



For Immediate Release:

Milwaukee Repertory Theater Brings Haunting, Heartfelt New Work for Fall



"A funny...haunted exploration of ambition, legacy, and familial responsibility." – *The Austin Chronicle*

September 17, 2026 (Milwaukee, WI) – Milwaukee Repertory Theater continues its 2026/27 Season with the spellbinding new work ***Instructions for a Séance***, running **October 6 – November 8, 2026**, in the **Herro-Franke Studio Theater**. Written and performed by **Katie Bender**, this intimate, genre-bending production invites audiences into a DIY séance where humor, heartbreak, and Houdini collide.

In this unforgettable adventure of mystery, mischief, and messy humanity, Bender transforms the theater into a handmade world of illusion—daring to summon the spirit of Houdini and confront the chaos of her own life along the way. Equal parts hilarious, haunting, and heartbreakingly honest, this one-woman show fuses memoir and live magic to explore ambition, motherhood, and the craving to break free. Expect laughter, surprises, and glimpses of the extraordinary hidden in everyday life.

A **John (Jack) D. Lewis New Play Development Program Production**, *Instructions for a Séance* continues Milwaukee Rep's commitment to nurturing bold new theatrical voices and expanding the canon of contemporary American storytelling through further development of Katie Bender's work. Bender is a playwright, performer and theater maker. Her plays include *Judith*, *SHE WOLF*, *The Survivors/Los Sobrevivientes* and *Howling, Texas* to name a few. Filled with games, physical exertion and a poetic delight in the mundane, her work often examines the surprising ways humans transform within impossible systems.

The creative team includes director **Lily Wolff** (*Wolf Play*, Chautauqua Theater Company), with scenic design by **Collette Pollard** (*The Chinese Lady* and *Steel Magnolias*, Milwaukee Rep), costume design by **Mieka van der Ploeg** (*Romeo and Juliet*, Milwaukee Rep), lighting design by **Paige Seber** (*Titanique*, Broadway), sound design by **Kathy Ruvuna** (*Clyde's*, Portland Stage) and stage manager **Emily Wright** and **Merit Glover**.

Instructions for a Séance will be performed **October 6 – November 8, 2026**, in the **Herro-Franke Studio Theater**. It is presented by Diane and Clark Slipper with Associate Producers Julia Ihlenfeldt, Sandy Laedtke, Jennifer and Mark Niedfeldt and is part of the Four-Four Foundation Herro-Franke Studio Season.

To purchase tickets, visit www.MilwaukeeRep.com, call the Ticket Office at **414-224-9490**, or stop by in person at **108 E Wells Street** in downtown Milwaukee.

For more information, please visit www.MilwaukeeRep.com

::FACT SHEET::

Instructions for a Séance

Written & Performed by Katie Bender

Directed by Lily Wolff

October 6 – November 8, 2026

Herro-Franke Studio Theater

A John (Jack) D. Lewis New Play Development Program Production

Running Time: Approximately 70 minutes with no intermission

Houdini, Motherhood And Mayhem

Step into an unforgettable adventure of mystery, mischief, and messy humanity. Katie Bender transforms the theater into an intimate DIY séance, daring to summon the spirit of Houdini—and maybe wrestle with the chaos of her own life along the way. Equal parts hilarious, haunting, and heartbreakingly honest, this one-woman show fuses memoir and live magic to explore ambition, motherhood, and the craving to break free. Expect laughter and glimpses of the extraordinary hidden in everyday life.

Katie Bender is a playwright and performer. Her plays include *Judith*, *SHE WOLF*, *The Survivors/Los Sobrevivientes*, *Instructions for a Séance*, *Howling, Texas* and *The Optimizers*. Katie's work has been developed and produced all over the country including at Hyde Park Theatre, Alley Theatre, Ensemble

Studio Theatre, Kitchen Dog Theater, The Playwrights' Center, LAUNCH PAD at UC Santa Barbara, Fusebox Festival, THT Rep, New Harmony Project, ACT Theatre, Urbanite Theatre and Amphibian Stage. Her play *Judith* received the B. Iden Payne award for Best New Script. Katie was a Jerome Fellow and a Core Writer at The Playwrights' Center. She received her MFA from The University of Texas.

Connection Series Events:

Community Nights

Girl Dinner + Theater: The group chat finally made plans! Experience a playful pre-show gathering featuring choice of a Caesar salad or petite Wisconsin charcuterie board plus a drink. Cost is \$50 and includes a Séance ticket. Thursday, October 15, 22, and 29

Mom's Night Out: Tuesday, October 27

Pre-Show Experiences

Make a night of it with special events and activities before the performance. All events held in the Herzfeld Foundation Education & Engagement Center

Magic Workshop: Sunday October 25 from 1-3pm

Dinner Dialogue: Sunday, November 8, 4:30pm

Post-Show Experiences

Extend your theater experience with special events and activities after the performance.

TalkBacks: Wednesday, October 14 and 21

Panel Discussion: Escape vs. Responsibility in Parenthood following the Tuesday, October 20 performance

Access Services

Milwaukee Rep offers a variety of accessibility services and seating options in the Herro-Franke Studio Theater, including wheelchair, transfer, companion, bariatric, and no-step seating.

Audio-Described Performance: Thursday, October 22 at 7:30pm

ASL Performance: Friday, October 30 at 7:30pm

Open-Captioned Performances (GalaPro):

- Wednesday, October 14 at 1:30pm
- Tuesday, October 20 at 6:30pm
- Saturday, October 24 at 3pm
- Wednesday, October 28 at 1:30pm
- Thursday, October 29 at 7:30pm
- Sunday, November 1 at 2pm

For more information on all Connection Series Events visit www.MilwaukeeRep.com/engageandlearn.

About Milwaukee Repertory Theater

Milwaukee Rep is the largest performing arts organization in Wisconsin. Its new artistic home, the Associated Bank Theater Center, opened Fall 2025 with three unique performance venues—the Ellen & Joe Checota Powerhouse Theater, Herro-Franke Studio Theater, and Stackner Cabaret. For over seven decades, Milwaukee Rep has been a centerpiece of Milwaukee's vibrant arts and cultural scene with productions ranging from Broadway musicals to Shakespeare to American Classics and New Works that are entertaining, inclusive and impactful. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Mark Clements and Ellen & Joe Checota Executive Director Chad Bauman, Milwaukee Repertory Theater ignites positive change in the cultural, social and economic vitality of its community by creating world-class theater experiences that entertain, provoke and inspire meaningful dialogue among an audience representative of Milwaukee's rich diversity. More information visit www.MilwaukeeRep.com

Media Contact: Frances White, Director of Media Relations

fwhite@milwaukeerep.com

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