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THE DAILY ORANGE



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SLICE OF LIFE (/PULP/SLICE-OF-LIFE)

'The Wizard of Oz' to return to Syracuse Stage after almost 15 years



Courtesy of Joanna Penalva

Robert Moss, Jill Anderson and Robert Hupp (left to right) have all contributed to the Syracuse Stage with their artistic or managerial direction.

By [Jony Sampah \(/writers/jony-sampah/\)](#) CONTRIBUTING WRITER

1 day ago

Dorothy, the Wicked Witch of the West and the magical kingdom of Oz will call Syracuse Stage home for the holidays.

The production of “The Wizard of Oz” opens on Friday at 8 p.m. at the Syracuse Stage/SU Drama Complex, located on the corner of East Genesee Street and Irving Avenue, and will run until Sunday, Jan. 7, 2018. The production will have two preview performances on Wednesday and Thursday ahead of its Friday opening. Tickets are available online, by phone and at the Stage box office.

Syracuse Stage will also hold a dinner party on the opening night at 8 p.m., and audience members can stay behind and join the cast for a free post-show celebration with food, drinks and music by Scott Dennis and Dave Solazzo.

The biggest surprise this year will be the introduction of 2 Ring Circus, a circus theater company based out of New York, said play director Donna Drake and artistic director of Syracuse Stage Robert Hupp. The company will add cirque-like choreography, acrobatic and gymnastic twist to the production.

“Bob and I have worked with 2 Ring Circus on previous productions and we’ve had a great personal friendship with them,” Drake said. “We sort of combined all of our talents together and said, ‘Let’s expose the world more to a theatrical circus.’”

Drake has nine Broadway shows to her directorial credit and 40 years of theatrical experience under her belt.

“I wanted to be in theater since I was a small little girl,” Drake said. “I trained my whole life being a dancer and when I came to New York, my very first show was playing Tricia in the original production of ‘A Chorus Line,’ and that was 40 years ago. If I don’t do theater, which is my passion, then I can’t breathe.”

The concept of a circus is not something that audience members expect in the classic production, which comes more to Syracuse Stage for the first time since the 2003-04 season, Drake said.

“You do expect people to fly, and we’re not doing that kind of flying. Glinda comes in and she’s on a trapeze and before she lands she spins and twirls and flips and does all this stuff – on a trapeze. You don’t expect that of Glinda,” Drake said.

Lani Carson, 2 Ring Circus member and Syracuse Department of Drama alumna, will play the role of Glinda.

Lyman Frank Baum, writer of “The Wonderful Wizard of Oz’ was born in Chittenango, New York, was raised in Syracuse, where he met his wife, Maud Gage.

“The Wonderful Wizard of Oz” was published in 1900 and was so successful that Baum was able to turn the book into a Broadway musical primarily for adults within two years. Drake said she intends to stick with the original story with as little twists as possible.

“I am staying more true to L. Frank Baum’s original intentions,” Drake said. “The only thing that is a little bit reimaged about this production is that we are bringing in a lot of circus and aerial arts and groundwork into this production. So, it will be quite a spectacle to see.”

Syracuse University sophomore Kate Jarecki will make her Syracuse Stage debut taking on the role of Dorothy.

“We are at a facility that is a learning experience, and what better opportunity than to bring in students, surround them with the dozens of professionals, let them work with that caliber so they can learn,” Drake said.

Alongside her, are fellow SU students Tucker Reed Breder as the Tinman, Myles Hayward as the Cowardly Lion and Crawford Horton as the Scarecrow.

“Every year, since 2001 or so, during the holidays, Syracuse Stage does these large co-productions where we partner with Syracuse University’s drama department in casting students for plays,” Hupp said. “It’s an opportunity for them to gain professional experience.”

The production will feature the original music and lyrics from E.Y. Harburg and Harold Arlen, including fan-favorites, like “Over the Rainbow,” “We’re Off to See the Wizard (Follow the Yellow Brick Road),” and “Ding Dong! The Witch is Dead.” It will also feature background music by Herbert Stothart, and orchestration by Larry Wilcox.

Joseph Whelan, the director of marketing and communications at the Syracuse Stage, said there will be supplementary dedications to the author, Baum.

A lecture on Dec. 6 at 1 p.m. will feature two-time Emmy winner John Fricke, who, Whelan said, is known as the “world’s preeminent ‘Wizard of Oz’ and Judy Garland historian and author.” The lecture will also feature panels by the Onondaga Historical Association.

“You will see that there will be materials here within the program, that will be referencing him, Bob is certainly aware of the connection between the upstate New York-Syracuse area and the writer of this classic story.” said Stuart Plymessenger, the production stage manager of Syracuse Stage.

“Whenever a theater like this is going to do ‘Wizard of Oz’ we have to keep all that in mind.”

For those with accessibility needs, there will be a show that is sign interpreted for the hearing impaired, and there will be two performances that are open-captioned, with lyrics and dialogue displayed on a screen.

There will also be performances that are audio-described, for the visually impaired.

“We have someone who is narrating stage direction into headphones that they’re wearing as they’re able to hear the performance so that people who have trouble seeing the stage would be able to get a fuller picture of what’s going on,” Plymessenger said.

The Syracuse Stage will also have a sensory-friendly performance designed to create an ideal environment for those on the autistic spectrum, an initiative that was started last year.

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