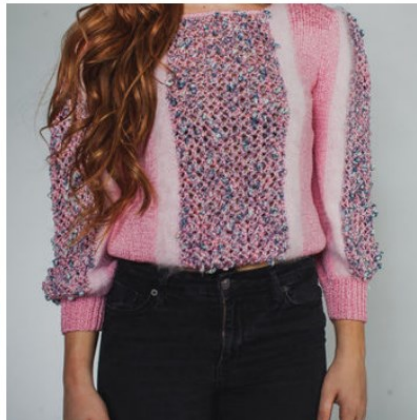
*Steel
Magnolias*

Taproot Theatre 2020
m lund - designer

Costumes

Authors of novels or short stories will often include character descriptions as part of the story. In a play, the costume designer is responsible for creating the first impression of a character. As soon as an actor walks out on stage you can guess something about their character. Are they old or young? Are they rich or poor? Are they from another time period or dressed in modern clothes?

Costume Research by Jocelyn Fowler



Hair Salons: More Than Hair

“Beauty shops are universal. Demonstrating the need for friendship and support knows no bounds.”

— Robert Harling.

An article in *Southern Living Magazine* titled, *Secrets of a Southern Hair Salon* says southern salons are: "a cornerstone for women--the church of beauty, whose congregation [is] anchored in friendship".

The article goes on to say that Southern Hair Salons are more than just a place to get your hair done. While hair is certainly important, perhaps more important is the news that is spread. It serves as a newsstand for the community, where women trade the latest gossip, "It's a post to pore over turmoil, tragedies and triumphs." The salons are often smaller, very homey feeling spaces that bring the female community together.

Rochaun Meadows-Fernandez, (a freelance writer specializing in health and diversity) wrote in a recent blog, "At the salon, we have the chance to rejoice, discuss, and complain. I don't have many opportunities to speak with individuals who understand the nuances of the black household or the additional challenges that come with black motherhood and black marriage. Unlike the therapists of my past, my hairdresser understands the importance of dialogue and catharsis."



Arika Matoba and Marlette Buchanan in *Steel Magnolias* at Taproot Theatre.

Resources: <https://www.southernliving.com/fashion-beauty/hairstyles/beauty-salon-culture> & <https://www.byrdie.com/natural-hair-beauty-essay>

What is cosmetology?

Cosmetology is the study and application of beauty treatment. Branches of specialty include hairstyling, skin care, cosmetics, manicures/pedicures, non-permanent hair removal such as waxing and sugaring, and permanent hair removal processes such as electrolysis and intense pulsed light (IPL).

A cosmetologist is specially trained and licensed to perform cosmetic treatments to the hair, skin, and nails. This can be expanded into multiple parts including cutting and chemically treating hair, chemical hair removal, fashion trends, wigs, nails and skin care, skin and hair analysis; relaxation techniques including head, neck, scalp, hand and feet basic massage and aroma therapies; plus ability to expertly apply makeup applications to cover or promote and can expand into further specialties such as reflexology; theatrical applications; cosmetics and others.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmetology>

The Bechdel Test

Female friendships are at the center of *Steel Magnolias*. According to many psychologists female friendships are essential to emotional health. And there have been studies that show that women who have strong female friendships are more likely to succeed than those without.

A study published in the *Harvard Business Review* found that women who have a strong circle of friends are more likely to get executive positions with higher pay. "Women who were in the top quartile of centrality and had a female-dominated inner circle of 1-3 women landed leadership positions that were 2.5 times higher in authority and pay than those of their female peers lacking this combination," Brian Uzzi writes in the *Harvard Business Review*.

Steel Magnolias stands in contrast with many stories in our culture that pit women against each other. Movies like *Mean Girls*, *Heathers* and more featured women in competition with each other. *Steel Magnolias* focuses more on the importance of female collaboration. Recent movies such as *Hidden Figures*, *The Joy Luck Club* and *Bridesmaids* have given female relationships a new depth and brought attention to their importance.



Cas Pruitt, Melanie Hampton and Arika Matoba in *Steel Magnolias* at Taproot Theatre.

<https://hbr.org/2019/02/research-men-and-women-need-different-kinds-of-networks-to-succeed>

<https://www.upworthy.com/women-female-friends-more-successful>

The Bechdel Test

Does the story feature at least two female characters? (Do they both have names?)

The **Bechdel test** (/ˈbɛkdəl/ *BEK-dəl*), also known as the **Bechdel–Wallace test**, is a measure of the representation of women in fiction.

Do the female characters talk to each other?

The test simply asks whether a work features at least two women who talk to each other about something other than a man. The requirement that the two women must be named is sometimes added.

Do they discuss something other than a man?

About 50% of all films meet these criteria, according to user-edited databases and the media industry press. Passing or failing the test is not necessarily indicative of how well women are represented in any specific work. Rather, the test is used as an indicator for the active presence of women in the entire field of film and other fiction and to call attention to gender inequality in fiction.

The test is named after the American cartoonist Alison Bechdel in whose comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For* the test first appeared in 1985. Bechdel credited the idea to her friend Liz Wallace and the writings of Virginia Woolf. After the test became more widely discussed in the 2000s, a number of variants and tests inspired by it emerged.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bechdel_test

Diabetes

Diabetes can cause problems during pregnancy for women and their developing babies. Poor control of diabetes during pregnancy increases the chances for birth defects and other problems for the pregnancy. It can also cause serious complications for the woman. Proper health care before and during pregnancy can help prevent birth defects and other health problems.

About Diabetes: Diabetes is a condition in which the body cannot use the sugars and starches (carbohydrates) it takes in as food to make energy. The body either makes no insulin or too little insulin or cannot use the insulin it makes to change those sugars and starches into energy. As a result, extra sugar builds up in the blood. The three most common types of diabetes are:

Type 1: The pancreas makes no insulin or so little insulin that the body can't use blood sugar for energy. Type 1 diabetes must be controlled with daily insulin.

Type 2: The body either makes too little insulin or can't use the insulin it makes to use blood sugar for energy. Sometimes Type 2 diabetes can be controlled through eating a proper diet and exercising regularly. Many people with Type 2 diabetes have to take diabetes pills, insulin or both.

Gestational: A type of diabetes that is first seen in a pregnant woman who did not have diabetes before she was pregnant. Often gestational diabetes can be controlled through eating a healthy diet and exercising regularly. Sometimes a woman with gestational diabetes must also take insulin. For most women with gestational diabetes, the diabetes goes away soon after delivery. When it does not go away, the diabetes is called Type 2 diabetes. Even if the diabetes does go away after the baby is born, half of all women who had gestational diabetes develop Type 2 diabetes later. She should also remind her doctor to check her blood sugar every 1 to 3 years.

<https://www.cdc.gov/pregnancy/diabetes.html>



- 30.3 million people, or 9.4% of the U.S. population, have diabetes.
- Approximately 7.2 million people have diabetes but have not yet been diagnosed (All ages, 2015).
- Diabetes impacts all social, economic and ethnic backgrounds

<https://www.diabetesresearch.org/diabetes-statistics>

"My diabetes is such a central part of my life... it did teach me discipline... it also taught me about moderation... I've trained myself to be super-vigilant... because I feel better when I am in control."

— Supreme Court Justice, Sonia Sotomayor

"I do not love to work out, but if I stick to exercising every day and put the right things in my mouth, then my diabetes just stays in check."

— Actor, Halle Berry

"I have high blood sugars, and Type 2 diabetes is not going to kill me. But I just have to eat right and exercise and lose weight and watch what I eat and I will be fine for the rest of my life."

— Actor, Tom Hanks

<https://www.brainyquote.com/topics/diabetes-quotes>

1980s TIMELINE

1980

- The Rubik's Cube debuts at the International Toy Fair.
- Mount St. Helens erupts.
- *Pac-Man* video game is released.
- Ted Turner establishes CNN.



1981

- John Hinckley, Jr. attempts to assassinate President Reagan.
- The first Space Shuttle, Columbia, is launched.
- Prince Charles of Great Britain marries Lady Diana Spencer.
- The first IBM PC and the software program MS-DOS are released.

1982

- The movie *E.T.* is released.
- Vietnam War Memorial opens in Washington, D.C.
- Michael Jackson releases *Thriller*.
- First artificial heart surgery

1983

- The TV show, *M*A*S*H*, ends after 256 episodes.
- Sally Ride becomes the first American woman in space.
- The first commercial cell phone call is made.

1984

- Steve Jobs introduces the first Macintosh computer.
- Bruce Springsteen releases his album *Born in the U.S.A.*



1985

- Discovery of the wreck of the Titanic.
- Microsoft introduces *Windows*.
- Soviet Premier, Mikhail Gorbachev calls for "glasnost" and "perestroika" reforms in the U.S.S.R.

1986

- Space Shuttle Challenger explodes shortly after lift-off.
- The first Martin Luther King, Jr. Day is observed.
- Chernobyl nuclear meltdown occurs.
- RUN DMC releases *Walk This Way*.



1987

- Red M&M's were re-introduced after having been removed during a red dye scare in 1976.
- Black Monday ravaged Wall Street as the Dow plunged "an astonishing 22.6%."
- **The play *Steel Magnolias* debuts in New York.**

1988

- George H. W. Bush. elected President of the United States.
- *Phantom of the Opera* debuts on Broadway (it is still running today).
- CDs outsell vinyl records and tapes for the first time.

1989

- Exxon Valdez spills millions of gallons of oil on Alaskan coastline.
- Student protesters killed in China's Tiananmen Square.
- F. W. DeKlerk becomes president of South Africa, promising apartheid reforms.
- The Berlin Wall is torn down.
- ***Steel Magnolias* film released.**



Glossary of Terms

Robeline's Boarding House: Typically, a family home that is open for people to rent for an extended period of time. Many boarding houses include room and board, and can include amenities like meals and laundry.

Elizabeth Taylor: Movie Star. She suffered from many ailments and illnesses throughout her life, including a brain tumor, skin cancer, pneumonia and congestive heart failure

Zwolle, Louisiana: (Za-wall-ee) - A small town located in Sabine Parish. Known for its proximity to North Toledo Bend, the largest man-made lake in the U.S.

Child-Bride: A child marriage in the U.S. is a marriage in which at least one party is under eighteen years old.

Glamour: A fashion and beauty magazine targeting women as the primary audience.

Coiffure Card: A client's information on the style or manner of arranging their hair kept on a card.

Jaclyn Smith: An actress well known for her role in the television show *Charlie's Angels*.

Petroleum Club: A private club located in Shreveport, Louisiana that traces its origins to the meeting of oil industry employees who needed a place to enjoy lunch together. It serves its members personal and professional needs with business, social and dining privileges.

West Monroe v. Monroe Proper: Two relatively large towns separated by a bridge. A reason for the rivalry could be based on football teams and intense fans.

Emily Post: Author of the book *Etiquette: In Society, In Business, In Politics and At Home*. She had "numerous books, a syndicated newspaper column, and a regular network radio program".

"Gild the Lily": "To add unnecessary ornamentation to something beautiful in its own right"

Dark Victory: A 1939 film, based on the play of the same name, starring Bette Davis. "A young socialite is diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor and must decide whether or not she'll meet her final days with dignity".

Elizabeth Arden: A business woman in the makeup industry - Arden was largely responsible for establishing the use of makeup as proper and appropriate, even necessary, for a ladylike image, when before, makeup had often been associated with lower classes and prostitutes.

Piggly Wiggly: "America's first true self-service grocery store". A grocery store chain mostly found in the South.

Circus of Stars: "An annual television special in which celebrities performed circus-type acts. The series featured many leading movie and television stars".

Anne Boleyn: The second wife of King Henry VIII of England. A man named Sanders wrote that she had an extra finger, a cyst on her neck and a projecting tooth. However, they exhumed what they believed to be her body and there was no extra finger.

Jane Fonda: An actress, activist and fashion model. In many movies throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. She currently stars in the Netflix series *Grace and Frankie*.

Post-show Reflection

The Question: Where do you find your community? What do those relationships mean to you?

1. Which of your favorite plays or movies pass the Bechdal Test (contain two female characters who talk to each other about something other than a man)?
2. Are there stories from your own family history that you think might make a good play?
3. What are some strategies you've learned for coping with loss or other troubling things?

Post-Show Reflection

After the show, write a short review of the performance using the space below. Include what you liked and didn't like while identifying the main conflicts of the play and its plot structure.

TAPROOT THEATRE COMPANY

MISSION STATEMENT

Taproot Theatre Company creates theatre experiences to brighten the spirit, engage the mind and deepen the understanding of the world around us while inspiring imagination, conversation and hope.

ABOUT US

Taproot Theatre Company was founded in 1976 by six friends, five of them graduates from Seattle Pacific University. From its humble beginnings as a touring group, the company is now Seattle's largest mid-size theatre company. Today Taproot Theatre serves over 150,000 people annually throughout the Pacific Northwest with its Jewell Mainstage season, Isaac Studio Theatre season, Touring programs and Acting Studio.

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EDUCATION PROGRAMS

In-School Residencies & Workshops

- From drama games to acting classes to putting on a production, Taproot Theatre's residencies can range from several weeks, to months or an entire school year. Whether during the school day or after school as an enrichment program, let Taproot's trained teaching artists introduce a whole new world to your students.
- Our theatre arts professional will visit your classroom for a workshop that will inspire and excite your students. They will develop basic acting skills and explore non-theatre curriculum using theater as a medium.

Touring Productions

- The Road Company – performing plays for elementary and secondary schools focusing on issues such as bullying prevention, substance abuse and friendship skills.
- Family oriented productions and improv comedy for churches, clubs, office parties and other groups.

Camps & Classes

- Taproot Theatre Company's Acting Studio is a year-round instructional program for theatre artists of all ages and experience levels. We are devoted to the wholeness of the artist with the goal of creating a nurturing environment to help

Coming Soon to the Jewell Mainstage



Babette's Feast

Conceived and Developed by Abigail Killeen
Written by Rose Courtney
Adapted from the short story by Isak Dinesen

Crossing thousands of miles in search of asylum, Babette finds safety across the fjords in a tiny mountain village. But petty squabbles and personal slights render the pious villagers as frigid and unforgiving as their surroundings. In one radical act of generosity, Babette prepares a feast so lavish it awakens grace and transforms brittle hearts.

Age Recommendation: 12+

Single tickets on sale: January 14, 2020



See How They Run

By Philip King

All Penelope wants is an evening out; surely even vicars' wives can have an innocent night on the town with an old friend. But between a buzzed busy-body in the closet, a volley of vicars galloping across the lawn and a Soviet spy on the loose, this night is racing toward insanity. Precocious and preposterous, this comedy is quintessentially English!

Age Recommendation: 12+

Single tickets on sale: March 10, 2020

Don't Miss These Special Opportunities!

Teen Tix

TeenTix members may purchase a \$5 ticket for themselves and for another person of any age (\$10 total) on Thursdays at this venue. Always call ahead to plan for companion tickets. For more information visit teentix.org

Wednesday Night Talkbacks

Dive deeper into the show. After every Wednesday performance the audience is invited to talk about the play with the cast. You can ask the actors questions and learn more about what goes into creating the play.

25 & Under Discount

All Jewell Mainstage performances offer \$15 tickets for patrons 25-years-old or younger. For more information about how to use this discount contact the box office at 206.781.9707. *Excludes Christmas Shows.*