Welcome to American Blues Theater’s 33rd season “Home Sweet Home”. We proudly celebrate the 17th anniversary of this holiday tradition. We’ve delighted over 50,000 patrons throughout the years and featured the work of 29 Ensemble members and Artistic Affiliates. One cast member, John Mohrlein (Mr. Potter/Clarence), has evolved with this production since the first curtain. In 17 years, he has never missed a performance. Please knock on wood immediately upon reading.

This story is a staple of our mission: American Blues Theater explores the American identity through the plays it produces and communities it serves. During 2002 and 2003, our Ensemble and former Artistic Director, Damon Kiely, presented staged-readings of It’s a Wonderful Life. In 2004, we expanded the event to a fully-staged production of Joe Landry’s adaptation, directed by Ensemble member Marty Higginbotham. In the years that followed, Higginbotham created a live-radio experience for audience members and adapted a new version with our Ensemble. Dramaturgical research and attention to detail were paramount to our adaptations. Higginbotham’s directorial elements included adding audio grams, lobby refreshments of cookies and milk, dramatized scenes from Capra’s film, a pre-show, and singing holiday carols. In our present iteration, you can also enjoy “vintage” video, the “Soldier Spotlight” which has honored nearly 400 military personnel, expanded scenes, and a quiz show for the live audience.

This story reminds us of the fragility of life. Frank Capra’s lines—“Each man’s life touches so many other lives. When he isn’t around, he leaves an awful hole, doesn’t he?”—resonates throughout the year. During the holidays, it becomes a poignant reminder as we gather with our loved ones.

Your gracious spirits and open hearts are equally important to this Chicago tradition. Your presence is a gift to the Blues family. We welcome you—our home is yours.

—Gwendolyn Whiteside

Gift Certificates

GIVE THE GIFT OF THEATER
Certificates can be purchased at any amount & redeemed for any American Blues production

(773) 654-3103 or purchase in our lobby
Begins at $27

(773) 654-3103
AmericanBluesTheater.com

Never expires!
presents
from the Frank Capra movie “It’s a Wonderful Life”
based on the Philip Van Doren Stern story “The Greatest Gift”

IT’S A WONDERFUL LIFE:
LIVE IN CHICAGO!

directed by Gwendolyn Whiteside*
music directed by Michael Mahler*

Scenic Design .......................................................... Grant Sabin*, U.S.A.
Lighting Design ....................................................... Katy Peterson Viccellio
Costume Design .................................................... Christopher J. Neville*
Original Score ......................................................... Austin Cook*
Jingle Composer ..................................................... Michael Mahler*
Sound Design ........................................................ Keegan Bradac
Set Dressing & Properties Design............................ Elyse Dolan*
Projection Associate .............................................. Paul Deziel*
Production Stage Manager ..................................... Shandee Vaughan*

* Ensemble member or Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater

NOVEMBER 15, 2018–JANUARY 5, 2019 (previews Nov 15–18)

More than 50,000 patrons have enjoyed our holiday classic since 2002. The American Blues Theater Ensemble performed “It’s a Wonderful Life” as a radio play at Chicago venues and events, including American Theatre Company, Theater on the Lake, Mrs. Murphy’s Bistro, Logan Square (2002-2008); Victory Gardens Biograph Theatre (2009-2012); Greenhouse Theater Center (2013-2016); Stage 773 (2017+)

American Blues Theater
4809 N. Ravenswood Ave., Suite 221, Chicago, IL 60640
Phone: (773) 654-3103 AmericanBluesTheater.com

American Blues Theater is a constituent of the Theatre Communications Group, Inc – the national organization for nonprofit professional theaters, the League of Chicago Theaters, Arts Alliance Illinois, and Lakeview Chamber of Commerce.

American Blues Theater operates under agreements between Producers’ Association of Chicago Area Theatres, Actors’ Equity Association – the union of professional actors and stage managers, Stage Directors & Choreographers Society, and United Scenic Artists of America, Local 829 – AFL-CIO.
CAST (IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER)

Violet .......................................................................................................................... Dara Cameron*^  
Harry ......................................................................................................................... Ian Paul Custer*^  
George Bailey ......................................................................................................... Brandon Dahlquist^  
Announcer/Pianist ................................................................................................. Matt Edmonds^  
Foley ....................................................................................................................... Shawn J. Goudie*  
Uncle Billy ............................................................................................................... James Joseph*  
Clarence/Mr. Potter ................................................................................................. John Mohrlein*^  
Mary Bailey ............................................................................................................. Camille Robinson*^  

* Ensemble member or Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater  
^ Member of Actors’ Equity Association—the union of professional actors and stage managers

As a courtesy to the actors and your fellow patrons, please turn off your phone before the performance. The taking of photographs and the use of any type of recording device are not allowed in the theater during the performance and is a violation of state and federal copyright laws. Digital media will be deleted and tape or film will be confiscated.

SETTING

1944. A radio broadcast from the WABT Studio on Belmont Avenue in Chicago.  
The performance runs 90 minutes without an intermission.

PRODUCTION STAFF

Production Manager ............................................................................................... Shandee Vaughan*  
Assistant Stage Manager ..................................................................................... Breana Young  
Production Consultant .......................................................................................... Kathryn Lochert*  
Technical Director ................................................................................................. Bobby Huggins  
Master Electrician .................................................................................................. Rachel West  
Scenic Painter ....................................................................................................... Eileen Rozycki

* Ensemble member or Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater

COMMUNITY SERVICE FOR IT’S A WONDERFUL LIFE: LIVE IN CHICAGO

American Blues Theater believes it is an honor and duty to serve our community. We raise awareness of other non-profit organizations’ great causes through creative collaborations. We proudly offer complimentary tickets to the USO, U.S. Dept. of Veteran Affairs, and Misericordia. We honor military personnel during the performance through out “Soldier Spotlight”. We continue our “Pediatric Previews” that donate proceeds of preview performances to St. Jude’s Children’s Research Hospital.

To enrich your experience, visit AmericanBluesTheater.com.
SEASON SUPPORTERS


SPECIAL THANKS

The biggest Hoosier fans, Mark Botelho, Michael Brosilow, Cathy Taylor Public Relations, Paula Conrad, Marty Higginbotham, Michael Levinson, The Saints, X-Man, and the staff of Stage 773.

Our ushers are provided by the Saints—Volunteers for the Performing Arts.

For more information visit Saintschicago.org or call (773) 529-5510.

BIOGRAPHIES

DARA CAMERON (Violet) is a proud Ensemble member of American Blues Theater. She is happy to be performing with WABT for her sixth holiday season. Favorite credits include Little Shop of Horrors (American Blues Theater); Old Jews Telling Jokes (Royal George and Off-Broadway); Elf, Hero (Jeff nomination), South Pacific, October Sky, Sister Act, City of Angels, Cinderella, The Wizard of Oz, Fiddler on the Roof (Marriott Theatre); Addams Family (Mercy Theater); Dirty Rotten Scoundrels (Theatre at the Center); and Sunset Boulevard, Seussical, The Buddy Holly Story (Drury Lane). She is a graduate of Northwestern University and a proud member of Actors’ Equity. She’d like to dedicate this production to her new baby boy, Ezra!

IAN PAUL CUSTER (Harry) is a proud Ensemble member of American Blues Theater. Recent American Blues credits: “Hi Pockets” in Buddy—The Buddy Holly Story (Jeff Awards—Best Ensemble and Best Musical, Midsize), “David Halberstam” in The Columnist (Jeff nomination—Best Production, Midsize), It’s a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago! (Jeff nominations—Best Ensemble and Best Production, Midsize), “Orin Skrivello” in Little Shop of Horrors (Jeff nomination—Best Production of a Musical, Midsize), and “Adam” in Yankee Tavern. Recent Chicago credits: Bad Jews (Theater Wit, North Shore Center, Royal George), 33 Variations (TimeLine Theatre, Jeff Award—Best Production, Midsize), Annie Bosh is Missing (Steppenwolf Theatre), High Holidays (Goodman Theatre), To Master the Art (Broadway Playhouse/TimeLine Theatre), Strangers, Babies (Steep Theatre), and Fiddler on the Roof (Paramount Theatre). Regional credits: Hero: The Musical (Asolo Rep Theatre), Cymbeline (Notre...
Dame Shakespeare), *Romeo and Juliet* (Cardinal Stage), and *Peter Pan* (360 Entertainment—London, England). Television credits: *APB, Empire, Chicago Fire,* and *Chicago PD.* Love to Shannon, my friends and family, and Gray Talent Group for all the support.

**BRANDON DAHLQUIST** (*George Bailey*) is thrilled to be back in Bedford Falls this winter! Theatre credits include: Broadway: *Bronx Bombers;* Regional: *Shakespeare in Love,* *Rhinoceros* (Asolo Repertory), *The Glass Menagerie* (Milwaukee Repertory), *1776* (A.C.T, Asolo Repertory), *A Little Night Music* (A.C.T), *Dogfight, City of Angels* (SF Playhouse), *Lombardi, Murder on the Nile* (Peninsula Players), and *12 Angry Men* (Maltz Jupiter); Chicago: *A Little Night Music* (Jeff nomination), *Oh Coward, Arcadia* (Writers Theatre), *Cabaret, Sugar, Meet Me in St. Louis, Grand Hotel* (Drury Lane), *City of Angels, Sunday... George, Assassins, The Teapot Scandals & Best Musical* (Porchlight Music Theatre) and *Knute Rockne: All American* (Jeff nomination). Dahlquist is a graduate of The Second City Musical Conservatory and a popular headshot photographer. www.brandondahlquistphotography.com

**MATT EDMONDS** (*Announcer/Pianist*) is pretty jazzed to make his American Blues Theater debut, and, tangentially, is rather excited that someone asked him to do a holiday show that isn’t *Christmas Carol.* He’s been performing in Chicagoland for 10ish years; recently, you may have seen him in *Murder For Two* (Marriott Lincolnshire, or before that, Milwaukee Repertory), *Forever Plaid, Big River* (Theatre at the Center), or *James and the Giant Peach* (Drury Lane Oakbrook). Favorite productions include *Rent* (Theo Ubique), *Titanic, Ragtime* (Griffin Theatre), *All-American, Death of a Salesman* (Redtwist Theatre), *The Last Five Years* (Metropolis PAC), *Upright Grand* (Citadel Theatre), and *Next To Normal* (TheatreSquared). He is a company member at Redtwist Theatre, and is represented by Shirley Hamilton Talent.

**SHAWN J. GOUDIE** (*Foley*) is a proud Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater. He is excited to be returning for his tenth season of *It’s a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!* It is a joy for him to share the magic of old time radio with so many wonderful folks year after year. He would like to thank his amazing wife, their endlessly curious children, and his loving parents.

**JAMES JOSEPH** (*Uncle Billy*) is a proud Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater. He returns for his ninth season of *It’s a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!* Also at American Blues he appeared in *Tobacco Road,* performed voiceovers for *Hank Williams: Lost Highway* and *American Myth,* and has written for the *Ripped* festival. He has performed on Chicago stages for twenty years, including at Steppenwolf Theatre, Northlight Theatre, Victory Gardens Theater, and TimeLine Theatre. He is your audio guide for the permanent *Chicago Authored* exhibition at the Chicago History Museum and was nominated for a Non-Equity Jeff Award (Supporting Actor) for his role in *Faith Healer* with UMA Productions.
Biographies Cont.

John Mohrlein
(Clarence/Mr. Potter) is a proud Ensemble member of American Blues Theater. 17 years as “Clarence/Mr. Potter”, and he loves getting to revisit and reinvent these characters year after year. At American Blues, he’s appeared in Half of Plenty, It’s a Wonderful Life, A View from the Bridge, Strictly Dishonorable, American Dead, The Hairy Ape, A Lie of the Mind, Endgame, American Buffalo, The Skin of Our Teeth, The Threepenny Opera, A Stone Carver (Jeff nomination for Best Actor, After Dark Award for Outstanding Performance), and directed Catch-22. Other credits: The Glass House at the Art Institute of Chicago; nine productions at Goodman Theatre; and Cripple of Inishmaan, Heart of a Dog, and Murder of Cardinal Tosca at Northlight Theatre. His extensive television and film work includes Golden Boy, Good Night Sweet Wife, Dillinger, Killing Floor, Early Edition, Crime Story (recurring role), Untouchables, Devil’s Dominiones, Stranger Than Fiction, No Place to be Somebody, Hellcab, Hero, and Cold Justice. Now he’s developing “Star Crossed Lovers”, “Pope Frank in Venice”, while continuing to install his art works.

Camille Robinson
(Mary Bailey) is a proud Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater. She is thrilled to return to this beautiful, timeless show with such a wonderful cast and team. Her favorite Chicago theater credits include: Lizzie (Firebrand Theatre); Jesus Christ Superstar (Paramount Theatre); A Wonder in My Soul (Victory Gardens Theater); Wonderful Town (Goodman Theatre); and Little Shop of Horrors (American Blues Theater). Most recently, she completed a regional tour of Beehive: the 60s Musical and can be seen as “Nurse Tanya” on Chicago Med. Camille is a proud member of AEA and SAG/AFTRA and represented by Gray Talent Group. She sends all her love to her family and friends as she would be nothing without their unwavering love and support.

Gwendolyn Whiteside
(Director and Artistic Director) is a proud Ensemble member of American Blues Theater and has served as Artistic Director since 2010. Under her leadership, American Blues has nearly doubled the size of its Ensemble, added 30 Artistic Affiliates, and diversified its base of artists. She created the nationally-recognized annual Blue Ink Playwriting Award, Blueprint Development for new work, implemented community service into the company’s mission, and created the free arts education program The Lincoln Project for Chicago Public Schools which serves 3,000 students annually. She led American Blues through its 2009 rebirth and built the operational budget from zero to $1 million+ in seven years. Whiteside served numerous panels for the National Endowment for the Arts and sat on the national Board of Directors for Network of Ensemble Theaters. Currently she sits on the Board of Directors for The League of Chicago Theatres. She’s a graduate of Northwestern University (cum laude), The School of the Art Institute of Chicago (MFA), and a Kellogg Executive Scholar in Nonprofit management (Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University). She was nominated for “Chicagoan of the Year” in Chicago Magazine and named in Newcity’s annual Players list numerous times. In eight years, nine American Blues’ productions won or were nominated for production by the Joseph Jefferson Award committee. She’s received 14 Joseph Jefferson Awards, Citations, and nominations as an actress and Artistic Director. Her favorite performances include Jeff Award for Solo Performance (Grounded) and seven years as “Mary Bailey” (It’s a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!). She’s the recipient of two After Dark Awards and numerous Broadway World Chicago Awards and nominations.
MICHAEL MAHLER (Music Director and Jingle Composer) is a proud Ensemble member of American Blues Theater. He may be spending the holidays up north this year, but his heart is still with his radio family. He has served as music director/jingle writer for the past 7 seasons of It’s a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago. He most recently music directed and appeared in Buddy - The Buddy Holly Story. Past appearances with Blues include “Seymour” in Little Shop of Horrors, “Clifford” in Side Man, and “Jimmy” in Hank Williams: Lost Highway. Other recent Chicagoland music director credits: Parade (Writers), Road Show (Chicago Shakespeare), Pinkalicious (Marriott), and The Music Man (Paramount). Michael can currently be seen in Holiday Inn at the Marriott Lincolnshire. He is a Jeff Award-winning composer/lyricist who contributed additional lyrics to the new Broadway production of Miss Saigon. Love to his wife Dara Cameron and their little angel, Ezra.

GRANT SABIN (Scenic Design) is a proud Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater. A native of rural Illinois, Grant blends his rural roots with urban art. He’s a recipient of the 2015 Michael Maggio Emerging Designer Award. He’s a graduate of Columbia College with a BFA in theatre design where he was awarded the 2005 Michael Merritt student scholarship for collaboration in theatre design. He is known throughout Chicago for his keen eye in capturing atmospheric detail and his ability to design “impressively executed sets” on a storefront-theater budget. His designs have been seen at Northlight Theatre, Victory Gardens Theater, Steppenwolf Theatre, Next Theatre, The Royal George, Overture Center WI, Theatre Wit, Gallagher Bluedorn IA, American Blues Theater, American Theater Company, Christina Isabelle Dance, The Seldoms Dance, and A Red Orchid. He was nominated for a Joseph Jefferson Award for his design of American Blues’ production of Yankee Tavern, A Red Orchid’s production of The Sea Horse, and Dog & Pony’s production of Mr. Marmalade. He was recently named one of the Top 50 Players in Chicago Theatre by New City Magazine. Grant is currently a part-time faculty member at Columbia College.

CHRISTOPHER J. NEVILLE (Costume Design) is a proud Ensemble member of American Blues Theater. He is elated to be back this holiday. Previous Blues costume designs include Hank Williams: Lost Highway (assistant), The Rainmaker, It’s a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago, Looking Over The President’s Shoulder, and Dutchman/TRANSit. Christopher stitched and assistant designed at Victory Gardens Theater, Lookingglass Theatre Company, Chicago Opera Theater, Theatre at the Center, and Signal Ensemble Theatre. Along with balancing design work, Christopher teaches yoga across the Chicagoland area. He trained at Peninsula Players Theatre as a production intern and received his BFA in Theatre Design & Technology from Oakland University in Rochester, MI. www.cjnevilledesigns.com

KATY PETERSON VICCELLIO (Lighting Design) is delighted to return for her 14th year as Lighting Designer to It’s a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago. Katy has designed lighting and scenery throughout the United States for nearly 20 years. Favorite Chicago shows include It’s a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago! with American Blues; Playing With Fire, I Am My Own Wife (Jeff nomination) with BoHo Theatre, and seven seasons of Lighting/Production Design for The Oprah Winfrey Show. She holds a B.A. from The University of Texas and M. Arch from The Ohio State University. Katy practices architecture in Columbus, Ohio, where she lives with her husband, son, and two rescue dogs. Her first building as a project director won a 2018 AIA Ohio Honor Award and was featured in Metropolis magazine.
ELYSE DOLAN (Set Dressing and Properties Design) is a proud Ensemble member of American Blues Theater where she is also the Associate Producer. Outside of her enthusiasm for decorating Christmas trees, she's primarily a Director. Here at Blues she has directed several short plays in past Ripped festivals, staged readings in the annual Blue Ink Festival, and has been Assistant Director on a handful shows including Six Corners (dir. Gary Griffin) and Little Shop of Horrors (dir. Jonathan Berry). Her directing work has been seen across Chicago at The New Colony (where she is also their Director of Education), Broken Nose Theatre, Prop Thtr, Commission Theatre, Babes with Blades, 20% Theatre Company, Pride Films & Plays, and more. She has also served as Assistant Director on productions at Raven Theatre, Oracle Theatre, 16th Street Theater, and Redtwist Theatre. Elyse holds a B.A. from Denison University.

KEEGAN BRADAC (Sound Design) returns to It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago for his third year. Sound Designs include Lettin’ the Good Times Roll (Kicky Productions at Victory Gardens); Violet (Griffin Theatre); The Scottsboro Boys, Marry Me a Little, Applause, Chess, The Rink, Little Me, They’re Playing Our Song, and Do Re Mi (Porchlight Music Theatre); Bullets Over Broadway (NightBlue); and Assistant Designs for South Pacific (Drury Lane) and Last Stop on Market Street (Chicago Children’s Theatre). He is currently the Sound Engineer at the Marriott Theatre. Other Engineer credits include A Midsummer Night’s Dream (Chicago Shakespeare Parks Tour); Fun Home (Victory Gardens); Little Fish (Kokandy Productions); Thrones! The Musical Parody (Apollo Theater); Merrily We Roll Along, In the Heights, Dreamgirls, Far from Heaven, and Ain’t Misbehavin’ (Porchlight Music Theatre).

AUSTIN COOK (Score Composer) is a proud Ensemble member of American Blues Theater. He is an award-winning music director, musician, actor and producer currently residing in Brooklyn, NY. Most recently he was part of the Los Angeles production of Hamilton as the Music Associate. Recent credits: Pre-Broadway World Premiere War Paint (Pianist), 1st/4th National Tour Million Dollar Quartet (Music Director/Music Supervisor), Sondheim on Sondheim (Music Director/Pianist—Jeff Award Music Direction), Ain’t Misbehavin’ (Pianist – Jeff Award Artistic Specialization), Putting It Together (Music Director/Pianist—Jeff Award Nominee), Some Enchanted Evening (Music Director/Pianist—Jeff Award Music Direction). Ring of Fire (Piano, Guitar, Dobro, Bass), and Hank Williams: Lost Highway (Hoss), Little Shop of Horrors (Music Director—Jeff Award Nominee). Chicago Theater credits include: Goodman Theatre, Writers Theatre, Mercury Theater, Theatre at the Center, Porchlight Music Theatre, American Blues Theater, American Theater Company, Second City. Music Producer credits: Billy Woodward, John Michael Presney, Yuleberry’s and Friends. Austin’s most recently produced album “The Beast in Me” won the Independent Music Award for Best Roots EP and is featured on PBS nationally in Sun Studio Sessions. www.austinryancook.com

PAUL DEZIEL (Projections Associate) is a proud Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater; this is his 6th It’s a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago. He freelances as a projection designer throughout Chicago and Washington D.C. Selected Credits include: Beauty’s Daughter (American Blues Theater—Jeff Nomination, Equity), Tilikum (Sideshow Theatre Company), The Vagrant Trilogy (Mosaic Theatre Company), United Flight 232 (The House Theatre), Sotto Voce (Theater J), Churchill (SoloChicago Theatre Company), The Glass Menagerie (The Hypocrites), Merge (The New Colony), Redletter (The Neo-Futurists), The 39 Steps
(Theatre at the Center), _Mutt_ (Stage Left & Red Tape Theatre), and _Twisted Melodies_ (Congo Square Theatre Company). Paul holds a B.A. in Theatre from Columbia College Chicago and is currently an MFA candidate for Projection and Multimedia Design at the University of Maryland. Outside of theatre, Paul enjoys tabletop gaming and Formula 1. For more info on his designs, visit pauldeziel.com

**SHANDEE VAUGHAN** (Stage Manager and Production Manager) is a proud Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater and Production Manager. She is excited to be back again for _It’s a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!_ This show is one she holds dearly in her holiday tradition, and she is happy to share it once again with her Blues family. Blues credits: _Flyin’ West, Buddy—The Buddy Holly Story, The Columnist, It’s a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago_, and _Little Shop of Horrors_. Other recent Chicago credits include: _Time Is On Our Side_ (About Face Theatre), _Deathscribe X_ (WildClaw Theatre), _Night in Alachua County_ (WildClaw Theatre), and _The Woman in Black_ (WildClaw Theatre). Shandee is a freelance stage manager & production manager from Arizona. shandeevaughan.com

**BREANA YOUNG** (Assistant Stage Manager) Born and raised in Chicago and its surrounding suburbs where the theater is full of life, Breana has grown to love theater in all of its forms. Since graduating from the University of Illinois at Chicago in the spring of 2017 with a bachelors in Theatre Design, she has since been working in theaters around Chicago and more recently found a home at American Blues (_This Wonderful Life, Six Corners, Buddy—The Buddy Holly Story, Flyin’ West_).

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**ABOUT AMERICAN BLUES THEATER**

Winner of American Theater Wing’s prestigious National Theatre Company Award, American Blues Theater is a premier arts organization with an intimate environment that patrons, artists, and all Chicagoans call home. American Blues Theater explores the American identity through the plays it produces and communities it serves. American Blues Theater follows three guiding values both on and off its stages—to be accessible, responsible, and true.

Our diverse and multi-generational artists have established the second oldest professional Equity Ensemble theater in Chicago. Our 36-member Ensemble has nearly 600 combined years of collaboration on stage. As of today, our theater and artists received 204 Joseph Jefferson Awards and nominations that celebrate excellence in Chicago theater and 35 Black Theater Alliance Awards. Our artists are honored with Pulitzer Prize nominations, Academy Awards, Golden Globe Awards, Emmy Awards, and numerous other accolades.

American Blues Theater is committed to developing the classic plays and musicals of tomorrow. Our new work development consists of a variety of programs—including world and regional premieres, the _Blue Ink Playwriting Award_, _Blueprint_ commissions, and _Ripped: The Living Newspaper Festival_ of new short-plays. More than half of our mainstage productions are world and Chicago premieres.
An Ensemble theater is a group of individuals dedicated to collaborative creation and committed to consistently working together over years to develop a distinctive body of work and practices. Ensemble members, both artists and administrators, are empowered to help shape their theater’s artistic direction and organizational structure.

American Blues Theater was founded in July 1985 by a director, playwright, designer, and actor. The company dedicated itself to new and classic American plays. Richard Christiansen of the Chicago Tribune cited American Blues in his editorial “Chicago TheaterForges New Standards of Glory.” In August of 1993, the company leased a warehouse on Byron and Lincoln. In 38 days, James Leaming led a community-based 90+ volunteer crew to transform the space into an intimate 134-seat theater. From 1994–1997, the Ensemble was lauded with numerous Joseph Jefferson Awards and After Dark Awards.

From 1997–2009, the company was led by Artistic Directors from outside of the Ensemble. Under the leadership of Brian Russell and Damon Kiely (’97–’07), the theater’s name changed to American Theater Company (ATC), the mission statement was revised, and the business expanded greatly. In 2008, under new management, the Ensemble theater practice was dismantled. After 18 months of talks with the new management, all four Founders and every Ensemble member prior to 2008 chose to leave the ATC organization in March 2009 citing “major administrative and artistic differences.”

The Ensemble reformed under its original name American Blues Theater. Founding Board members reconstituted the Board, giving tremendous support and guidance. Ensemble member Gwendolyn Whiteside became the Artistic Director. Whiteside ushered in the annual Blue Ink Playwriting Award, Blueprint Development, implemented community service into the company’s mission, and adapted the arts education program The Lincoln Project for Chicago Public Schools that serves 3,000 students annually.

“Feels like home.”—Terry Teachout, The Wall Street Journal

“One of our favorites in Chicago!”—Dean Richards, WGN

“Ensemble founded one of Chicago’s most venerable off-loop theaters.”

—Chris Jones, Chicago Tribune
### American Blues Theater Ensemble Founded in 1985

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<tr>
<th>Dawn Bach</th>
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<td>Ed Blatchford</td>
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<td>Austin Cook</td>
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<td>Ian Paul Custer</td>
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<td>Lauri Dahl</td>
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### Board of Directors (2018–19)

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<td>Matthew Hafter</td>
<td>Chip Pringle, <em>in memoriam</em></td>
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*If you are interested in joining the Board of Directors at American Blues Theater, please call (773) 654-3103.*

### Artistic Affiliates

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<th>Eric Backus</th>
<th>Sarah Hughey</th>
<th>Grant Sabin</th>
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<td>Dana Black</td>
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<td>Olympia Dukakis</td>
<td>Eric Lynch</td>
<td>Shandee Vaughan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tom Geraty</td>
<td>Rohina Malik</td>
<td>Michael Trudeau</td>
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<td>Christina Gorman</td>
<td>Cara Parrish</td>
<td>Dennis Zacek</td>
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<td>Shawn J. Goudie</td>
<td>Camille Robinson</td>
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Dara Cameron  Elyse Dolan  Sydney Smith
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GENERAL INFORMATION

American Blues Theater Administrative office
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