



AMERICAN  
STAGE

# ARTS GUIDE

VOLUME IV ISSUE I 2025-2026

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## A NOTE

St. Pete is an ever-growing city. So many newcomers embrace our beautiful town wholeheartedly, it feels like they've always been a part of its story. I'm always curious: what drew them here? What made them stay? What about you? What brought you here? Why does this place feel like home? And what is home, really? Is it a place, a memory, a group of people? An idea we carry with us?

At American Stage, we're passionate about welcoming people into our space. But it's more than an invitation to a place—we're welcoming people home. That's the truest form of what we do. The more I reflect on why we make theatre, the more it feels like an answer to one persistent ache: loneliness. Maybe that's why we gravitate toward love stories in all their forms—they remind us that connection is possible. That we're not alone. That someone, somewhere, sees us.

It is quite an adventure - to tell stories that help people find connection, find their way home. Our 48th Season is an exploration of that adventure—the journey that starts with longing and ends in belonging. Plays that reflect the courage it takes to seek connection, the beauty in discovering your tribe—especially in unexpected places; a celebration of difference, and the universality of love. That coming-of-age moment when we realize the world is not what we thought—and yet, somehow, we are still okay. Maybe even better for it. We hear it all the time from our patrons: they're searching for a sense of community, of belonging—a place that feels like home. We hear you. This season, we're inviting you to join our family and journey with us. Because sometimes, the greatest adventure... is the one that brings us home.

HELEN R. MURRAY  
Producing Artistic Director



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SEPT. 20

*One girl faces an epic storm.*



OCT. 22 - NOV. 16

*A hundred days to love fearlessly.*



JAN. 21 - FEB. 15

*A reimagined exploration of  
"the original sin."*



MAR. 25 - APR. 26

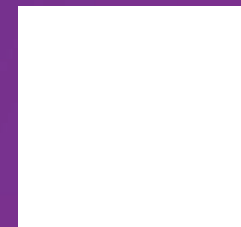
*Go beyond "happily ever after."*



JUN. 3 - 28

*Love and family tension  
bring the heat.*

Explore the  
Mainstage Season at  
[americanstage.org/mainstage](http://americanstage.org/mainstage)



# The Good Peaches

## A Tale of Resilience and Rebirth in Post-Hurricane St. Petersburg

In the aftermath of Hurricanes Helene and Milton, the St. Petersburg community has come together to rebuild and redefine its identity. One of the most poignant expressions of this collective spirit is *The Good Peaches*, a groundbreaking collaborative performance that intertwines theater, orchestral music, and contemporary dance. Presented by American Stage, The Florida Orchestra, and projectALCHEMY, this multidisciplinary production offers a narrative of survival, transformation, and the enduring strength of community.

Written by Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Quiara Alegría Hudes, *The Good Peaches* follows Aurora, a young girl who, in her desire for change, unwittingly summons a massive storm that alters her world. Her journey of survival and self-discovery mirrors the challenges faced by the residents of St. Petersburg as they navigate the complexities of recovery and renewal.

The performance is set against the backdrop of The Duke Energy Center for the Arts - Mahaffey Theater on September 20, 2025, with two scheduled performances. The Florida Orchestra, conducted by Chelsea Gallo, will perform Benjamin Britten's Four Seasons Interlude, providing a dynamic auditory landscape. American Stage actors will bring Hudes' poignant storytelling to life, while projectALCHEMY's dance artists, led by founder Alexander Jones, will embody the storm's emotional and physical turbulence through movement. This fusion of disciplines creates a rich tapestry that reflects the multifaceted nature of the Tampa Bay community's recovery journey.

Producing Artistic Director Helen R. Murray, expressed her enthusiasm for the collaboration, stating:

“

This is the sort of artistic intersectionality that will dynamically engage our community and enrich our cultural landscape in ways we had not yet imagined.”

Indeed, *The Good Peaches* serves as more than just a theatrical event; it is a testament to the resilience and creativity that define St. Petersburg in the face of adversity.

As the city continues its path to recovery, *The Good Peaches* stands as a beacon of hope and a reminder of the power of art to heal, unite, and inspire.



THE  
GOOD  
PEACHES

by Quiara Alegría Hudes

TWO PERFORMANCES - SEPT. 20



AMERICAN  
STAGE



PRESENTING SPONSOR **SUSAN & ROBB HOUGH**

Catch the rest of our musicals this season:

*Hundred Days* (p. 13), *The Magi* (p. 23), and *Into the Woods* (p. 16)





# TAMPA BAY WATCH

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# THE REAL-LIFE ROMANCE BEHIND *HUNDRED DAYS*

**“What would you do if you only had 100 days to fit an entire life?”** This question lies at the heart of *Hundred Days*, a folk-punk musical memoir created by married couple Abigail and Shaun Bengson. This real-life love story, marked by a dream that foretold a short-lived relationship, serves as the foundation for this raw exploration of love, mortality, and living fully in the moment.

## **I t Began with a Dream**

At the age of 15, Abigail Bengson experienced a dream she viewed as prophecy: she found herself in a diner booth with the love of her life, only to be told that he had only 100 days to live. The vision stayed with her for years, until one evening in an Astoria diner, she met Shaun Bengson, a fellow musician. That night, she ended her engagement. Within three weeks, the couple was married, embarking on a shared journey as the Bengsons.

The narrative of *Hundred Days* responds to Abigail's prophetic dream by depicting the Bengsons' decision to live each day as if they have only a hundred left. This leads them to celebrate holidays out of season, savor fleeting moments, and confront the fragility of life head-on.

## **From Personal Story to Stage**

Drawing inspiration from their personal experiences, the Bengsons, alongside playwright Sarah Gancher, crafted *Hundred Days* as a theatrical concert. Their story unfolds through a blend of original songs and narrative storytelling, allowing the couple—and in other productions, actors portraying them—to perform their love story live on stage. The development process was deeply collaborative, with the

Bengsons and Gancher working closely to adapt the autobiographical material into a cohesive theatrical experience. Originally directed by Anne Kauffman and featuring movement direction by Sonya Tayeh, the show evolved on various stages, including workshops and performances at venues like Z Space in San Francisco and the Under the Radar Festival at The Public Theater in New York. This iterative process allowed the team to refine the integration of music, narrative, and performance, culminating in an emotionally resonant, intimate production.

## **A Legacy of Love and Art**

*Hundred Days* has touched audiences across various theaters, from New York's New York Theatre Workshop to regional stages nationwide. The Bengsons' ability to blend personal narrative with universal themes has garnered critical acclaim, with the production being described as

**“a luminous musical memoir that celebrates and laments the elusive radiance of a shared life.”**

Through their art, Abigail and Shaun Bengson have created more than just a musical; they've shared a testament to the power of love, the inevitability of loss, and the beauty of living fully—even when time is limited.



# HUNDRED DAYS

OCT. 22 - NOV. 16, 2025

Tickets available at [americanstage.org/hundreddays](https://americanstage.org/hundreddays)



# Reimagining Hester Prynne

## How Kate Hamill's Adaptation Brings a Classic to Life

A Q&A with the director of American Stage's upcoming production of playwright Kate Hamill's adaptation of *The Scarlet Letter*.

BY JENNA JANE

Director Arpita Mukherjee reflects on how Hamill's retelling of Nathaniel Hawthorne's 1850 novel reinterprets the character of Hester Prynne for a contemporary audience, emphasizing Prynne's agency. This conversation has been edited for brevity and clarity.

### Q: What drew you to this story?

A: What I liked so much about the adaptation is this idea that patriarchy hurts everyone. That liberation is really something that should be for all, and these systems end up creating so much pain across social strata and gender. I know playwright Kate Hamill's work and have always admired it.

### Q: The original novel was published in 1850. Why do you think this story has had such staying power?

A: These ideas of shame, desire, repression have really informed America, the American identity. Who gets to decide what is punishment—and who gets to decide who gets punished for what—is a kind of old, old story that seems to be just as relevant today.

### Q: How does Kate Hamill's adaptation of Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel reinterpret the character of Hester Prynne?

A: I think what Kate Hamill does is put, very firmly, Hester in the driving seat of her own life. She's basically trying to forge this new way for her daughter. Actually, Hester seems much less concerned in this adaptation with the men around her. But the men seem very concerned with her and almost, in a way, can't let her go. It's not as much, really, about her feeling sort of like a sad heroine, like a tragic heroine.

### Q: Why is it important to revisit classic stories?

A: They're like origin stories and I think it's important to go back to them, to remember. I think it's important to remember how women were seen, then, in terms of their sexuality or sensuality. The fear of desire—that desire can topple an order. And I think that's really fascinating, in terms of American puritanical history of the fear of desire and sex. So, I think it's important to remember that story because it helps us make sense of things, of why.

### Q: What do you hope audiences walk away with?

A: Some questions that maybe don't have easy answers. I hope that they walk away with a sense that the reckoning that is America is continuous.

Jenna Jane is a Pinellas County playwright, actor, and voiceover artist. @jennajanecreative on Instagram.



## THE SCARLET LETTER

JAN. 21 - FEB. 15, 2026  
TICKETS ON SALE NOV. 25, 2025

Become a subscriber for early access at [americanstage.org/subscriptions](https://americanstage.org/subscriptions)



# BEYOND 'HAPPILY EVER AFTER'

## SONDHEIM'S *INTO THE WOODS* AND THE CULTURAL PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

BY RANDI J. NORMAN

"Happily Ever After"—a phrase often found in our beloved fairy tales and an ideal woven into the fabric of our psyche. One that is believed to always come at the conclusion of pursuit. But what does that even mean? According to our good friend Google, 'Happily Ever After' means "to live in a state of lasting happiness and contentment." Is that possible, or are we, much like the characters found in *Into the Woods*, bound to a never-ending cycle of pursuit?

A fairy tale is a tale about something magical and imaginary. It's a story about something that doesn't exist. However, all good stories—my favorites—are rooted in something real. For most, it's our desire for love, acceptance, sufficiency, trust, and freedom. These are the roots that draw us in and allow us to find ourselves within the branches of the story, no matter how outlandish the landscape. Magical beans, talking cosplaying wolves, hair long enough and strong enough for climbing, and shoes that determine destiny overlay very real desires inherent to the human experience. We all want financial sufficiency to take care of our families, long to trust those in close proximity to us, the freedom to live life on our own terms, and, of course, to find true love.

The pursuit of such things takes us into the woods of the unknown—a place that can be scary, yet adventurous and filled with possibility. Whether you will be content with what you find at the end of that journey is solely determined by how content you were with yourself before it even began. When you begin a journey full of happiness, thankful for and

content with what you have and who you are, what you gain and learn along the journey is only bonus material. As the writer of Philippians states, "I have learned, in whatever state I'm in, to be content." This means that what I have is sufficient for today, what I know is enough to discern who to trust, who I am already gives me permission to live free, and true love has already been found within. The journey then becomes less about finding happiness and more about who you will meet along the way, how you will impact their lives, and how they will enrich yours.

"Happily Ever After" isn't just a mere phrase to conclude our favorite childhood stories—it is a way of life that, when embraced, makes ordinary moments magical and shifts our perspective on this adventure called life. To live in a state of lasting happiness and contentment is a superpower that not only illuminates you from within; it invites others to embrace where they are and get busy crafting their own stories that will always begin with: "Once upon a time, [insert your name] went into the woods..." and end with "...and lived happily ever after."

*Randi J. Norman is a writer, performer, and creative visionary inspiring others to find faith, freedom, and purpose through storytelling. @iamrandijnorman*



INTO THE  
WOODS  
IN THE PARK

**MAR. 25 - APR. 26, 2026 | TICKETS ON SALE JAN. 28, 2026**

**OPENING NIGHT ON MARCH 27, 2026**

See more details on page 35 or online at [americanstage.org/park-opening-night](https://americanstage.org/park-opening-night)

# What Makes The Hot Wing King Sizzle?

## The Role of Food in Family

Katori Hall's Pulitzer Prize-winning comedy-drama *The Hot Wing King* centers on Cordell and his partner Dwayne, along with their friends—collectively the “New Wing Order”—as they prepare for Memphis's annual Hot Wing Festival, a hot wing cooking contest filled with family bonds, pride, and high stakes. Sizzling wings bring literal warmth and energy to the stage in the form of a fully-functioning kitchen, but beneath the spectacle lies a deeper meaning. Hot wings are also framed as a tribute to Black culinary ingenuity—seasoned spices turn scarcity into lovingly crafted meals born of history and resilience.

### Cooking as Ritual, Rhythm, and Togetherness

In *The Hot Wing King*, cooking unfolds not just as performance, but as a ritual steeped in cultural memory and resilience. The play's creative process has often been compared to crafting music and cuisine alike—both are collaborative art forms dependent on rhythm, timing, and a shared appetite for perfection. But beyond these rhythms lies a tribute: the wings themselves are positioned as symbols of Black culinary ingenuity. As director Timothy Douglas explains, seasoning and invention turn what were once discarded scraps into meals of care and creativity—“during times of slavery, we were only given the scraps, the parts of the animal that the privileged didn't deem suitable for eating. Those scraps...and how it became palatable was how it was spiced... it's in the bones of the play and something these characters know well” (“Worthy of the Crown: The Hot Wing King Pits Family Against Fame,” Denver Center for the Performing Arts, 2025).

Together, these elements transform cooking into ritual, rhythm, and togetherness, anchoring the play's exploration of identity, history, and community.

### Wings: Fuel for Family, Friction, and Growth

What begins as a lighthearted cooking contest quickly deepens into a crucible of loyalty, identity, grief, and love. Cordell—having left his wife and children behind to build a new life with Dwayne—clings to the competition in hopes of asserting himself and forging a sense of belonging. But when Dwayne's nephew Everett and his father TJ unexpectedly arrive, their presence disrupts the kitchen's rhythm and forces Cordell to confront what it truly means to be family. Ultimately, the spectacle of frying wings serves as a backdrop; what truly resonates is how the act of cooking brings layered human connections to life, transforming frying oil into fuel for family, friction, and personal growth. (The Guardian)

### Food as Love and Liberation

Cygnnet Theatre's director Kian Kline-Chilton emphasizes that “food is not something that I know how to fake... Especially in Black culture, that's love.” Through this lens, hot wings transcend their role as props—they become sensory anchors that root the characters in a space where vulnerability is safe, identity is uplifted, and emotional authenticity thrives. On stage, food transforms into something profoundly intimate: it's both a catalyst for honest expression and a symbol of communal love. By centering hot wings in this way, the production culminates in a triumphant celebration of joy, queer identity, and the families we choose.

At its heart, *The Hot Wing King* is more than a culinary competition; it's a celebration of chosen family, resilience, and the transformative power of love. Through the metaphor of hot wings—seasoned with history, identity, and care—the play invites audiences to savor the complexities of Black queer life, where joy and struggle coexist on the same plate. In a world where family is often defined by blood, Hall reminds us that true kinship is forged in the heat of shared experience, the spice of authenticity, and the sweetness of belonging.



**JUN. 3 - 28, 2026**

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# BEYOND THE STAGE

As a St. Petersburg native, I have a deep love for our ever-changing city, as well as its rich history. That's why I am thrilled about the return of our Beyond the Stage series, which brings powerful storytelling to iconic settings around St. Pete! Whether walking the beautiful trails at Boyd Hill or hearing a new play at a local cafe, these experiences allow you to engage with our city and our community in fun and exciting new ways.

This season, *Weird in St. Pete* is back and *Weirder* than ever, highlighting the best and strangest of St. Pete history, amidst the sculptures at Duncan McClellan Gallery. The holiday season brings "*The Magi*", an intimate, folk-rock musical to our stage, in a modern re-telling of "*The Gifts of The Magi*". Then, *Tales by Twilight* returns for its third year, bringing an immersive, all-ages storytelling experience to Boyd Hill Nature Preserve. In the Spring, we will continue to support new play development with our Fresh Ink series, pop-up events that bring new plays to cozy, intimate venues. Finally, our Summer Cabaret Series will return with three new musical performances, curated by American Stage. These unique experiences highlight the beauty of our city, our local talent, and the enduring magic of storytelling, no matter the setting. I hope you will join us to go *Beyond the Stage*.

ANTHONY GERVAIS

Associate Artistic Director

BEYOND THE STAGE, PRESENTED BY

DUNCAN McCLELLAN GALLERY



## WEIRD IN ST PETE

OCTOBER 2 - 19, 2025

Taken directly from the weird and wacky tales that make St. Pete one-of-a-kind, this immersive play will take you on a journey through The Duncan McClellan art gallery, as some well-known (and not so well-known) characters in St. Pete folklore come to life!



## THE MAGI

DECEMBER 4 - 21, 2025

Nix and Jude have been on the road as *The Magi* for eight years—and have shared nearly all of that time together, falling in love after seven years and eleven months. Now, as the holiday lights begin to glow, both the band and the couple find themselves at a breaking point. *The Magi* peels back the curtain on the sacrifices we make for those we deeply cherish. Equal parts festive concert, tender love story, and deliciously awkward moments—get ready for an evening as real as it is heartwarming.



## TALES BY TWILIGHT

### FAIRYLAND: A MIDWINTER NIGHT'S DREAM

FEBRUARY 19 - MARCH 8, 2026

Step into the great outdoors as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* unfolds along the winding trails of Boyd Hill Nature Preserve. With nature and theater blending seamlessly, the forest becomes a character in its own right. Follow lovers lost in mischief, fairies casting spells, and transformations both whimsical and wondrous. This isn't just a play—it's an adventure you can wander through.



## FRESH INK

FEBRUARY 24, 2026 & MAY 5, 2026

Experience the development of a new play with this staged reading series! Enjoy hearing new work at local hot-spots around town, and engage in meaningful conversation post-show!



## SUMMER CABARET

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## BEHIND THE SCENES

Behind the Scenes offers a community-focused discussion aimed at enriching your understanding of our current main stage productions. Gain an exclusive glimpse into the creative process as our design team explores the journey of bringing each show to life.

**HUNDRED DAYS:** Sunday, 10/12/25 @ 2:00pm

**THE SCARLET LETTER:** Sunday, 1/11/26 @ 2:00pm

**THE HOT WING KING:** Sunday, 5/24/26 @ 2:00pm

## ASL-INTERPRETED PERFORMANCES

Theatre for all. This season, join us for the following ASL-interpreted performances:

**HUNDRED DAYS:** Saturday, 11/8/25 @ 8:00pm

**THE SCARLET LETTER:** Saturday, 2/7/26 @ 8:00pm

**THE HOT WING KING:** Saturday, 6/20/26 @ 2:00pm

## IDEA

The mission of the IDEA Council is to discuss concerns and develop solutions for issues related to inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility within our organizations and the Tampa Bay community.

### IDEA COUNCIL MEMBERS

Ajori Spencer | Performing Arts Specialist - Pinellas County Schools

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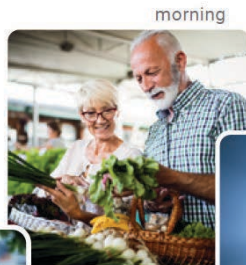
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# WAYS TO SUPPORT

We are committed to making the best possible use of your gift to shape and advance the theatre we share with our community each year.

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Partner with us to enjoy company marketing and experiential benefits for your clients and employees, while investing in your community.

## ENGAGE IN OUR COMMUNITY PARTNER PROGRAM

Support live theatre through in-kind donations of services or products from your business and receive company marketing or ticketing perks.

## SPONSOR A STUDENT

Give a student the gift of opportunity—your sponsorship supports their arts education, unlocks their potential, and changes their future.

## SPONSOR A CLASS

Empower an entire class with resources and encouragement—your sponsorship fuels collective learning and lasting impact.

## SPONSOR A PERFORMANCE

Support a Mainstage or Beyond the Stage production, bringing powerful stories that inspire, excite and engage audiences of all ages.



FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT  
PAMELA ARBISI, DIRECTOR OF ADVANCEMENT  
AT 727-685-4014 OR PARBISI@AMERICANSTAGE.ORG.

# FROM ONE OF OUR STUDENTS

“

I have been going to American Stage Theater Camp since I was in the 4th grade and it's literally my favorite camp in the world.

I was really shy at first but Hamilton was my favorite musical and I wanted to do it! The teachers and mentors were amazing and they taught us how to bring out the talent we didn't know we had. I love the camps because not only do they help me with the stage acting, they also teach how to do backstage production, script writing, and how to do a music score for a movie.

The activities are fun, but the best thing about the camps are the other campers! I have my theater friends that I get to hang out with every year and do fun things with them. We get to grow together and have fun at American Stage since we all go to different schools. They all have different genders and nationalities and everyone gets along because we love acting and singing. In conclusion, I really love American Stage Theater Camp, (especially Miss Ivy Sunflower!!) And I hope to get more scholarships so I can do Fall Camp and Summer camp. Thank you!

”

– ZURI W.

8th grade, Sanderling IB World School





## SAVE PARK

THE HEART OF AMERICAN STAGE

American Stage in the Park is our most beloved annual program and has become a treasured tradition for our community since 1986. We are passionate about keeping this experience going as it all adds up to...

more **CORE MEMORIES** being made.

more **ART** with our **COMMUNITY**.

more **POWERFUL STORIES. BOLDLY TOLD.**

The costs of producing popular musicals in the park continue to rise. We know we could not do it without our community and YOU!

Won't you join other Park Supporters to provide a memorable evening of theatre under the stars? Please consider an annual, monthly, or one time gift to keep the magic for years to come.

**SCAN TO LEAN MORE  
AND DONATE NOW.**



# PARK OPENING NIGHT

## INTO THE WOODS

Join us to go beyond "happily ever after" with *Into the Woods*...in the Park! Experience the Sondheim's classic musical that flips Grimm's fairy tales upside down! Enjoy a night of entertainment under the stars with a full dinner, drinks, and delights in support of American Stage!

**March 27, 2026**

**DINNER, DRINKS AND SHOW**

**6:00 - 10:00 PM**

**Demens Landing Park**

**Attire: Grimm's Classic Fairy Tales Inspired**

For sponsorships and tables, contact Pamela Arbisi, Director of Advancement at [parbisi@americanstage.org](mailto:parbisi@americanstage.org) or 727.685.4014.





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Your support helps connect our community to powerful stories, boldly told through year-round theatrical productions, arts education programs, and community engagement initiatives.

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Contact Pamela Arbisi at [parbsi@americanstage.org](mailto:parbsi@americanstage.org) or 727-685-4014 for more information.

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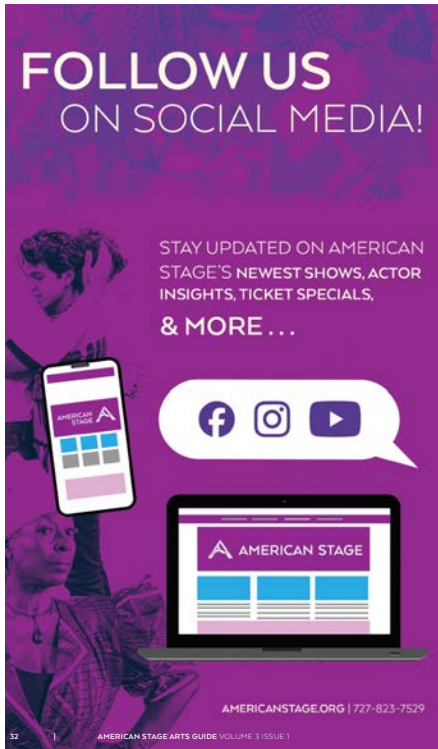


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