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INTO THE WOODS

MUSIC & LYRICS BY STEPHEN SONDHEIM
BOOK BY JAMES LAPINE
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MUSIC DIRECTION AND RE-ORCHESTRATIONS BY MATT DEITCHMAN
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Welcome to the final production of American Blues Theater’s Season 33 “Home Sweet Home”. We proudly present James Valcq and Fred Alley’s *The Spitfire Grill—a musical*, based on the film by Lee David Zlotoff.

We’re thrilled to reteam longtime collaborators Tammy Mader and Malcolm Ruhl on this project. Malcolm has been involved with American Blues from before our rebirth in 2009. His recent work at Blues includes award-winning musicals *Hank Williams: Lost Highway* (music direction), *Little Shop of Horrors* (musician), and *Buddy—The Buddy Holly Story* (music consultant).

After many male-driven musicals, we want to showcase strong female characters and voices, particularly in today’s state of declining women’s rights and equity. In addition, these gorgeous songs and rich folk music offer a needed respite from the 24-hour news cycle, constant alerts, alarms, and notifications. For a short while, you’ll receive a break from the fast-paced world as you enter this small town. *The Spitfire Grill* cooks up a recipe of judgment, forgiveness, and redemption. The dessert is a warm helping of self-reflection. What is your moral code? How do you begin anew? Where do you go to rejuvenate?

Our heroine Percy Talbott claims, while looking into the lush Wisconsin scenery, “…the only woods I ever saw was in magazines and picture books. But this is better than any picture.” Humankind has always communed with nature though the frequency is waning. In Japanese culture, there is a therapy *shinrin-yoku*, or “forest bathing”. What was once considered commonplace—a walk amongst trees—has now become prescriptive to combat daily stress of the modern era. The proverbial sniff of the roses no longer cuts it.

Sometime before the summer cools and the sun sets, treat yourself to a little self-care walk amongst the trees. Perhaps a few bars from this score will accompany your steps and lift your spirit.

—Gwendolyn Whiteside
The Spitfire Grill

Music & Book
James Valcq

Lyrics & Book
Fred Alley

Based on the film by
Lee David Zlotoff

directed by Tammy Mader

music directed by Malcolm Ruhl

Scenic Design
Sarah E. Ross*, USA

Lighting Design
Jared Gooding*

Costume Design
Lily Grace Walls

Sound Design
Rick Sims*, USA

Properties Design
Mary O’Dowd

Production Stage Manager
Kate Ocker^}

* Ensemble member or Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater

^ Member of Actors’ Equity Association

JULY 19–AUGUST 17, 2019  (previews July 12–18)

The Spitfire Grill is presented by special arrangement with SAMUEL FRENCH, INC. Playwrights Horizons, Inc., New York City, produced the New York Premiere of The Spitfire Grill Off-Broadway in 2001. The Spitfire Grill received its World Premiere production by the George Street Playhouse, November 5, 2000, David Saint, Artistic Director, Michael Stotts, Managing Director.

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)

Shelby Thorpe.................................................................................................................. Dara Cameron*^  
The Visitor ....................................................................................................................... Ian Paul Custer*^  
Caleb Thorpe .................................................................................................................. Karl Hamilton^  
Sheriff Joe Sutter ......................................................................................................... Donterrio Johnson^  
Percy Talbott ................................................................................................................. Jacquelyne Jones^  
Effy Krayneck ................................................................................................................ Gabrielle Lott-Rogers  
Hannah Ferguson .......................................................................................................... Catherine Smitko^  

* Ensemble member of American Blues Theater  
^ Member of Actors’ Equity Association

BAND (IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER)

Keyboard ......................................................................................................................... Ian Paul Custer*  
Violin ................................................................................................................................. Greg Hirte  
Accordian ........................................................................................................................ Malcolm Ruhl  
Guitar/Mandolin ............................................................................................................. Scott Sedlacek  
Cello ................................................................................................................................. Magdalena Sustere  

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.
A small town—Gilead, Wisconsin.  
The production runs 2 hours with an intermission.

**PRODUCTION STAFF**

Production Manager ................................................................. Shandee Vaughan*
Assistant Stage Manager ......................................................... Brianna Consalvo
2nd Assistant Stage Manager ................................................... Breana Young
Publicist .................................................................................. Cathy Taylor PR
Conductor ................................................................................ Malcolm Ruhl
Music Consultant ................................................................. Michael Mahler*
Sound Engineer ....................................................................... Michael Daly
Technical Director ............................................................... Manny Ortiz
Master Electrician ..................................................................... Rachel West
Scenic Painter .......................................................................... Eileen Rozycki

* Ensemble member or Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater

**COMMUNITY SERVICE FOR THE SPITFIRE GRILL**

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 partner with Northwestern University’s The Family Institute, Alternatives Girl World, Connections for Abused Women and Their Children, and Suits for Success. 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.

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**SPECIAL THANKS**

The biggest Hoosier fans, Michael Brosilow, 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.
DARA CAMERON (Shelby Thorpe) is a proud Ensemble member of American Blues Theater. Other Blues productions include 6 years of It’s a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago! and Little Shop of Horrors. Other theatre credits include Something in the Game with the American Music Theatre Project; October Sky, City of Angels, Elf, Cinderella, The Wizard of Oz, Hero (Jeff nomination), Sister Act, Little Women, and Fiddler on the Roof at the Marriott Theatre; Sunset Boulevard, Buddy - The Buddy Holly Story, Seussical, and Thoroughly Modern Millie at Drury Lane Theatre; Hero at Asolo Rep; The Addams Family at Mercury Theater; and Dirty Rotten Scoundrels at Theatre at the Center. She appeared off-Broadway and at the Royal George Theatre in Old Jews Telling Jokes and is a graduate of Northwestern University. She is married to actor/composer/fellow Blues Ensemble member Michael Mahler, and they are very busy keeping up with their 15-month-old son, Ezra!

IAN PAUL CUSTER (The Visitor & Keyboard) is a proud Ensemble member of American Blues Theater. American Blues credits: Buddy–The Buddy Holly Story (Jeff Award–Best Ensemble, Best Musical), Little Shop of Horrors, It’s a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!, and Yankee Tavern. Chicago credits: Bad Jews (Theater Wit, North Shore Center, Royal George Theatre); 33 Variations (Jeff Award–Best Production), To Master The Art (TimeLine Theatre/Broadway Playhouse); Annie Bosh is Missing (Steppenwolf Theatre); High Holidays (Goodman Theatre); The Watson’s Go To Birmingham: 1963 (Chicago Children’s Theatre); and Fiddler on the Roof (Paramount Theatre). Regional credits: Hero (Asolo Rep), Cymbeline (Notre Dame Shakespeare), and Peter Pan (360 Entertainment - London, England). Television credits: APB, Empire, Chicago Fire, and Chicago PD. Ian is a graduate of The Theatre School at DePaul University and is represented by Gray Talent Group. Love to Shannon.

KARL HAMILTON (Caleb Thorpe) makes his American Blues debut. Most recently, he reprised for the 4th time his role as “The Amazing Karnak” in Ride the Cyclone performed at Atlanta’s Alliance Theatre. Other Regional credits include All the Way and Living on Love (Asolo Rep, Sarasota); Children of a Lesser God, Ragtime, Big Fish, and Private Lives (Timberlake Playhouse, Mt. Carroll); and Mamma Mia! (Tropicana, Las Vegas). His Chicago credits include Wonderful Town and Jungle Book (Goodman Theatre); The Christmas Schooner and The Addams Family (Mercury Theater); A Christmas Carol, 7 Brides for 7 Brothers, Mame, and Charlotte’s Web (Drury Lane Theatre); and Mamma Mia!, Aladdin, For the Boys, The Full Monty, and Shenandoah (Marriott Theatre). Karl remains a proud and outspoken 12-year member of Actors' Equity and is married to actress Elizabeth Haley.

Two. Donterrio thanks God, BD, and every one of you! #PASSIONFAME If you like the show follow Donterrio on social media @DonterrioLive

JACQUELYNE JONES (Percy Talbott) is so honored to be making her American Blues debut with such a heartfelt story and exceptional artistic team! Chicago credits include: You’re A Good Man Charlie Brown (Drury Lane Theatre), Shrek (Marriott Theatre), Legally Blonde (Paramount Theatre), Sweeney Todd (Jeff Award Winner–Best Performer in a Musical, Theo Ubique), Lizzie (Firebrand Theatre), Heathers the Musical (Kokandy Productions), Honkey Tonk Angels (Theo Ubique), Company (Writers Theatre), and Pericles (Chicago Shakespeare Theater). Here’s to telling beautiful, complicated stories and allowing them to change our minds and hearts.

JACQUELYNE JONES

GABRIELLE LOTT-ROGERS (Effy Kayneck) is absolutely thrilled to make her American Blues Theater debut. Some recent Chicago credits include: EthiopianAmerican (Definition Theatre), Between Riverside and Crazy (Redtwist Theatre), Downstate (Steppenwolf Theatre), The Plea (Black Ensemble Theater). TV/Movie credits include: Proven Innocent, Chicago PD, The CHI, Empire, Southside with You, and the upcoming Holiday Heist. Gabrielle gives thanks to God and her family and friends for their unwavering love and support. Gabrielle is represented by DDO Artist Agency.

GABRIELLE LOTT-ROGERS

CATHERINE SMITKO (Hannah Ferguson) is so very happy to join American Blues Theater for this production! Some of her recent Chicago Theatre credits include: “Madame DeLa Grande Bouche” in Drury Lane Theatre’s Beauty and the Beast; “Nurse” in Chicago Shakespeare Theater’s Shakespeare In Love; “Dora Bailey” in Marriott Theatre’s Singing in the Rain; and many more, including work at Goodman Theatre, Asolo Rep, and Magic Theatre (San Francisco). She was most recently seen as “Katherine Bradley” on Chicago PD, and would to thank Marissa and the fabulous team at Paonessa Talent for all their amazing talents and hard work! Cheers!

CATHERINE SMITKO

TAMMY MADER (Director) is a proud member of SDC, the union of professional Stage Directors and Choreographers. Credits include: Bye Bye Birdie, Hairspray (Jeff Nomination), and Buddy–The Buddy Holly Story at Drury Lane Theatre; My One and Only (Jeff Nomination) at Marriott’s Lincolnshire Theatre; Buddy–The Buddy Holly Story and The Full Monty (Assistant Director/Choreographer) at Water Tower Place. Tammy is also a full-time faculty member in the theatre department at Roosevelt University’s Chicago College of Performing Arts.

TAMMY MADER

MALCOLM RUHL (Music Director & Accordion) is excited to return to American Blues Theater, where he received the Jeff Award for Music Direction for Hank Williams: Lost Highway. His Chicago musical direction credits include 7 Jeff Award nominations (2 Jeff Awards), productions for Goodman Theatre, Lookingglass Theatre, Drury Lane Theatre, Mercury Theater, Northlight Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre, Apollo Theater, Apple Tree Theatres, and Theatre at the Center. He has done orchestrations...
for productions at American Theater Company, Drury Lane Theatre, Writers Theatre, and BoHo Theatre. Album production credits include W.O.M.A.N. and Wildwood Flower for Cory Goodrich and Love is Everything for Christine Mild. Malcolm has played with Harry Chapin, The Osmond Brothers, Big Joe Turner, Jim Lauderdale, Jason Robert Brown, and Loudon Wainright III. He appeared as “Jackson” in the 1982 Broadway production of Pump Boys and Dinettes. With degrees in music composition from Missouri State University and Coe College, Malcolm maintains a teaching and recording studio in Elk Grove Village. malcolmruhl.com

SARAH E. ROSS (Scenic Design) is a proud Ensemble member of American Blues Theater. Sarah returns to Chicago from Stevens Point, Wisconsin where she teaches scenic and properties design at UWSP. Past American Blues Theater productions include Buddy—the Buddy Holly Story (scenic), Little Shop of Horrors (puppets, Jeff Nomination), Dutchman/TRANSit (scenic), The Rainmaker (scenic, Jeff Award), Side Man (scenic), Grounded (scenic), Hank Williams: Lost Highway (costumes), Collected Stories (Scenic, Jeff Nomination), and Tobacco Road (costumes, Jeff Award). Her work has also been seen at Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Marriott Theatre, Paramount Theatre, Shattered Globe Theatre, The Joffrey Ballet, The Second City, Theater Wit, BoHo Theatre, Writers Theatre, Theatre at the Center, Peninsula Players Theater, and others. Sarah is a proud member of USA Local 826 and the Society of Properties Artisans Managers.

JARED GOODING (Lighting Design) is a proud Ensemble member of American Blues Theater. His design credits include designs for American Blues Theater, Writers Theatre, Milwaukee Rep, Victory Gardens Theater, TimeLine Theatre, Madison Children’s Theater, UIC Theatre, Strawdog Theatre, The Hypocrites, Definition Theatre, Windy City Playhouse, Sidseshow Theatre, First Floor Theatre, About Face Theatre, MPAACT, Pegasus Theatre, Next Theatre, Congo Square, Citadel Theatre, ETA, Fleetwood Jourdain Theatre, and serving as the Lighting Assistant for The Wiz Live on NBC, along with Associate Designing for Lookingglass Theatre’s tour of Lookingglass Alice. He is a company member with MPACCT. He spends his off time managing a DJ company for Chicago area bars. You can find his work at goodingdesigns.com.

LILY GRACE WALLS (Costume Design) is overjoyed to be back with American Blues for The Spitfire Grill. Previous credits include Akvavit Theatre’s English language premiere of Bad Girls: The Stylists, American Blues Theater’s Flyin’ West, Midsummer Flight’s Twelfth Night, Citadel Theatre’s The Roommate, and Artemisia Theatre’s Sweet Texas Reckoning. She would like to thank Michael (husband), as well as Bamba and Khoshekh (cats) for their respective support, love, and ankle bites.

RICK SIMS (Sound Design) is a proud Artistic Affiliate with American Blues Theater. He has composed and designed sound for numerous Chicago-area theaters, including Steppenwolf Theatre, Lookingglass Theatre, American Blues Theater, Congo Square Theatre, Writers Theatre, Lifeline Theatre, Griffin Theatre, Chicago Children’s Theatre, The Hypocrites, House Theatre of Chicago, Court Theatre, American Theater Company, Victory Gardens Theater, Raven Theatre, Steep Theatre, Northlight Theatre, and About Face Theatre. His additional credits include The Getty, Boston Playwrights’ Theatre, Arden Theatre Company, Playwrights Horizons, Actors Theatre of Louisville, and Portland Playhouse. Rick won Jeff Awards for Sound Design for Moby Dick and Hephestus (Lookingglass
Mary O’Dowd (Properties Design) is honored to return to American Blues, having designed props for On Clover Road, Six Corners, This Wonderful Life, and Beauty’s Daughter. She has created props/set dressing for dozens of shows and received several Jeff nominations. Most recent design: Into the Breeches! (Northlight Theatre); favorite projects ever: Rock ‘N’ Roll (Artistic Home) and Bakersfield Mist (TimeLine Theatre). Mary is a graduate of the United States Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point, NY.

Greg Hirte (Violin) is a violinist, actor and composer. He recently performed in Lookingglass Theatre’s hit production of The Steadfast Tin Soldier. Other theatre credits include: 19 seasons with Goodman Theatre’s A Christmas Carol; role of “Luther” in Ring of Fire: The Music of Johnny Cash, and “Leon” in Hank Williams: Lost Highway (American Blues Theater). Greg has performed and composed music for Goodman Theatre, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Court Theatre, Drury Lane Theatre, Victory Gardens Theater, and Piven Theatre Workshop, as well as several international music festivals. He has also performed with bands, Mucca Pazza, The Flashbulb, Gin Palace Jesters, Can. Ky.Ree, and Mojo & The Bayou Gypsies.

Scott Sedlacek (Guitar/Mandolin) is extremely happy to be back with American Blues Theater where he made his professional theater debut with Oklahoma. More recently he has been a regular at the Mercury Theater, playing The Color Purple (sub), Avenue Q, The Addams Family, Hair, Avenue Q (again), and Little Shop of Horrors. Scott is a graduate of Columbia College class of ’93 where he studied music composition. Scott would like to thank his family—wife Janet, son Joey, and daughter Kristiana—for letting his freak flag fly!! Scott would also like to wish “Peace on all of ya’s!”

Magdalena Sustere (Cello) Originally from Latvia, Magdalena Sustere is a cellist who is passionate about music in a wide variety of forms. From playing classical to World music, she finds joy in taking part in various projects. Her passion is reflected in her versatile career, encompassing the baroque, classical, and modern genres, as well as opera, gospel, musicals, world music, jazz, and improvisation. Ms. Sustere serves as freelance studio recording artist, educator, chamber musician, and orchestral musician. She is principal cellist for Chicago Composers’ Orchestra, sectional cellist with Oistrakh Symphony Orchestra, and cellist with Chicago based Sonder Trio. Additionally, she runs private cello studio and teaches at El Sistema in Cathalist Circle Rock in Chicago and Science Academy of Chicago. Ms. Sustere love collaborations and she is a strong supporter of new music.

Kate Ocker (Production Stage Manager) is a Chicago based stage manager and has worked for such companies as Northlight Theatre, Paramount Theatre, Court Theatre, Goodman Theatre, American Blues Theater, The Great River Shakespeare Festival, Resident Ensemble Players, Lyric Theatre of Oklahoma, and the Oklahoma City Ballet. Kate is a proud member of Actors’ Equity Association.

Brianna Consalvo (Assistant Stage Manager) is currently pursuing a degree in Theatre Design, Production and Technology at the University of Illinois at Chicago. The Spitfire Grill is her second
show with American Blues Theater after Assistant Stage Managing On Clover Road.

MICHAEL MAHLER *(Music Consultant)* is a proud Ensemble member of American Blues Theater. He is thrilled to be collaborating with Malcolm and Tammy once again. Recent credits include: *Miracle the Musical* (Royal George Theatre—composer/lyricist), *Buddy–The Buddy Holly Story* (American Blues—actor/music director—Jeff Award), *Holiday Inn* (Marriott Theatre—actor), *The Man who Murdered Sherlock Holmes* (Mercury Theater—composer/lyricist—Jeff Award), *October Sky* (Marriott Theatre—composer/lyricist), and *Hero* (Marriott Theatre—composer/lyricist—Jeff Award). Projects in development include *The Secret of My Success* (Paramount Theatre), *Monster* (Chicago Shakespeare Theater), and *Jonestown* (Writers Theatre). He can be seen onstage this fall in *Into the Woods* at Writers Theatre. Love to his wife, actor Dara Cameron, and their son Ezra.

SHANDEE VAUGHAN *(Production Manager)* is a proud Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater and serves as the production manager. She is excited to be working with such a stellar team for *The Spitfire Grill!* Blues credits: *The Absolute Brightness of Leonard Pelkey*, *On Clover Road*, *It’s a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!* (2016 & 2018), *Flyin’ West*, *Buddy–The Buddy Holly Story*, *The Columnist*, 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

MANNY ORTIZ *(Technical Director)* is a Chicago native actor, carpenter, designer and photographer. He received his BFA in Acting at DePaul University. When he is not building and/or performing on stage, you can find him at home joyfully playing with all 15 of his animal friends (yes, he has pictures). As an artist, he has devoted himself to many artistic mediums such as puppeteering, makeup, lighting, and more. Working in such a prodigiously diverse community of captivating artists, Manny has grown and hopes to continue to collaborate and cultivate communities of inclusion and equity filled with ardent passion of theater.

GWENDOLYN WHITESIDE *(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 20 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, served as a Board member for Network of Ensemble Theaters and League of Chicago Theaters. 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’s been 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
**BIOGRAPHIES CONT.**

actress and Artistic Director. Her favorite performances include Jeff Award for Solo Performance (Grounded), seven years as “Mary Bailey” (It’s a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!), and “Kate” in On Clover Road. She’s the recipient of two After Dark Awards and numerous Broadway World Chicago Awards and nominations.

**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 36 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.

**DEFINITION OF “ENSEMBLE”**

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.

Your support enables our artistic & educational programming!

AmericanBluesTheater.com  
Call (773) 654.3103
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 Theater Forges 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.

LEADERSHIP FROM OUTSIDE THE ENSEMBLE
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.”

BLUE SKIES AHEAD
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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Matthew Brumlow
Manny Buckley
Sarah Burnham
Dara Cameron
Casey Campbell
Darren Canady
Rick Cleveland
Austin Cook
Ian Paul Custer
Lauri Dahl
Elyse Dolan
Joe Foust
Jared Gooding
Marty Higginbotham
Jaclyn Holsey
Philip Earl Johnson
Lindsay Jones
Nambi E. Kelley
Kevin Kelly
Steve Key
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James Leaming
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If you are interested in joining the Board of Directors at American Blues Theater, please call (773) 654-3103.

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Sarajane Johnson, Director of Development
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Shandee Vaughan, Production Manager

GENERAL INFORMATION

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