



Milwaukee Repertory Theater History and Timeline

1954: Milwaukee native Mary Widrig John founds the Fred Miller Theatre, a professional theater for the city of Milwaukee producing a standard repertoire of Broadway hits, and becomes the inaugural Artistic Director

1955-58: Famous names such as Betty White, Rita Moreno, Eva LeGallienne, Uta Hagen, Herbert Berghof, Ethel Waters, and Geraldine Page performed at the Fred Miller Theatre

1958: Presents its first world premiere, *The Last Days of a Young Man* by James Andrews, at the Fred Miller Theater, joining a small group of regional theaters producing new plays

1959: Partnered with Karamu House Theater, the nation's oldest producing Black Theater, to bring *Amahl and the Night Visitors* to the Fred Miller Theater creating diverse programming for children

Early 1960s: The theater creates a resident acting company and is renamed the Milwaukee Repertory Theater in 1963, expanding its repertoire to include classics and premieres of new works. It becomes an important part of the first major regional theater boom

1964: Charles McCallum becomes Milwaukee Rep's first Managing Director

1966: Tunc Yalman becomes Artistic Director and launches "Theater for Tomorrow," a program exploring new plays and playwrights

Becomes a founding member of the League of Resident Theaters (LORT)

1968: Milwaukee Rep moves into the 504-seat Todd Wehr Theater in the new downtown Performing Arts Center designed by renowned Brutalist Chicago architect Harry Weese

1970-71: Judith Light and Jeffrey Tambor join the repertory company for a few seasons
Nagle Jackson becomes Artistic Director

1972: Receives grant from the NEA for "building one of the true resident acting companies in the nation" that intentionally integrated actors and directors of color into productions becoming a national pioneer in theatrical diversity

1974: Milwaukee Rep opens a second space, the Court Street Theater, a small warehouse converted into a 99-seat theater focused on artistic exploration, the development of new work, and plays suited to an intimate setting

Sara O'Connor is named Managing Director. She later served as President of the Board at TCG and President of LORT

1976: Milwaukee Rep premieres its production of *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens, starting a tradition that has lasted more than 50 years

1977: John Dillon is named Artistic Director, engaging in international partnerships with theaters in England, Japan, and Russia including a multi-year exchange with Tadashi Suzuki and the Waseda Theatre Company of Japan

Streetcar Names Desire tours Japan with company member Tom Bergner before his film career took off winning a Golden Globe for *Platoon*

1978: Wisconsin born actor and producer Tom Hulce best known for playing Mozart in the film *Amadeus* starred in *Romeo and Juliet* staged at the historic Pabst Theater

1980: Milwaukee Rep got the rights to produce *Children of a Lesser God* while the play was on Broadway, and first national tour was in Washington DC. Artistic Director John Dillon was one of only two or three professional directors in America with sign language fluency. This was the beginning of the theater's commitment to providing accessibility services for patrons

1981: Larry Shue's *The Nerd* premieres at Milwaukee Rep, going on to be performed on Broadway and in London's West End with *Star Wars* star Mark Hamill

1987: Milwaukee Rep moves into the Patty and Jay Baker Theater Complex, its new home in the former historic Oneida Street Power Plant, cementing its role as the cornerstone of Milwaukee's downtown theater district. The Complex houses three theaters: a main stage, a studio theater, and a black box; rehearsal facilities, production shops, and administrative offices

1988: Madison born actor Chris Noth makes his stage debut in *The Torch* before gaining widespread fame in "Sex in the City"

1991: Actors' Equity presents Milwaukee Rep with the Rosetta LeNoire Award for dedication to non-traditional and color-blind casting

1991: Milwaukee Rep went beyond the iron curtain to perform *Death of a Salesman* in partnership with the Omsk Drama Theatre in Siberia through an exchange where Russian actors came to Milwaukee Rep to perform *Moscow Kitchens*

1993: Joe Hanreddy is named Artistic Director adapting many novels for the stage and set plays in Wisconsin settings

1994: The Education and Engagement Department is created to build bridges between the art on the stage and those in the community

1998: Tim Shields is named Managing Director solidifying the co-production model with other regional theaters to align artistic ambition with larger budgets and reach

1999: *Guys on Ice* by Fred Alley and James Kaplan and *The Marvelous Wonderettes* by Roger Bean have their world premiere

2009: Mark Clements begins his tenure as Artistic Director

Milwaukee Rep starts a partnership with Milwaukee native and Pulitzer-Prize-winning playwright Ayad Akhtar. Since that time the theater has produced all of the playwright's works

Mark starts the tradition of a musical on the mainstage which is now the highlight of every season

2013: Chad Bauman, current Executive Director, is named Managing Director

2016: Milwaukee Rep launches the John (Jack) D. Lewis New Play Development Program to develop and produce plays from a wide spectrum of innovative voices that push the form and explore pressing contemporary challenges which resonate across communities. To date commissioned playwrights include Ayad Akhtar, Craig Lucas, Dael Orlandersmith, Rick Cleveland, Eleanor Burgess, Lloyd Suh, Idris Goodwin, Catherine Trieschmann, Kimberly Belflower, Johanna Murray Smith, A. Rey Pamatmat, Eric Simonson, Aaron Posner and Nygel D. Robinson among others

2018: The Stackner Cabaret is renovated by Uihlein-Wilson Architects with state-of-the-art production capabilities, updated front- and back-of-house amenities, and increased seating capacity

2020-21: The Covid-19 Pandemic shuts down live performance across the globe. Milwaukee Rep became a leader in the field on safely returning to performance, successfully producing the first in-person, indoor, regional theater production

2023: Milwaukee Rep premieres two new productions, *Run Bambi Run*, a new musical by Violent Femmes front man Gordon Gano and Academy Award-winner Eric Simonson and Lloyd Suh's *The Heart Sellers*. *Run Bambi Run* is named "One of the 10 Best Productions of 2023" by *The Chicago Tribune* and *The Heart Sellers* goes on to win the 2024 Harold and Mimi Steinberg/ATCA Award

2025: Milwaukee Rep enters a bold new chapter, completing a \$80.1 million renovation and expansion of its current, historic home to unveil the new Associated Bank Theater Center. The state-of-the-art complex expands Milwaukee Rep's capacity to engage both new and longtime audiences through its three flexible, accessible theaters, vibrant community gathering spaces, and a dedicated education and engagement center

2026: Milwaukee Rep announces a major new commission from Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Ayad Akhtar, *Evicted*, a stage adaptation based on Matthew Desmond's groundbreaking, Pulitzer Prize-winning book *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*