

# PLAYBILL®

RED MAGNOLIA THEATRE COMPANY  
PRESENTS

## STEEL *Magnolias*



BY ROBERT HARLING





RED MAGNOLIA THEATRE COMPANY  
PRESENTS

# STEEL MAGNOLIAS

By  
Robert Harling

with

Aron Coates  
Diane Isom

Elizabeth Mathews  
C. Jaye Miller

Nancy Litton  
Tara Sager

**Scenic Design**  
Courtney Thompson

**Lighting Design**  
Christopher Pyfrom

**Sound Design**  
Jeffrey Johnson

**Costume Design**  
Marie Stagg

**Stage Manager**  
Mary Pittman

**Props Mistress**  
Jennifer Ellis

**Directed by**  
Michele Johnson and  
Courtney Murphy

Originally produced by the W.P.A. Theatre, New York City, 1987.  
(Kyle Renick, Artistic Director)

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# ABOUT US



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**Paula Shreve**  
Administrative Vice-  
President

**Dr. Macy Jones**  
Artistic Vice-  
President

**Mary Pittman**  
Secretary

**Theresa Alvarez**  
Treasurer

**Courtney Murphy**  
Member-At-Large

**Elise Roberson**  
Member-At-Large

**Morgan Kastner**  
Member-At-Large

## Planting the Seed

The Red Magnolia Theatre Company was formed by six friends whose relationship was built on and off the stage. Our desire is to create a place that puts women in the spotlight by cultivating opportunities supporting the development of female artists while simultaneously sharing our love for the arts with our community.

## Establishing Roots

Our mission is to provide joyful and bonding collaboration among women in the arts through involvement in all aspects of theatre production while serving the community with enriching and entertaining performances.

## Why Red?

Red represents the theatre's connection to home: its place of origin is Baton Rouge, fondly known as the "red stick."

The simple 3-letter word **RED** expresses our vision:

- **R**enew audiences with strong portrayals of female characters and poignant stories of women to which general audiences can connect.
- **E**levate women by offering them opportunities in all aspects of theatrical production, both on stage and off.
- **D**iscover new friendships and a deeper understanding of ourselves as women and our importance to society as women in the arts.

## Why the Magnolia?

The magnolia represents everything a woman is: strong, beautiful, adaptable, feminine, and stable. Thought to be one of the first flowering plants to evolve on Earth, the magnolia is a symbol of stability and grace throughout time.

## Our Fiscal Sponsor

The National Performance Network is the 501(c)3 Fiscal Sponsor of Red Magnolia Theatre Company. NPN is a national arts service organization that believes artists and arts organizations are essential for creating a just and sustainable world. Their programs are built upon the belief that communities deserve broad access to art and culture that reflects their own experiences and informs about the experiences of others.



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**E**LEVATE

**D**ISCOVER

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# STEEL MAGNOLIAS

## THE CAST

Truvy Jones .....	Aron Coates
Annelle Dupuy-Desoto .....	Diane Isom
Clairee Belcher .....	Tara Sager
Shelby Eatenton-Latcherie .....	C. Jaye Miller
M'Lynn Eatenton .....	Elizabeth Mathews
Ouiser Boudreaux .....	Nancy Litton

## THE SETTING

1987, Chinquapin, Louisiana

## ACT ONE

Scene I: April

Scene II: December

There will be one 15 minute intermission.

## ACT TWO

Scene I: June, eighteen months later.

Scene II: November

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# STEEL MAGNOLIAS

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## PRODUCTION TEAM

DIRECTOR ..... MICHELE JOHNSON

CO-DIRECTOR ..... COURTNEY MURPHY

SCENIC DESIGN ..... COURTNEY THOMPSON

LIGHTING DESIGN ..... CHRISTOPHER PYFROM

SOUND DESIGN ..... JEFFREY JOHNSON

COSTUME DESIGN ..... MARIE STAGG

STAGE MANAGER ..... MARY PITTMAN

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER ..... MELISSA VENABLE

PRODUCTION MANAGER ..... PAULA SHREVE

PROPS MISTRESS ..... JENNIFER ELLIS

PROPS ASSISTANT ..... KATHY DUBIN

SCENIC PAINTER ..... MARIA BOUDREAUX

RUNNING CREW ..... CHRISTINA NORMAND, EMERY LANCASTER,  
CORYN BOURGEOIS, RONNI BOURGEOIS,  
JAY MILLER

BUILD CREW ..... MIKE SAGER, JEFFREY JOHNSON

FRONT OF HOUSE ..... PAM POSSTER

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# CAST WHO'S WHO

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## Aron Coates

*as Truvy Jones*

Aron is so excited to make her Red Magnolia (RMTC) debut, as working alongside these women has been a beautiful buffet of learning, laughter, and tears. She has performed in several Theatre Baton Rouge productions. Past credits include *Cats*, *Chicago*, *9-to-5*, *Boeing Boeing*, *Don't Dress for Dinner* and *A Chorus Line*. She currently works as an operating room nurse at Our Lady of the Lake hospital. Aron would like to thank the talented ladies of RMTC for casting her in this show. She now has an even thicker southern accent!



## Diane Isom

*as Annelle Dupuy-Desoto*

Diane is pleased to be playing the role of Annelle. It has been a God-given role that she thought she never had the technique to play. Her credits include playing in *Hello Dolly* as Mrs. Molloy, *Antigone* as Antigone and *Macbeth* as Lady Macbeth. Diane would like to thank her parents for supporting her life-long dream, her Nana for consistently having her back, and God for saving her with theatre when she thought she had nothing. She hopes you all enjoy the show as much as she has!



## Nancy Litton

*as Ouiser Boudreaux*

Nancy's most recent stage performance was the role of Rebecca Nurse in Theatre Baton Rouge's (TBR) production of *The Crucible*. She portrayed Gingy in Red Magnolia's inaugural production of *Love, Loss and What I Wore* in 2018. She has been acting for much of her life, at such venues as TBR, Swine Palace, LSU, Playmakers of Baton Rouge, Baker Little Theatre, and the Cabaret Theatre. She has also appeared in many productions for the Baton Rouge Irish Club. Nancy has taken acting classes in London, Dublin, Boston, and Los Angeles. She is a retired LSU instructor, and, unlike Ouiser, is an avid reader. She is thrilled to be playing the outspoken, hilarious Ouiser.

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# CAST WHO'S WHO

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## Elizabeth Mathews

*as M'Lynn Eatenton*

Elizabeth is a graduate of LSU with a B.A. in Theatre and an M.S. in Human Resources. She teaches dance at Forest Heights Academy of Excellence and The Dancers' Workshop. She is an alumni of the Baton Rouge Ballet Theatre. She has performed in many shows in the Baton Rouge area including *Cinderella*, *Into the Woods*, and *Oklahoma* (Theatre Baton Rouge) and *12 Angry Men* (Red Magnolia). She has worked on Broadway shows such as *Beauty and the Beast*, *Shrek*, *Chicago*, and *Curtains*. She dedicates her performance to her dad. GYBOTF.



## C. Jaye Miller

*as Shelby Eatenton-Latcherie*

Jaye's theatre credits include Chicago Theatre: *Twilight Bowl* (u/s The Goodman Theatre), *House Hunters* (16th Street Theatre), *Mary's Wedding* (u/s First Folio Theatre), *The Good Fight* (Babes with Blades Theatre Company), *A Charlie Brown Christmas* (Emerald City Theatre), *For Annie* (The Sound Theatre Company), *Arcadia* (u/s, Writers Theatre), *Crimes of the Heart*, *The Odd Couple: Female Version* (Oil Lamp Theatre), *You Never Can Tell* (Remy Bumpo Theatre Company), *Bachelorette* (u/s, Profiles Theatre). TV credits: *In an Instant* (ABC). Graduate of Oklahoma City University. C. Jaye extends much love to every Steel Magnolia on stage with her, and to those behind the scenes. Romans 12:12



## Tara Sager

*as Clairee Belcher*

Tara has appeared in several productions at Theatre Baton Rouge as well as in many productions at her local church. Thank you, thank you to Michele and Courtney, for this wonderful opportunity to be a part of this marvelous, brilliant cast. And a very special thanks to her amazing husband, Mike, for his love and support.

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THEATRE AND THE ARTS COUNCIL OF GREATER BATON ROUGE**



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# PRODUCTION WHO'S WHO

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## MICHELE JOHNSON

**DIRECTOR**

Michele Johnson is the founder of Red Magnolia. She had the honor of playing Shelby in *Steel Magnolias* in Wilmington, NC. Seventeen years later, she is proud and humbled to make her directorial debut directing her favorite play/film. Thanks to the cast and crew for their amazing work and bringing this show to life, to Courtney for her guidance and support and Paula, for her hard work and dedication. Em and Charlie, Mama loves you. Finally, to Jeff and mom; for their unwavering love and support. "You know I love you more than my luggage."

## COURTNEY MURPHY

**CO-DIRECTOR**

Courtney Murphy attended Northwestern State with a Bachelor of Science with concentration in Performance and Directing. Directing credits include *Sister Act: The Musical* and *Round & Round the Garden*. On stage she's performed in shows at TBR, ACT, and Red Magnolia (RMTC). Performance credits include *In the Next Room*, *Almost, Maine*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and *Love Loss & What I Wore*. She thanks the board members of RMTC and Michele for having her take part in this production. A HUGE thank you to the production team, who without there would be no show and to the cast and crew for their hard work and dedication, a driving force from day one. Lastly, she would like to thank her family and friends for their continuous and loving support!

## COURTNEY THOMPSON

**SCENIC DESIGN**

Courtney Thompson is a Baton Rouge local with a love for all things Theatre. With a degree in theatre Design/Tech and 14+ years experience, she excels in design/construction and scenic painting. She's worked with multiple local theatre companies such as New Venture, BREC's Independence Park Theatre, and Piper Productions. She recently worked as the Art's Department PA on Paramount Network's recent pilot, *Paradise Lost*, and on her sixth year working backstage for *The Nutcracker: A Tale From the Bayou*. Many thanks to Red Magnolia and its fantastic members for the opportunity to join the crew in telling this classic story!

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# PRODUCTION WHO'S WHO

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## CHRISTOPHER PYFROM

**LIGHTING DESIGN**

Chris Pyfrom holds an MFA in Theatre Technology and Design from LSU and is no stranger having lived and worked in Baton Rouge for 12 years. He is currently serving as the Technical Director for the University of South Florida School of Theatre and Dance in Tampa, FL. Locally, he's designed shows for LSU, Swine Palace, Manship Theatre, and Center Stage PAA. He thanks Red Magnolia for the opportunity to work with this team on such an iconic show. Last, he thanks Olivia and Emilie for letting daddy go play with lights, and Mary for sharing a love of theatre.

## JEFFREY JOHNSON

**SOUND DESIGN**

Jeff Johnson has been involved in theatre for more than a decade, both on and off stage. Past performance credits include *Dracula*, *Almost, Maine*, and *Lombardi*; and Sound Design for several productions at Theatre Baton Rouge. Outside of theatre, he can be found on the air every morning on Classic Hits 103.3. As a former resident of Natchitoches, *Steel Magnolias* holds a special place in his heart. He's thrilled to be working with Red Magnolia on such an amazing show with such a talented cast and production team which includes his wife and director of the production, Michele Johnson. Words can't describe how immeasurably proud he is of the job she and her "Magnolias" have done with this show.

## MARY PITTMAN

**STAGE MANAGER**

Mary Pittman is a retired LSU Administrative Program Specialist who has been active in the Arts community for more than 40 years. Her experience includes performance, stage management and stage crew for Theatre Baton Rouge (TBR), Ascension Community Theatre (ACT), Opera Louisiane, Manship Theater, Playmakers of Baton Rouge, Baton Rouge Symphony Chorus, Red Magnolia (RMTC) and Baker Little Theater. Mary is on the Board of RMTC and serves as Secretary. Her favorite roles to date are Grandma Addams in ACT's *Addams Family*, Sister Mary Lazarus in TBR's *Sister Act*, and grandmother to five beautiful grandchildren.



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# PRODUCTION WHO'S WHO

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## MELISSA VENABLE

**ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER**

Melissa Venable is delighted to work with Red Magnolia (RMTC) after stage managing their premier, *Love, Loss, and What I Wore*. Melissa has stage managed many productions and a few of her favorites were *The 39 Steps*, *The Elephant Man*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Footloose*, and now *Steel Magnolias*. Mel enjoys acting and singing and was last seen as a nun in *Sister Act* at Theatre Baton Rouge. She is the owner of Melissa V. Photography. Melissa thanks Michele, Courtney, and Mary for including her in another RMTC show and thanks the entire cast and production team for making this such a great experience! Mel lives in Watson with her husband, Brad, and their funny little dog, Fievel.

## PAULA SHREVE

**PRODUCTION MANAGER**

Paula Shreve is a Co-Founder and serves as the Administrative VP of Red Magnolia. A classically trained singer, she has performed locally as a church soloist, cantor, and recently performed the role of Mrs. Bucket in *Willy Wonka* at Ascension Community Theatre. Some theatre credits include Karen in *August: Osage County* and Juror 6 in *12 Angry Men*. Being that *Steel Magnolias* was the inspiration that led to the creation of Red Magnolia, she is proud to have this show come to life with Michele's directorial debut. Congrats to Michele and Courtney on their wonderful vision and direction, to Mary and Mel, the cast, designers, and Board for seeing this show come to life. Special thanks to Lee and Rachel for their continuous support.

## MARIE STAGG

**COSTUME DESIGN**

Marie Stagg is delighted for her first costuming adventure with Red Magnolia. A graduate of LSU's Apparel Design program, Marie designs and creates historically inspired costumes and enjoys being photographed in them. Although she loves her day job at the LA Office of Tourism, she has not given up on her dream of costuming for period drama movies. Marie would like to thank her parents for supporting her crazy ideas, her hoard of cats for tolerating her absence at home due to multiple projects, and everyone in *Steel Magnolias* for this opportunity. Instagram @sweetmarielouise



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## 4 Things About *Steel Magnolias* You Probably Don't Know.

1. The story is based on true life events of playwright Robert Harling's sister, Susan.
2. Robert Harling wrote the play in 10 days.
3. Bette Davis invited Robert Harling to tea to convince him that she should play Ouiser in the film version.
4. There isn't a parish or town in Louisiana called Chinquapin. It's the name of several types of trees and shrubs, including a species of oak. Chinquapin is also the name for the redear sunfish—the sun perch.



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# STEEL MAGNOLIAS



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# STEEL MAGNOLIAS

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*Headshots by Teresa Alvarez*

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## DIRECTORS' NOTES

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*"The women in this play are witty, intelligent, and above all, real characters. They in no way, shape, or form are meant to be portrayed as cartoons or caricatures."* Robert Harling, Author's note.

*Steel Magnolias* has always been one of my favorite films. In college I had the opportunity to play Shelby in the stage production with an all-female theatre company. It was my experience with that play and that company of women that inspired Red Magnolia Theatre Company. Directing this piece is a dream finally come true. In both the play and film, the strength of the characters, their deep friendships, and their ability to encourage and support one another through the best and worst life experiences, resonates with me. It wasn't until I met my husband (a native of Natchitoches, Louisiana, on which the small town of Chinquapin is based) the "characters" of this play became real. Playwright Robert Harling (also a Natchitoches native), based *Steel Magnolias* on the tragic loss of his sister, Susan Harling Robinson, his mother, Margaret, and the underlying "steel" strength and love at the heart of their female friendships. During our rehearsal process I had the chance to take a weekend road trip for a 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration of the film. I was honored to meet several women who knew the Harling family and had known Margaret (M'Lynn) and Susan (Shelby). I was struck by their stories, and how so much of their essence survives in the text. Margaret loved Jane Fonda workouts; Susan twirled fire batons. The script came alive in a new way that inspired and humbled me. I left Natchitoches with a deeper love of the material, and a profound new appreciation of the real women on which it was based. It was then, the impact of the playwright's author's note, fully resonated. If I achieved nothing else with my directorial debut I wanted make these women *real*. Though the play is set in the 1980's it was vitally important all elements of the production, while acknowledging the era in which it is set, feel timeless. The truth of these women, their powerful story, loving friendship, and unique personalities define the play. The film successfully achieved portraying these characters in a way that generations continue to fall in love with their friendship and story.



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## DIRECTORS' NOTES

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In closing, I would like to note that while Robert Harling did write this play as a cathartic tribute to his sister, many often miss that his story was also to equally honor his mother Margaret, whom he deemed "The Steel Magnolia." Ours is not just "another" production of *Steel Magnolias*. "Gentle as the sweet magnolia, and stronger than steel," our production is a love story to the film that stole our hearts, the play that we treasure, and the real women on which it was based: the original "Steel Magnolias."

- Michele Johnson

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I must confess. I've never seen the movie *Steel Magnolias* and up until this year I had never read the play either. I realize that is a pretty bold statement for someone who was born in Louisiana during the late 80's, and even bolder still, attended the college in the very city in which our fictitious setting is based. When I was first asked by Michele to work alongside her for this production, I admitted the above information and she seemed excited by the news. I was shocked! Michele's love for and history with this show coupled with my fresh eyes seemed like a winning pairing! Thinking back, I don't know why I was shocked. At its essence that's what this show is all about; women nurturing the growth of one another.

Throughout the process of this show I have come back time and time again to that sentiment: women nurturing the growth of one another. These women and the journey they take together throughout this play even 30 years later are still relatable. That is the beauty of this story. These women and their lives are cornerstones in the pantheon of iconic Southern women. We've all known these women in our lifetimes. They have achieved the status of timeless. I can hardly believe it took me so long to read this play. I'd be remiss if I didn't thank everyone involved in this production for reminding me on multiple occasions of the powerful truth of women nurturing one another. I couldn't have asked for a better team with whom to work on this production and I couldn't have asked for a better co-director with whom to share the space. For that I am forever grateful.

-Courtney Murphy

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