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Robert Harling's *Steel Magnolias* Opens

Alabama Shakespeare Festival Continues Spring Repertory with Audience Favorite

MONTGOMERY, Ala., (March 15, 2019) — Alabama Shakespeare Festival presents Robert Harling's dynamic and unforgettable Southern story, *Steel Magnolias*, on the Octagon Stage March 21 through May 5.

Tickets start at \$26 and are available by calling 334.271.5353 or visiting the ASF Box Office, open Monday through Saturday 12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., or anytime at asf.net. Evening performances begin at 7:00 p.m.; matinees start at 2:00 p.m. on weekdays and Saturdays and at 3:00 p.m. on Sundays. For a truly immersive experience, patrons can select to sit in Row T and spend the evening on the Octagon Stage as a customer in the waiting area of Truvy's salon!

"There is no such thing as natural beauty," except of the mind and spirit, and there it abounds in this hilarious and heartwarming Southern classic of six very different women who gather and gossip at the local beauty parlor in Chinquapin, Louisiana. With wit, warmth, and intelligence, they pull together to tackle whatever shocks and surprises life sends their way with Southern charm, strength, and their firm bonds of friendship.

Directed by ASF Artistic Director Rick Dildine, *Steel Magnolias* is inspired by a true story penned by playwright Robert Harling only months after his sister, Susan, died of complications from diabetes. "It was written in about ten days. The events that inspired it were so powerful that, after I found the story arena, it just poured out into my typewriter in a 24/7 tsunami of Southernness. I had no idea what I'd written. I asked the first person I gave it to if it even looked like a play. I wasn't really sure. All I knew was that I felt it portrayed my sister's life and spirit accurately, and that was enough for me," Harling told *Garden & Gun* magazine in 2012.

"This play gives us much to consider. Friendship, with no limits or restraints, is priceless. The freedom to be who you are is an enduring journey. And despite setbacks and heartbreak, life goes on," said Dildine.

Longtime ASF company member and Associate Artistic Director Greta Lambert brings the eccentric and curmudgeonly Ouiser Boudreaux to life in this production. After starring in ASF's *Ring of Fire* in 2013, Allison Briner Dardenne returns to portray the strong and stubbornly devoted M'Lynn. Her previous credits include *Bright Star* and *Mamma Mia!* (Broadway) and national tours of *Les Misérables*, *Titanic*, and *White Christmas*.

Marcy McGuigan makes her ASF debut as Truvy, the vivacious owner of the local beauty shop. Marcy's recent credits include *Ring of Fire* (Stages Repertory Theatre) and *Red Herring* (Portland Stage). ASF MFA alum Sarah Walker Thornton portrays the (seemingly) shy and unsure Annelle. Sarah most recently appeared in the reading of *A Sudden Spontaneous Event* during ASF's Southern Writers Festival. Her NYC and regional credits include *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *As You Like It*, *Hamlet*, *Twelfth Night*, *Armless*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Anthem* (Off-Broadway).

Last seen in *Sweat* at Pittsburgh Public Theater, Tracey Conyer Lee is the beautiful and sophisticated Clairee Belcher. Her recent works include *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar and Grill*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* at Yale Rep, and Paula Vogel's *Civil War Christmas* at Baltimore Center Stage. Making her ASF debut, Gracie Winchester plays the strong-willed and passionate Shelby. Gracie most recently worked Off-Broadway as Ophelia in the Drilling Company's production of *Hamlet*.

The *Steel Magnolias* creative team includes Scenic Designer Scott Neale, Costume Designer Olivera Gajic, Lighting Designer Annie Wiegand, Sound Designer Brendan Connelly, Stage Manager Hannah-Jean Farris, Assistant Stage

Manager Rebecca C. Monroe, Production Assistant Catherine Ranieri, Assistant Lighting Designer Gifford Williams, and Assistant Scenic Designer Robert Ashurst.

“For this production, we’ve configured the audience to be nearly in-the-round and positioned the beauty shop in a way that supports intimate conversations,” shared Dildine.

A three-piece band will help set the scene for each performance with live, original songs that convey the sounds of life in a small Louisiana parish. Band members include Lloyd Strickland, Lee Borden, and Charles Walters.

Steel Magnolias runs in repertory with George Brant’s new wartime comedy, *Into the Breeches*, also on the Octagon Stage April 4 through May 4.

Special events presented in conjunction with this production include a Conversation at Kress on April 6 at 10:00 a.m., which will be a panel discussion hosted by ASF about the importance of women supporting women in their friendships and in the workplace. On April 20, ASF’s technical director and artisans invite the public to experience a Narrated Changeover on the Octagon Stage, which will allow the audience to watch the stage crew transition the set from *Into the Breeches* to *Steel Magnolias* while the crew shares details about developing the designs for each play.

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EMBRACING OUR COMMUNITY – ONE STORY AT A TIME.

Alabama Shakespeare Festival (ASF) is a not-for-profit organization under the direction of Artistic Director Rick Dildine and Executive Director Todd Schmidt. Designated as The State Theatre of Alabama, ASF is a leader in education and outreach, serving more than 40,000 students annually with artistic programming. ASF is supported by grants from the Alabama State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts.