

The Over Our Head Players' Story

www.overourheadplayers.org

Over Our Head Players, Inc.

318 6th Street, Racine, WI 53403

(262) 632-6802

Over Our Head Players has been serving the Racine community since 1992. They just closed a sold out run of the original sketch comedy musical, "Kringlethe Musical? Part IV: 7 Mile Fair Lady." [CBS58 did a live broadcast from the theatre, which can be seen in part here: <https://www.cbs58.com/news/behind-the-scenes-with-6th-street-theater-in-racine-ahead-of-final-weekend-of-kringle-the-musical>] They will present "Who's Holiday" by Matthew Lombardo in December, "Seven Sacrifices," an original production honoring service members from Racine County in January, 2024; "2024 Snowdance® 10 Minute Comedy Festival" competition of original comedies in February; and "Hand to God" by Robert Askins to close their 32nd season. They have also just launched a capital campaign, supported by a matching donation, to ensure their sustainability into the future.

In the lore of Racine community theatre, the founding of Over Our Head Players is legendary. A couple friends sitting around a bar decided to put on a show – the owner of the establishment offered his space, they rounded up a few more friends, and a show was born. Sort of a Judy Garland / Mickey Rooney movie set in a tavern rather than a barn.

Also part of the legend is how we got our name. As those same founding members narrowed down the options, they wrote down their favorites on slips of paper. "Over Our Head Players" was, quite literally, drawn from a hat! Of course, we couldn't have known then that the name would live on for decades. (That other final favorite, "Theatre / Schmeatre," eventually got put to good use, too.)

So, in early 1992, "Bathroom Humor" was produced at George's Tavern, giving birth to the Theatre in the Bar movement in Racine. Six of those original Founding Members from "Bathroom Humor" are still a core part of OOHPs, working every season and, some of them, on every show. More than 30 seasons later, Over Our Head Players operates our own space at the Sixth Street Theatre, and we have expanded our paid staff to include a Managing Artistic Director and a staff of paid Artistic Associates.

Season Seven of Theatre in the Bar proved to be another turning point. This was the first season to include original material, as we a dramatic adaptation, "Real

Remembrances of the War in Viet Nam” as a fundraiser for local veterans to open the season. We closed the season with an encore presentation of a production written by one of our volunteers and produced only once before, “Still Haven’t Found ... “In between, we presented our most popular show ever at George’s, “Do Not Disturb.”

The success and diversity of that season motivated us to find a permanent home, preferably Downtown. We watched the listings, and one Sunday afternoon, as we pressed our noses against the door to the empty double-store front at 318 Sixth Street, we felt we had found our home.

September 24, 1999, we opened both our Eighth Season and The Sixth Street Theatre, Home of the Over Our Head Players. With an encore presentation of “Bathroom Humor” to kick off the season, we built ourselves a theatre, a season, and a home.

Presenting original works has become near and dear to our hearts, and we have had the opportunity to premiere many non-published scripts. We’re proud to list these productions as some of our favorites: “Ode to Garlic” by Frank Tylla, “Waiting for the Weinermobile™” by Dan Nielsen, “Big Shoes” by Tim Bohn, “Camp Nelson’ by Tim Bohn, “Lie Down with Dogs” by William W. Vought, and “The Cedar Chest Letters” by Barbara Tylla.

This commitment to both original theatre and comedy started us thinking about how to combine them in – well, an original way. In 2004, we announced the “2005 Snowdance 10 Minute Play Festival” and solicited original scripts to be produced in January. We hoped to receive a couple dozen scripts from the area, knew the talent around should yield enough to fill an evening, and rolled the dice selling season tickets to a show without a single written word. We were overwhelmed to receive 140 scripts from throughout the United States! And those scripts were funny. And the audience loved Snowdance; as the shows sold out, we added performances. Snowdance was a hit!

Now the cornerstone of our season, Snowdance has made Racine the Home of the 10-Minute Comedy. In 2012, we received a registered U.S. trademark for Snowdance®, which has now received thousands of entries, not only from across the country but also from around the world. We are very proud that short comedies that made their debut with Snowdance have gone on to compete in other festivals and/or to be published. The 20th anniversary Snowdance will take the stage in 2024; we have received nearly 7000 submissions over the years from literally around the world.

One key to the popularity of Snowdance is the between script “hyjinx” the cover the scene changes. These “hyjinx” are really very short sketches unto themselves. Because the hyjinx are so much fun both for the audience and for us, we embarked on a production based entirely on original sketch comedy, and “Theatre / Schmeatre” began. Since 2008, “Theatre / Schmeatre” has been part of our repertoire, each production featuring all new, original sketches and each performance featuring live music from some of Southeastern Wisconsin’s finest musicians.

Always on the lookout for ways to combine comedy with original productions, and always looking to reach new audiences, we ventured into children’s theatre. In 2007, we teamed up with the Racine Public Library and the Choral Arts Society on an adaptation of “Julius and Friends,” a musical adaptation of Kevin Henkes’ book, “Julius, the Baby of the World,” presented at Memorial Hall. This planted the seed for more original adaptations, and in 2014, we added a bonus show to our season, “OOHPiE’s Fables.” This was followed the next year by “OOHPiE vs. The Big Bad Wolf.”

We don’t limit ourselves to original works, although our focus is on new and edgy comedy. Some of the scripted comedies we’ve produced over 32 years include “Selections from All in the Timing” by David Ives, Christopher Durang’s “Beyond Therapy,” “The Mystery of Irma Vep,” “Becky’s New Car,” and works by Neil Simon, Woody Allen, John Patrick Shanley, Steve Martin, Jeff Daniels, Amy Sedaris, David Sedaris, Sarah Ruhl, and – perhaps our favorite – David Lindsay-Abaire.

And even though we do focus on comedy, we enjoy offering a good drama. Our dramatic offerings have ranged from dramedies like “The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time,” “ART,” “The Vagina Monologues,” and “God of Carnage,” to “Proof,” “Closer,” “Rabbit Hole,” Martin McDonagh’s “The Beauty Queen of Leenane,” “A Steady Rain,” “Taking Sides,” “The Goat or, Who Is Sylvia?” by Edward Albee and David Mamet’s classic “American Buffalo.”

The Wisconsin Arts Board has been a resource for Over Our Head Players for decades. As we opened the Sixth Street Theatre and increased our programming, WAB informational materials helped us to create administrative foundations that are still in place today. Original programming is an important component of our community outreach, and we have received support for many of our productions through local grants; this year, we are presenting *Seven Sacrifices* in partnership with Racine Area Veterans, Inc. which had received a Racine Arts Council ArtSeed grant. And, during the stresses of the 2020-2021 shutdowns, we received much needed funds from the

Wisconsin Arts Board Rescue Program to help sustain our operations during that fallow period.

Over Our Head Players is a non-profit organization of volunteer theatrical talent from throughout Southeastern Wisconsin. They present a full season of plays and operate the Sixth Street Theatre. To volunteer or make reservations, please call the box office at (262) 632-6802.

Mission statement

Over Our Head Players, Inc., through its operation of the Sixth Street Theatre, will produce quality theatrical performances serving Southeastern Wisconsin. Over Our Head Players will strive to present fresh and unique theatre in a professional manner. We will focus on, but not be limited to, comedy. Our goal is to gratify our group members' artistic aspirations and to satisfy the expectations of our growing patron base. Over Our Head Players will contribute to the arts district in Downtown Racine through the Sixth Street Theatre. We will also open the Sixth Street Theatre to other performing arts groups in the area to provide a complete theatrical offering to both artists and audiences.