



Optimist Theatre 2020 Annual Report

**In 2020, Optimist Theatre celebrated Shakespeare in Milwaukee with
No Holds Bard: The Pericles Project**

The Optimist Theatre Mission

We believe that the theatrical arts broaden and enrich those parts of our minds and spirits that are most essentially human. Optimist Theatre is driven to reach artists and audiences across the economic, ethnic, and experiential landscape. We educate, entertain, and inspire through creative works of artistic integrity.



Who Are We?

Founded in 1993 as Midwest Children's Theatre, we re-invented ourselves in 2009 as Optimist Theatre. In 2010, Ron and Susan Fry, Tom Reed and ML Cogar teamed up to co-found Shakespeare in the Park and have been pursuing that passion ever since.

Optimist Theatre, the only company in Milwaukee focused solely on the timeless

works of William Shakespeare, **celebrated its milestone 10th anniversary season of free Shakespeare in the Park** in 2019.

The next 10 years were going to be launched with a much anticipated production of the iconic *Romeo and Juliet* and then...

2020

Then, 2020 happened. COVID-19 closed the playhouses, but the ideals behind free Shakespeare in the Park did not change. The impact of the works of the greatest playwright of all time did not change. The impact of theatre on the quality of our existence did not change. **Shakespeare reminds us what it means to be human, and bringing people together for a transformative theatre experience helps us take steps toward strengthening community bonds.**

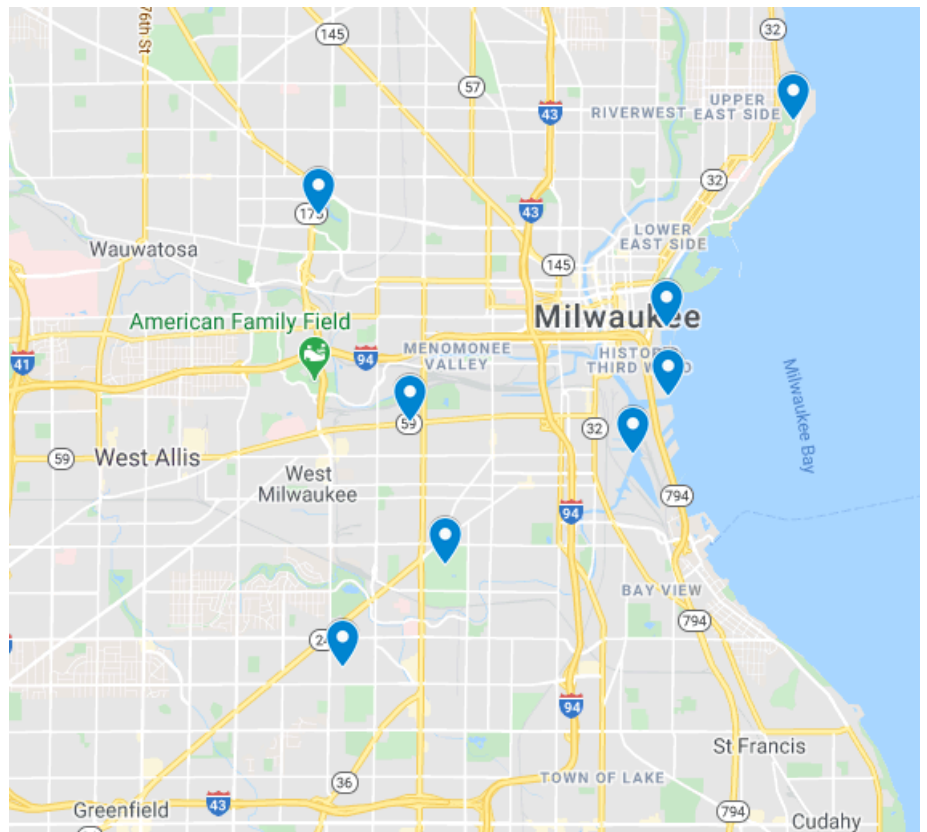
What Can We Do?

After exhausting all options for rolling performance dates forward, Optimists took a look at the resources still available. Turns out there was an exciting palette from which to choose. Instead of offering a full-length production in an outdoor setting that's free and accessible to all, Optimist Theatre brought Shakespeare to the people through the **far-reaching power of film**.

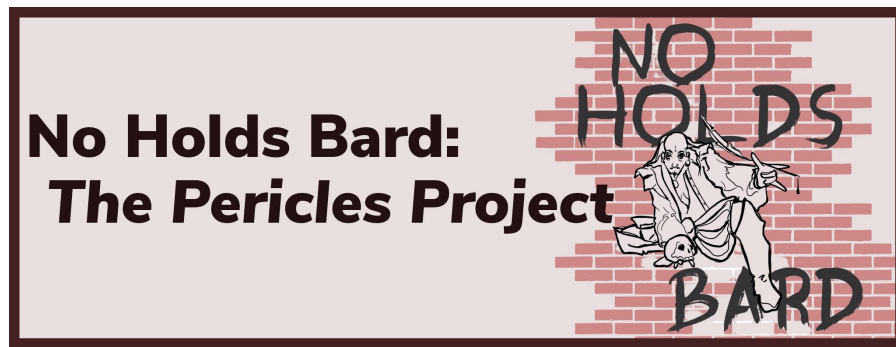
Bringing the Bard to Our Neighborhoods

While we are thrilled to introduce people young and old to the magic of Shakespeare, Optimist Theatre has always had a special focus on connecting with young people from diverse neighborhoods. As many in Milwaukee struggle with poverty and segregation, Optimist Theatre feels it is more important than ever to keep the show free for people from all ages, races, neighborhoods, socioeconomic and educational backgrounds.

While free Shakespeare in the Park strives to bring people from all over our community together in downtown Milwaukee for a shared experience, **No Holds Bard: The Pericles Project brings Shakespeare to them.**



A few of the Pericles filming locations



Winter 2020 –
Spring 2021

In 2020, Optimist Theatre created the web series “**No Holds Bard: The Pericles Project.**” Small groups of artists filmed 16 episodes on weekends in the late

summer through the winter of 2020. A local production company was hired to film and edit. Two episodes are streaming for free every other week starting Wednesday, January 13, 2021, on **NoHoldsBard.org** and the No Holds Bard YouTube and Facebook channels.

Each broadcast includes a live host introduction, wrap-up, and interactive chat with viewers. No Holds Bard is designed to connect with audiences who may not be able to attend a live performance or who live out of state.

The Story

Pericles, Prince of Tyre, one of Shakespeare’s less-often produced works, follows the adventures of Pericles as he tries to avoid assassination by an evil king, falls in love, loses his love, regains his love, and suffers a series of high seas storms and shipwrecks in the process. A romance with elements of farce, or a farce with elements of romance, Optimist will present a unique approach to the story.



Who?

The cast includes Milwaukee favorites **Andrew Varela, John Kishline, Deborah Clifton, Libby Amato, David Flores, Kelly Doherty, Rebekah Farr**, and many others.

➤ In total, No Holds Bard put 46 actors and a crew of 11 back to work. When the playhouses were closed, many of these same actors lost all or a significant portion of their annual income. All of the *Pericles* cast and crew were paid.

Where?

All filming took place outdoors in 10 locations throughout the greater Milwaukee area. Locations included places like the Denis Sullivan dock, the Harbor District, Forest Home Cemetery, Washington Park, and a couple backyards.

➤ Each filming day averaged no more than six people assembled in one location.

Creating *Pericles* also crafted the No Holds Bard process. Investments in time and equipment have yielded a structure that can be used to ensure that, regardless of health concerns, Optimist Theatre will be able to deliver free, curious, and innovative Shakespeare to our Milwaukee neighbors and far beyond.

How Did We Do?

Our Actors...

On a number of occasions, actors on set commented how grateful they were to be acting – to be out and with their compatriots, creating a Shakespeare play, striving to reach an audience. Above all, they commented about how much they appreciated Optimist’s health and safety protocols and felt truly comfortable coming together to create *Pericles*. In the words of one well-respected Milwaukee actor, **“Thank you. What you’re doing is commendable.”**



Ethan Miles Perry as Pericles

Our Audience...

We will truly know how the audience responds to the quality of our storytelling by April 7, 2021 – which is scheduled to be the final broadcast. However, as of January 3, 2021, in the words of one person working in a Presenting Sponsor capacity, the first episode, **“... It was FANTASTIC.”**

Our Supporters...

If donations are any indicator of the potential appeal and reach of a web series, the very first e-newsletter announcement about the project prompted donations from **Tennessee** (the very first donation) and **Florida**.

No Holds Bard showcases Milwaukee. However, its potential reach is only limited by internet access.

Other Optimist Theatre Programming

Best known for Shakespeare in the Park and now No Holds Bard, Optimist Theatre has been an active 501(c)3 non-profit theatre company since 1993. Over the years, we’ve taken on a variety of projects – some long-lasting, some to fulfill a specific need. 2020 was no exception.

Read on....

“To Be! Shakespeare Here and Now”

Since 1993. New in 2020: “To Be Zoom.”

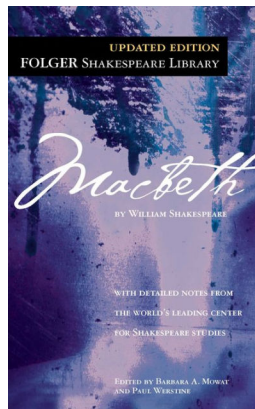


Optimist Theatre’s long-running educational outreach program, “**To Be! Shakespeare Here and Now,**” features Artistic Director **Ron Scot Fry** playing the Bard himself. Mr. Fry goes into schools and libraries for an interactive experience that focuses on accessibility, relatability, and fun but also teaches about Shakespeare’s language and history. “To Be!” was presented live for 11 performances and workshops in February 2020 to schools in Menomonee Falls and Chippewa Falls.

In 2020, a need for arts programming was identified in schools that had transitioned online. In April, Optimist Theatre was commissioned to create a virtual version of the workshop. This was accomplished with rousing success, playing 16 times to schools in Wisconsin and Maryland. One of the advantages of going virtual is we can reach anywhere in the country.

Macbeth From Mom

New in 2020



The book project **Macbeth From Mom**, which is based on research into points of contact that can positively affect the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences, debuted in 2020. It gets books directly into the hands of at-risk youth one person at a time. The impact of receiving an unexpected gift with a note indicating the sender had heard that this young person is gifted with



curiosity, imagination, potential, etc., is in itself a self-esteem boost, a touch from a world they may have thought didn’t care, and puts great literature in their hands. Whether the books are actually read is almost secondary to the fact that they earned this gift just by being themselves. Our 2020 partner for identifying youth most likely to be helped was the **Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee**.

Hello, Ms. Susan

This is Ana G from the boys and girls club. I writing this email to thank you for sending me these books, and to tell you that I really do appreciate you helping me with getting to read more about theater and sharing this with me. I am so excited to read these books.



No Holds Bard: Merely Players

Crafted in partnership with **Adaptive Community Approach Program**, Optimist Theatre presents “Merely Players”



The award-winning Adaptive Community Approach Program (ACAP) began in 1982 as a disability services organization serving people who have physical and developmental disabilities who did not connect with other human services programs. A commitment to community-based programming and advocacy is the foundation of ACAP's groundbreaking programming. Its Playmakers program began in 2006 and provides opportunities to craft full-fledged stage performances for actors with disabilities.

In early spring of 2020, Susan Fry of Optimist Theatre and Sandra Gines of ACAP decided to craft a live summer Shakespeare theatre camp program that introduced ACAP's actors to the works of William Shakespeare. Programming was created and then recrafted for the pandemic, thanks to inspiration from the No Holds Bard: The Pericles Project film experiences happening concurrently.

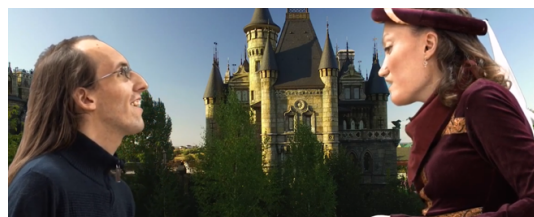


Through four-months of skills training theatre games and one-on-one virtual rehearsals, actors performed their Shakespearean roles on camera. Each role was selected to showcase the skills and talents each actor exemplified. Individually filmed pieces were edited together as a magical dream sequence in which William Shakespeare, as a playwright with writer's block, calls upon the ACAP Playmakers for assistance.

Optimist Theatre program directors Susan and Ron Fry were profoundly impacted by the experience of working one-on-one with these actors with a broad range of physical and developmental disabilities. The program content and success added to the ACAP staff's toolbox of approaches and possibilities for their ongoing programming. According to staff, volunteer facilitators, actors, and caregivers, it proved to be a surprising and enriching experience. Please enjoy <https://youtu.be/Tr7RDMqhj9A>



How did we do? *“Just finished watching. I am truly overwhelmed with how*



wonderful this is! I just absolutely love, love, love this project! SO much hard work has paid off in such a beautiful way.” — Angel

“Last August, when we were introduced to this project, most of us were puzzled with how this could work. From the get-go the ‘Fry team’ challenged all of us. The games, at first, seemed impossible knowing the limitations of our actors, but we were wrong. You set a high bar and everyone rose to it and in the process we ALL grew. After the filming, at our post filming wrap-up, the members almost unanimously agreed they gained more confidence. Quite an accomplishment! Both of you showed our members gentle, constructive guidance and great respect. In these days of civic unrest and disrespect, what a WONDERFUL gift you gave our organization and especially each individual member.

We know that everyone involved in this project will feel the awe that we feel and be immensely grateful to both of you. Thank you, thank you, thank you.” — Dorothy and Thomas

What's Next?

Optimist Theatre 2021 Goals

Act 1

Create a production of William Shakespeare's iconic *Romeo and Juliet* that is powerful, creative, and relevant and offer 12 performances, including two weekday matinees. The production, which will be staged to ensure cast and audience safety and comfort, is expected to draw an audience of about 3,500.

Shakespeare in the Park strives to make theatre financially and physically accessible to the people of Greater Milwaukee and beyond by offering free performances in an ADA-accessible central location, with no need for reservations. **The plays are crafted to be culturally accessible to newcomers while staying completely true to Shakespeare's own**

words. "Talk-forwards" occur before each presentation, providing information about the plot, language, and themes. These talk-forwards are proven to enhance the audience's connection and appreciation, especially by audience members from youth-serving agencies. Audience appreciation is noted through comments on surveys, social media, emails, and conversations with community group partners.



Act 2

Provide meaningful seasonal work for about 40 artists and production personnel, primarily from Milwaukee County. Optimist Theatre will hire a mix of highly regarded local professionals as well as developing artists for whom the production will offer growth opportunities and a chance to earn points toward membership in Actors' Equity Association.

Offering paid contract work is especially important in 2021, since artists and production personnel are working diligently to recover work lost in 2020, regain a solid footing, and again offer their best work in a vital field.

Act 3

Revitalize relationships with community organizations serving youth, veterans, and seniors. An extra special focus will be on youth groups by finding ways to support their work to reactivate their programming flow.

A new level was achieved in 2019 for Shakespeare in the Park with more than 16 groups attending the performances. The goal for 2021 is to achieve at least the same level of connection while these same organizations also work to reestablish their flow of programming.

Act 4

Contribute to Milwaukee's economy and support its cultural and civic foundation.

Optimist Theatre aims to help support the city by giving residents of the metro area an opportunity to explore Milwaukee's downtown sights and businesses in summer 2021.

With a free show there is no differentiation in ticket classes and most seating is first-come, first-served, so people from various ages, races, ethnicities, neighborhoods, and socioeconomic backgrounds sit together to share a cultural experience. The personal experiences of watching a production together visually illustrate to audience members that **Shakespeare transcends boundaries and Milwaukeeans can, too.** 2021 also provides an exceptional opportunity to set an example of a successful and high-profile comeback for an arts organization, thus positively influencing Milwaukee's cultural vitality and economic recovery.

Act 5

Pursue additional ways to use the "No Holds Bard" online platform after the web series airs. Plans are underway to turn "No Holds Bard: The Pericles Project" into educational modules for use by youth-serving arts organizations in search of online arts programming.

While Shakespeare in the Park fully intends to return to the Peck Pavilion in summer 2021, if *Romeo and Juliet* cannot be safely produced this summer, Optimist Theatre will be able to quickly shift online and create a virtual production using the existing "No Holds Bard" format and experience gained from *Pericles*.



Optimist Theatre 2020-2021 Board of Directors



Michelle Owczarski
President, Board
of Directors

Michelle graduated from Marquette University with a major in broadcast and electronic communications and is an active volunteer with St. Thomas Aquinas Academy in Milwaukee. Michelle is on the staff with the UW-Milwaukee Panther Arena and owns a voice-over and video production company. pixelsandtape@gmail.com



Michelle Young
Vice President, Board
of Directors

Michelle is a Human Resources professional focused on program management and continuous improvement at Rockwell Automation. She has a master's degree in human resources and industrial relations from the University of Minnesota and a bachelor's degree in psychology from Hamline University. She is especially proud that Shakespeare in the Park makes theatre accessible to the entire community. michelleyoung@wi.rr.com



Tyler J. Hull
Board Member

TJ is an award-winning composer. He graduated from Ball State University and holds a graduate degree from Boston University. He plays viola for the Fox Valley Symphony and is Director of Orchestras for Franklin Schools. tjhull@gmail.com



Azeeza Islam
Board Member, Educational
Outreach Advisor

Azeeza has been a teaching artist in the Milwaukee Public Schools for more than 40 years and has been an active advocate for all arts education. She is CEO of Vets76 Inc., a veterans support organization. azeezaislam@gmail.com



Laura Stone Barnard
Board Member,
Development Advisor

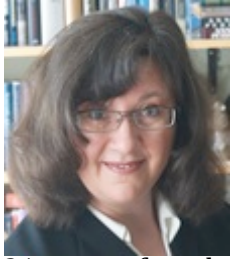
Laura is a retired communications and public relations professional who has directed communications at Wheaton Franciscan Healthcare and the Milwaukee Jewish Foundation. She has also served on the boards of a number of nonprofit organizations, including the Alzheimer's Association and the Mitchell Park Domes. Laura is a lifelong fan of film and theatre. laura.barnard@sbcglobal.net



Ron Scot Fry
Founding Artistic
Director, Board Member

Ron works as a teacher, designer, director, writer, and performer and has directed and designed numerous productions for Shakespeare in the Park. He was Artistic Director for Renaissance Entertainment for 19 years. Ron's one-man show, "To Be! Shakespeare Here and Now," has played throughout the United States and in Italy. rsfry@optimisttheatre.org

Optimist Theatre 2020-2021 Board of Directors



Susan Scot Fry
Executive Director,
Board Member

Susan has more than 26 years of festival and special event producing experience, 31 years of outdoor theater experience and is the owner of a niche tour company. Susan is devoted to the pursuit of free Shakespeare in the Park for greater Milwaukee. It is her life's work. ssfry@optimisttheatre.org



Emilio De Torre
Board Member, Community
Outreach Advisor

Emilio De Torre is the Executive Director of Milwaukee Turners. He's an award-winning former Director of Youth and Programs at the ACLU of Wisconsin and had worked there since 2006. He is the former Director of Education Services at Madison Square Boys & Girls Clubs, where he supervised education, social development, and technology programs for 12,000 young people at eight Boys & Girls Clubs in Brooklyn, Bronx, Manhattan, and Queens. He has served on the boards of Milwaukee Public Theatre and TRUE Skool. edetorre@aclu-wi.org

2020 Financials

Optimist Theatre's 2020 Income and Expense details show you clearly what's most important – our cast and crew.

Optimist Theatre Income and Expense Statement January 1 through December 31, 2020

Income	Amount
Cash Carry-over from 2019	\$32,061
Foundation Support (Bader Philanthropies, Greater Milwaukee Foundation, Herzfeld Foundation, UPAF, The Lynde & Harry Bradley Foundation, Woman's Club of Wisconsin)	\$73,750
Grants (CAMPAC, Milwaukee Arts Board, Wisconsin Humanities Council, Wisconsin Arts Board, Milwaukee Public Schools)	\$23,521
Individual Giving (Personal Donations, Shakespeare in the Park Memberships)	\$23,418
Performance Fees (To Be! Shakespeare Here and Now)	\$12,246
Corporate and Business Sponsors (Paris Dentistry, Rockwell Automation)	\$3,000
Loans – Payroll Protection Program	\$8,067
Income subtotal including cash carry over	\$176,063
In-Kind Donations (Human Resources, Storage Space, Auditions, Costumes, Props, Community Outreach, etc.)	\$52,950
Total Income	\$229,013
Expenses	Amount
Production Team, Cast, and Crew (Actors, Artistic, Production, Executive, Communications, Designers)	\$40,325
Production Expenses (Craft Services, Supplies, Costumes, Props, Software, Sound Equipment, Broadcast Equipment, Housing, Auditions, Meetings, Meals)	\$28,806
Development (Human Resources, Database, Printing, Postage, etc.)	\$18,724
Community Outreach and Marketing (Human Resources, Meetings, Supplies, etc.)	\$15,169
General Company Expenses (Management, Admin, Printing, Postage, Supplies, Insurance, Dues, Phone, etc.)	\$14,048
Educational Programs (Workshop Facilitators and Travel)	\$11,428
Expenses subtotal	\$128,501
In-Kind Donations (Human Resources, Storage Space, Costumes, Props, Auditions, Community Outreach, etc.)	\$52,950
Total Expenses	\$181,451
End of Reporting Period Surplus	\$47,560

Optimist Theatre
Income and Expense Statement - Balance Sheet
As of December 21, 2020

ASSETS	
Current assets – cash	\$47,560.00
Pledges & grants receivable	\$1,000.00
Prepaid expenses	\$0.00
Props, Costumes	\$4,500.00
House and Stage Crew Supplies	\$3,200.00
General Production Equipment	\$8,050.00
Scenic Supplies	\$2,400.00
Other assets	\$0.00
TOTAL ASSETS	\$66,710.00
LIABILITIES	
Accounts payable	\$0.00
Notes payable	\$0.00
TOTAL LIABILITIES	\$0.00
TOTAL ASSETS MINUS LIABILITIES	\$66,170.00

CASH ASSETS - Unrestricted	
Operations	\$35,670.00
Reserve	\$5,000.00
Total unrestricted cash assets	\$40,670.00
CASH ASSETS - Temporarily Restricted	
Restricted cash assets	\$0.00
Total temporarily restricted cash assets	\$0.00

Optimist Theatre operates on a January 1 to December 31 fiscal year. Primary programming typically happens mid-year, so funds raised after Shakespeare in the Park closes are earmarked for the following summer’s production. It is typical to have a cash carry-over of \$30,000 to \$40,000, as it reflects the grant-awarding season for a number of foundations.



“No Holds Bard: The Pericles Project 2020” was made possible by the support of these fine organizations...

- ❖ Isabel and Alfred Bader Fund
- ❖ Greater Milwaukee Foundation
- ❖ Herzfeld Foundation
- ❖ The Bradley Foundation
- ❖ BMO Harris Bank
- ❖ Milwaukee Arts Board
- ❖ CAMPAC
- ❖ Steigleder Charitable Trust
- ❖ Wisconsin Arts Board
- ❖ Wisconsin Humanities Council
- ❖ Paris Dentistry
- ❖ Mark and Laura Barnard
- ❖ Michelle, Chris and Riley Young
- ❖ Ruth and Chad Lawson
- ❖ Kris Vasquez and Jun Davantes
- ❖ and many more

“What you leave behind is not what is engraved in stone monuments, but what is woven into the lives of others.”

Pericles