LYRIC THEATRE
At The
SORG
MIDDLETOWN - OHIO

MASTER Class



October 2nd - 4th, 2026

Sorg Opera House
63 South Main Street - Middletown - Ohio 45044

MIDDLETOWN LYRIC THEATRE

Charley Shafor
Managing Artistic Director

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63 S. Main Street
Middletown, OH 45044

Box Office
513-425-7140

Website
middletownlyric.org

Middletown Lyric Theatre is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization

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Welcome Back to Middletown Lyric Theatre!

After closing our doors at 1530 Central Avenue in 2024, we have certainly missed the people, the energy, and the shared experience that only live theatre can create. But time away gave us space to rest, reflect, and talk about the future. Those conversations led us here — to a new home, and a full season of theatre as **Lyric Theatre at the Sorg.**

This season is built around one idea: the search for connection — to each other, to our purpose, and to the stories that shape us. From the simple, everyday joys of *You're A Good Man, Charlie Brown*, to the courage and identity at the heart of *The Nance*… from the quest for meaning in *PIPPIN*, to the artistic discipline and vulnerability explored in *Master Class*, and finally to the timeless spirit of generosity in *A Christmas Carol: A Live Radio Play* — each production asks, in its own way, what it means to find your place in the world and to share it with others.

We would not be returning without the support of many people and organizations who believe in the value of theatre in Middletown. We are deeply grateful to the Sorg Revitalization Group, the Middletown Community Foundation, the Miriam G. Knoll Charitable Foundation, and Barney Riesbeck of State Farm Insurance for helping make this new chapter possible.

LYRIC THEATRE At The SORG
MIDDLETOWN - OHIO

Middletown Lyric Theatre

sponsored in part by:
The Middletown Community Foundation
presents

MASTER CLASS
By TERRENCE McNALLY

With:
Heather Adams, Noelle Banks,
Mary Beth Benken-Riesenberg,
Tom Davis, Megan Rehberg

Production Assistance:
Heather Adams, Charley Shafor, Edwin Toy

Sound and Lighting Equipment provided by
Zeke Garfinkle - Hi-Tech Event Production

Directed by
CHARLEY SHAFOR

MASTER CLASS
was produced on Broadway by
Robert Whitehead, Lewis Allen and Spring Sirkin.

MASTER CLASS is presented by special arrangement with Broadway Licensing, LLC, servicing the Dramatists Play Service collection. (www.dramatists.com)

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Welcome

Choosing a season of shows is never simple. No theatre can predict exactly what its audience wants, and often the audience isn't sure either. What we can do is offer productions that challenge, inspire, educate, and - above all - entertain. That is always our goal.

More than a year ago, as we began planning our first full season in our new home at the Sorg Opera House, we knew we wanted each production to honor the building's history by incorporating a musical element. We're confident we've achieved that.

Selecting Master Class came with its own set of challenges. But what better piece to stage in an opera house than a play about one of the greatest sopranos of all time, Maria Callas. Choosing the show was only the beginning; finding the right cast was the next hurdle. Community theatre exists to welcome performers of all backgrounds and experience levels, but this show demanded something very specific. Without a formidable leading lady, the production simply wouldn't work.

Fortunately, I had already worked with Mary Beth Benken-Riesenberg, and once the show was chosen, I knew she was the one. That journey began more than six months ago. Any actress taking on Callas must have the ability, time, and desire to learn multiple languages and immerse herself in the complex, brilliant, tortured soul of Maria Callas. I am forever in awe - and deeply grateful - for the dedication Mary Beth has given this role.

Beyond her work, we also needed singers capable of performing Italian opera, and a pianist who could not only play but act. That team came together beautifully, and I am grateful for each of them.

Opera may not be my first passion, but it is an art form I deeply respect. The discipline of its vocalists, the grandeur of its sets and costumes, and the sheer emotional force that moves from stage to audience is unmistakable. I've been fortunate to experience opera here and across the country, and while I remember every performance, this production will stay with me just a little more. Theatre doesn't always give you the chance to work with people you love, respect, and admire - people who share their time, talent, and friendship so generously, and with this show I was lucky to have it all.

We truly hope you enjoy hearing Madame Callas' story. Creating this production has been a joy. Thank you for being here and thank you for supporting the arts.



SPECIAL THANKS

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WHO'S WHO



Heather Adams (Stagehand)
Heather joined MLT earlier this year for the production of *The Nance* for her first show where she was the Stage Manager both on and off stage. Since then she has been the stage manager for *Pippin* and performed in *110 Stories*. Heather is grateful to have had the opportunity to work alongside so many great actors, directors, and crew on such an array of shows. She looks forward to stage managing on and off stage for this production and hopefully many more to come! Heather would like to thank Edwin and Charley for always being so encouraging and always creating a safe space for expression.

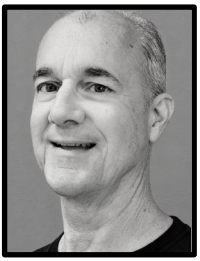


Noelle Banks (Second Soprano - Sharon)
Noelle is a Full Lyric Soprano with a B.F.A. in Vocal Performance from Carnegie Mellon University and an M.M. in Voice from the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music. Her performance credits include Fiordiligi in *Cosi fan Tutte*, Susannah in *Susannah*, First Lady in *Die Zauberflöte*, Mother in *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, and Sr. Blanche in *Dialogues of the Carmelites*, among others. She has sung with the Pittsburgh Opera, Opera Theatre of Pittsburgh, Cincinnati Opera, New York Lyric Opera, and Des Moines Metro Opera. Noelle is thrilled to join this MLT production in her hometown and at the historic Sorg Opera House!



Mary Beth Benken-Riesenberg (Maria Callas)
Mary Beth is thrilled to be playing the part of Maria Callas in MLT's production of MasterClass here at the beautiful Sorg Opera House. She is grateful for the opportunity to work with Charley and Edwin again as well as such a talented cast and crew. Some of her favorite roles she has done over the years include Ida (*The Cemetery Club*), Amanda (*The Glass Menagerie*), Celia (*Calendar Girls*), Victoria (*The String of Pearls*), Mary (*The Women*), Tecumapece (*Tecumseh*), Grace, Ruth, Aunt Harriet, Stephanie, Sandra (*The Dining Room*), Zorah (*Inspecting Carol*), Kate (*Uncommon Women and Others*), Shelby (*Steel Magnolias*) and, Eleanor (*Sunrise at Campobello*). Special thanks to Lisa and Diane for line & dialect help, MLT, the entire cast and crew, the audiences who come out and support theater and especially Charley for giving me this challenging and fun role. As always, a big thank you to Mike and Ben for their love and support.

WHO'S WHO



Tom Davis (Accompanist - Manny)
Music and performing have been a part of Tom's life for so many decades that he has lost track of the number of times he has appeared onstage. He has played in bands, sung in choirs, accompanied singers in shows and weddings, in venues ranging from Elks Lodges to university stages, La Comedia, Kings Island, and the Beverly Hills Supper Club (before the fire of 1977.) Tom has haunted the orchestra pit of many a musical theatre production as pianist and/or music director, and has written & composed two musicals. He is delighted to join the talented cast and crew of this production, and thanks his wife Sara for her ongoing counsel on all things musical.



Megan Rehberg (First Soprano - Sophie)
Megan is delighted to be back on the MLT stage, previously appearing in *Into the Woods*, *Sunday in the Park with George*, *Church & State*, and *Fix Me, Jesus*. Other favorite roles include Marian Paroo in *The Music Man*, Lily in *The Secret Garden* and Countess Ceprano in *Rigoletto*. She is the soprano section leader at Fairmont Presbyterian Church in Kettering and a member of the Dayton Opera Chorus.

MASTER CLASS
A play in two acts
There will be one - 15 minute interval

PLEASE NOTE:
The playwright has chosen to include adult language in the dialogue of this play.

Please turn off your cell phone, beeper, watch alarm or anything else that might make a noise during the performance. Unwrap any candies, cough drops, or mints before the performance begins to avoid disturbing your fellow audience members or the actors on stage.

The videotaping or making of electronic or other audio and/or visual recordings of this production and distributing recordings or streams in any medium, including the internet, is strictly prohibited, a violation of the Author(s)'s rights and actionable under the United States Copyright Law.

WHO'S WHO

Charley Shafor (Director)
Charley has been fortunate to spend his entire adult life in the arts. He began as a performer but soon discovered that his strengths and passions were best used behind the scenes. Starting his career as a scenic artist and designer, his work has appeared on stages across Ohio with companies including Middletown Summer Youth Theatre, LaComedia Dinner Theatre, The MUSE Machine, The Human Race Theatre Company, Dayton Contemporary Dance Company, and Weathervane Playhouse. He also served twice as a guest artist for the University of Iowa's Summer Playwrights Festival and contributed to several productions at the Fireside Playhouse in Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin.

His career expanded to Regional LORT theatres such as George Street Playhouse, Crossroads Theatre, and the McCarter Theatre Center in New Jersey; Circle Repertory, Playwrights Horizons, and Manhattan Theatre Club in New York City; Ogunquit Playhouse in Maine; and The Goodspeed Opera House in East Haddam, Connecticut. At Goodspeed, he worked on the original Annie II, later re-titled Annie Warbucks, with Composer Charles Strouse and Director Martin Charnin. He also built specialty costumes for the 90's revival of Pal Joey, featuring Peter Reardon and Florence Lacey. His work traveled to London's West End with The Fields of Ambrosia by Martin Silvestri and Joel Higgins, starring Broadway veteran Christine Andreas.

Beyond theatre, Charley has created art installations for NCR Corporation, The Reynolds & Reynolds Company, and Johnson & Johnson World Headquarters. Before returning to Ohio, he spent seven years on the faculty of Tower Hill School, a private Pre-K through 12 college preparatory school in Wilmington, Delaware. There he developed curriculum, taught American Musical Theatre and technical theatre, and collaborated across departments to produce multimedia arts events.

He credits his career and good fortune to the unwavering support of his family and his husband, Edwin Toy. Charley is also grateful to his entire family for the support they have shown throughout his career

Edwin Toy (Lighting Design)
Over the past 18 years, Edwin has designed over 100 productions for MLT. Locally, is design work has also been seen at Lebanon Theatre Company. Prior design experiences has taken him up and down the east coast where he spent eight years as resident lighting designer for The Pierre S. du Pont Arts Center in Wilmington, DE. He has also worked with St. Michael's Playhouse (Winooski, VT), Ogunquit Playhouse (Ogunquit, ME), Thalian Hall Center for the Performing Arts (Wilmington, NC), and Skyward Productions (Washington, DC).

NEXT ON OUR STAGE



A Christmas Carol

A Live Raido Play with Music

By Joe Landry
Music by Kevin Connors

December 18th - 20th

Step back in time and experience A Christmas Carol: A Live Radio Play with Music a heartwarming holiday classic re-imagined as a 1940s radio broadcast. As a troupe of voice actors and live foley artists bring Dickens beloved tale to life, the story of Ebenezer Scrooge unfolds with festive charm, ghostly visitations, and a powerful message of redemption. Complete with vintage jingles, live sound effects, and holiday music, this nostalgic, spirited retelling is a magical celebration of community, compassion, and the true meaning of Christmas. Recommended for all ages.

All Tickets $20.00 + processing fees
General Seating
Tickets available now at the SORG Box Office or On-line
middletownlyric.org

A Christmas Carol: A Live Radio Play is presented by arrangement with Broadway Licensing & Playscripts www.playscripts.com

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Thank You!

We are always grateful to our donors for their generous support, and we are equally grateful to everyone who purchases a season ticket package. Whether you choose to donate or become a season ticket holder, your commitment helps ensure we have the foundational financial support needed to produce an entire season of theatre.

Thank you to each and every one of you for believing in the work we do.

We do our best to recognize everyone accurately when printing names, but mistakes can happen. If you notice an error or have a question, please contact us at contact@middletownlyric.org.

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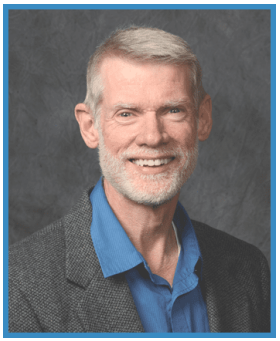
12noon - 1:00pm

Every 1st Friday of the Month
First United Methodist Church
Sanctuary
120 S. Broad St., Middletown, OH 45044
513.423.4629

All of our concerts are free and open to the public. We are handicapped accessible with easy and convenient parking.
We welcome you to bring a sack lunch to enjoy during the concert.

To see our full schedule, visit our website:
www.myfumc.net

The Middletown Community Foundation, the Miriam Knoll Foundation, the Barnitz Fund, and the congregation of the First United Methodist church have all been instrumental in the success of this concert series, now in its 20th year of bringing music to our community!



NOVEMBER 6
MILT GOEDDE

You name the song- Milt can play it! Every genre and every style will be featured here with creativity and class. We love it when Milt works his magic on all our favorites!



DECEMBER 4
275 Brass Quintet

Festive seasonal favorites, Gershwin, and more!

Les & Cheryl Landen Scholarship



Les and Cheryl Landen were lifelong Middletown residents, Middletown High School graduates, and devoted members of Middletown Lyric Theatre from its earliest days. Both believed deeply in the power of the arts and in the importance of education. Les was most often found onstage or designing and directing productions, while Cheryl worked behind the scenes; constructing, designing, helping with the box office and any other area that needed attention.

Their dedication extended far beyond the theatre. Les and Cheryl gave countless hours as volunteers for MidFest, the Ohio Hot Air Balloon Challenge, and numerous fundraising events. Their longest and most beloved service was to Light Up Middletown, where Les portrayed Santa Claus for many years and Cheryl served as Secretary, planner, and advertising coordinator.

Cheryl, a graduate of Transylvania University, taught in Middletown City Schools before opening her own business. After the birth of their sons, Scott and Alex, she became a full-time mother and continued her pattern of service—volunteering for the school system, Holy Family Parish, and several other community organizations. She also was on staff for the Middletown Art Center for many years

Les taught at Middletown High School before earning his law degree from the University of Dayton. He went on to serve the City of Middletown for nearly three decades as Law Director while also teaching Business Law at Miami University Middletown and Hamilton campuses. An avid golfer and a man of many talents, he poured his energy into every corner of the community he loved.

Together, Les and Cheryl championed education through the arts, believing that creativity strengthens both individuals and communities. In their honor, the Les & Cheryl Landen Scholarship provides an annual one-time award to a Middletown High School graduate pursuing education, with preference given to students entering the arts—music, drama, or visual art.

If you would like to support the arts, education, and the legacy of service embodied by Les and Cheryl, you may use QR code provided to make a donation to this or any of the valuable scholarships offered through the Middletown Community Foundation.