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THE SPITFIRE GRILL

Music and Book by
James Valcq

Lyrics and Book by
Fred Alley

Based on the Film by Lee David Zlotoff
February 27 – March 15, 2026 | Cabot Theatre | Broadway Theatre Center

Directed by
James Valcq

Music Direction by
Janna Vinson

Conducted by
David Bonofiglio

Scenic Designer
Jonathan Berg-Einhorn

Costume Designer
Michelle Therese Grimm

Lighting Designer
Alan Piotrowicz

Sound Designer
John Tanner

Production Stage Managers
Karly Amato*
Madeline M. Scott*

Assistant Stage Manager
Kian Arnold

Intimacy / Fight Director
Marcee Doherty

The Spitfire Grill is presented by arrangement with Concord Theatricals on behalf of Samuel French, Inc.
www.concordtheatricals.com

ANY VIDEO AND/OR AUDIO RECORDING OF THIS PRODUCTION IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED.

Playwrights Horizons, Inc., New York City, produced the New York Premiere of *The Spitfire Grill* Off-Broadway in 2001.

The Spitfire Grill received its World Premiere production by the George Street Playhouse, November 5, 2000, David Saint, Artistic Director, Michael Stotts, Managing Director.

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*Appearing through an agreement between Skylight Music Theatre and Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

This project is sponsored in part by a grant from the Wisconsin Arts Board with Endowment from the State of Wisconsin and the National Endowment for the Arts.

The Spitfire Grill **5**

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR



The 25th anniversary production of *The Spitfire Grill* comes to you from the perspective of a fella who's amazed and humbled that this tale Fred Alley and I began spinning in the woods of Wisconsin has traveled the globe many times over. Fred's words have been heard in at least six different languages. Actors who don't look anything like Great Lakes quarrymen or West Virginia miners have embodied these characters and brought them vividly to life. And all over the world, everyone feels that *Spitfire* reflects their own story... even their own music.

The truly amazing thing to this writer is that, 25 years and 1000 productions on, *The Spitfire Grill* seems to be well on its way to actually becoming the kind of folktale Fred and I held as inspiration while we wrote.

Folktale (*n*): A story passed over the years representing the culture and values of common, ordinary people, serving to entertain, explain natural phenomena, or teach deeper moral or spiritual lessons.

The Spitfire Grill - this folktale - is a parable about welcoming The Stranger while keeping the traditions of our Communities alive.

25 years ago we lost Fred Alley to an undiagnosed heart condition. Fred spent a week at my NYC apartment in April 2001 to prepare our script for an impending workshop at Playwrights Horizons where the show was to have its off-Broadway premiere in September. On the final day, we read and sang the show to each other, as we often did. Then my husband Bob and I called a car service to take Fred to the airport. We all went outside to wait for the car. The last time I saw Fred, we were waving to each other as his car disappeared over a rise in the road.

The character Shelby sings of a lost, beloved icon in the song "When Hope Goes":

*"I can see it still:
Everyone in town
Walking up that hill,
Waiting for the bus,
Waving him goodbye,
Part of all of us."*



Fred Alley

The countless parallels and resonances between who Fred was and what he wrote in *Spitfire* continue to haunt me. And to comfort me.

While preparing for this production I dug into my archives and pored over every word and note we ever wrote for this story. In the process Fred felt closer to me than he had in a very long time. I found that some of the material we discarded was indeed useful, perhaps even essential. I was newly inspired to develop 25 year old musical fragments and even compose some brand new music. Thus I'm proud to offer an extra helping of Fred (and James) this time around.

Despite our Wisconsin spin on the tale, the social structures, occupations, and concerns of the characters at the Grill are global and timeless. They are a folk who share a primal, elemental belief system that places great importance on the cyclical nature of seasons, certain cosmic phenomena, and the power of nature to harm and to heal.

As the story begins, the first image Fred asks us to see in our mind's eye is a ring around the moon. Across different times and cultures, the ring has been interpreted as a harbinger of change; an invitation to embrace the unknown; an omen that an emotional, spiritual, or physical storm is on the horizon. A ring around the moon serves as a powerful reminder that we are all interconnected with the universe. And that's in Fred's first line of lyric!

The emotional truths of this story resonate in any place, at any time. People have always been challenged to connect with their better angels.



Our coterie of beautiful theatre-makers are gathered together with you this Winter in the warmth of the Cabot Theatre to continue a ritual that has taken place around the glow of the hearth for millennia: Tell the story. Sing the song.

Open your hearts and listen carefully. You may hear your story. You might hear your music.

James Valcq, Director of *The Spitfire Grill*

A NOTE FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



Photo by Phil Kidd,
MKE Lifestyle

This production of *The Spitfire Grill* is a welcome, welcome home. This is a Wisconsin story, written by Wisconsin writers; yet, like most great stories, it is a universal tale. It has been done twice before at Skylight (2002 and 2008) and we are honored that composer/co-bookwriter, and director James Valcq, who has been involved in over 54 productions here, chose Skylight for the show's 25th anniversary production.

The Spitfire Grill is very near and dear to my heart, not only because my wife, Janet, was in the world premiere production in NJ in 2000, but also because we learned she was pregnant with twins during that production. Those twins are now 24 years old and are our proudest collaboration. They

have loved this show as well – from before the beginning.

The Spitfire Grill is based on the 1996 film of the same name. It is a gorgeous story about second chances, redemption, and learning to accept the stranger. These polarizing times may cause us to question the definition of “stranger” and can teach us to, perhaps, show more grace when fully understanding the circumstances that may cause a person to be considered one. Just because someone is from outside of your community does not mean that they cannot belong within it.

The provenance of this story starts with a Catholic charity based in Walls, Mississippi. The charity felt a film might have more impact than their customary print campaigns. After reading 200 screenplays, they settled on a script to be written by Lee David Zlotoff – best known for creating the TV series, *MacGyver*. As a result of a screening at the Sundance Film Festival in 1996, Rob Reiner's Castle Rock production company offered \$10 million for the distribution rights, the highest amount paid for an independent feature at that time. Profits from the film financed a K-8 school in Southaven, Mississippi, nearby to the Sacred Heart League charity headquarters in Walls.

Luckily for all of us, James Valcq and Fred Alley turned that film into the musical you are about to see. We encourage you to welcome yourselves in to the colorful, wide world of Gilead, WI and to allow those around you, whether you know them or not, to accompany you.

Michael Unger, Artistic Director

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THE SPITFIRE GRILL

CAST

Percy Talbott	Micah Friedman
Hannah Ferguson	Suzanne Graff*
Sheriff Joe Sutter	Frankie Breit
Effy Krayneck	Rhonda Rae Busch
Shelby Thorpe	Rachael Zientek
Caleb Thorpe	Nathan Marinan
The Stranger	Darren L. Green

MUSICIANS

Conductor / Keyboard	David Bonofiglio
Accordion	Sacia Jerome
Guitar / Mandolin	Fred Pike
Violin	Pamela Simmons
Cello	Ryan Fitzpatrick

PLACE A small town

TIME Not long ago

*Appearing through an agreement between Skylight Music Theatre and Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

The Spitfire Grill has a runtime of two hours and a 15 minute intermission.

MUSICAL NUMBERS

ACT 1

A Ring Around the Moon	Percy and Company
Something's Cooking at the Spitfire Grill	Effy and Company
Out of the Frying Pan	Percy
When Hope Goes	Shelby
Ice and Snow	Caleb, Joe, and Effy
The Colors of Paradise	Percy and Shelby
Digging Stone	Caleb
This Wide Woods	Joe and Percy
Forgotten Lullaby	Hannah
Shoot the Moon	Hannah and Company

ACT 2

Come Alive Again	Hannah and Company
Forest for the Trees	Joe
Wild Bird	Shelby
Shine	Percy
Way Back Home	Hannah
Finale	Company

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Chris Guse
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James Spencer

PRODUCTION SUPPORT

Interim Production Manager	Kathleen Dickinson
Technical Director	Islay Reed
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Cabot Lighting Supervisor	Ashton Karp
Cabot Audio/Video Supervisor	Ev Ponder
Properties Supervisor	Amaya Rockett
Wardrobe Supervisor	Alexis Flaten
Studio Lighting/Audio Supervisor	Eli Davis
Scenic Carpenters	Michael Boyle, Erin Lyn Chin, Rachel Stewart
Scenic Painters	Nora Brooks, Devin Meseke
Properties Artisans	Aminah Rockett, Ava Rodriguez, Zoe Lucas
Follow Spot Operators	Zoe Lucas, Jen Letscher
Electricians	Zoe Lucas
Audio/Deck Crew	Riley McTaggart
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SPITFIRE

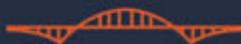
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The Spitfire Grill

Friday, March 6th, 2026

A ROCKIN' Midsummer Night's Dream

Friday, April 24th, 2026



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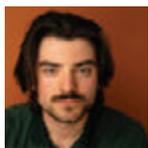
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A ROCKIN' Midsummer Night's Dream

Saturday, April 11th, 2026



BIOS



Frankie Breit (Sheriff Joe Sutter) is delighted to make his debut with Skylight Music Theatre! Film Credits: *Reasonable Doubt* (Marche de film Cannes Film Festival), *Dollar Store Killers* (Prime), *Where's Johnny* (Firehouse Films).

Theatre Credits: Noah in *Children of Eden* at La Comedia Dinner Theatre, Max in *The Play That Goes Wrong* at La Comedia Dinner Theatre, Ensemble in Disney's *Frozen* at Duluth Playhouse. Frankie would like to extend his thanks to his family, friends and to Mom and Dad for their endless support; he couldn't be living his dream without them! He is represented by SCE Agency in Chicago. frankiebreit.com
[@frankiejazz](https://www.instagram.com/frankiejazz)



Rhonda Rae Busch (Effy Krayneck) is thrilled to be part of this show! Skylight credits: Martha in *White Christmas*, Madame Thernardier in *Les Misérables*, Widow Paroo in *The Music Man*, Calliope in *Xanadu*. Re-

cent credits elsewhere: Aunt Eller in *Oklahoma!*, Reverend Mother in *Nunsense* at The Fireside. Love to Bill for 40 years of wedded bliss. [@rhondatherae](https://www.instagram.com/rhondatherae)



Micah Friedman (Percy Talbott) is overjoyed to be making her Skylight debut! Previous credits include: Heather Duke in *Heathers* at Eclipse Summer Stock Stage, Swing in *The 25th Annual... Bee* at the Studio Theatre

TDS, Boyet/Maria/Mote/Dull/Katherine in *Love's Labour's Lost* with Summit Players Theatre. [@micah.friedman](https://www.instagram.com/micah.friedman)



Suzanne Graff* (Hannah Ferguson) is thrilled to return to the Skylight after 30 years for this very special production. A Milwaukee native, Suzanne has worked as an actor and director in New York, Minneapo-

lis and Wisconsin. As the former Executive Director of Door Shakespeare, she performed and/or directed dozens of productions including *The Merchant of Venice*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Tartuffe*, *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *The Tempest*. Suzanne enjoyed several seasons with Northern Sky Theatre (formerly American Folklore Theatre) working with Fred Alley and originating

roles in *Tongue and Cheek*, *Northern Lights*, and *Bone Dance* among others. Off-Broadway Suzanne appeared in *Twelfth Night* and in James Valcq's *Zombies from The Beyond*; she also toured with the National Shakespeare Company.



Darren L. Green (The Stranger) is excited to be making his Skylight debut reprising his favorite role.

He previously played The Stranger at theatres in Montana and Nebraska. Opening night of this 25th Anniversary Production will be Darren's 25th performance in the role. Regional credits: *Man of La Mancha*, *Pride and Prejudice*.



Nathan Marinan (Caleb Thorpe) has stripped, donned drag, puppeteered, and occasionally joined a revolution with Skylight Music Theatre for the past 13 years in productions including *The Full Monty*, *Being*

Earnest, *Oliver*, Dennis DeYoung's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *Urinetown*, *Les Misérables*, and *Avenue Q*. For mom and each of his guys. www.NathanMarinan.com



Rachael Zientek (Shelby Thorpe) is thrilled to return to Skylight Music Theatre, where she most recently appeared as Constance Weber in *Amadeus*. Past credits include Hope Cladwell in *Urinetown* and Katherine

Plumber in *Newsies*. She is a Wisconsin actress who has worked with Forward Theater, Next Act Theater, Milwaukee Chamber Theatre, Renaissance Theaterworks, Northern Sky Theater, First Stage Children's Theater, and more.

BIOS CONTINUED



CREATIVE TEAM

James Valcq (Director/Music/Co-Bookwriter)

is the composer/co-author of the off-Broadway musical *The Spitfire Grill* (Playwrights Horizons, 2001) which has been seen in nearly 1000 productions spanning North America, Europe, Asia and Oceania, including a highly lauded London premiere in 2015. Also off-Broadway, Valcq was the composer/author of *Zombies from The Beyond*, which opened to critical acclaim in 1995. Regional credits include *The Passage* (another collaboration with Fred Alley), *Victory Farm* and *Boxcar* for Northern Sky Theater, and adaptations of the classic children's books *The Pancake King* (commissioned by Next Act Theatre) and *Anatole* (commissioned by First Stage).

During his decade as co-Artistic Director of Third Avenue Playhouse in Door County, Valcq created performing editions of several early 20th-century musical theatre pieces, including his reconstruction of George Gershwin's first Broadway musical, *La La Lucille*, for its centennial in 2019. As a conductor, orchestrator, actor and stage director, his career has spanned Broadway, National Tours and regional theatre. He holds an MFA from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts and is a proud member of Actors Equity. He is delighted to return to the Skylight where he's been a part of more than 50 shows, beginning with his professional debut in *Wozzeck* in 1971!

Fred Alley (Lyrics/Co-Bookwriter - 1962-2001)

was the co-founder and Artist in Residence at American Folklore Theatre (now Northern Sky Theater) in Door County, Wisconsin, a populist theatre with a seasonal audience of 50,000 where he collaborated on over 20 original shows. It was at Northern Sky that Mr. Alley first collaborated with James Valcq on *The Passage*. His second collaboration with Mr. Valcq, *The Spitfire Grill*, won the American Academy of Arts and Letters' prestigious Richard Rodgers Production Award for 2001. Premiered at the George Street Playhouse in New Jersey and produced off-Broadway by

Playwrights Horizons, it received Best Musical nominations from the Outer Critics Circle and Drama League, as well as two Drama Desk nominations.

Mr. Alley was also the librettist and lyricist of the musicals *Guys on Ice*, *Lumberjacks in Love* and *The Bachelors*, all of which set box office records at Milwaukee Repertory Theatre, and continue to win new fans at regional theatres all across the country. Fred Alley died unexpectedly in May 2001. In 2002, he was posthumously honored with the Mark R. Sumner Award for Distinguished Achievement, presented by the National Conference on Outdoor Drama.

Janna Vinson (Music Director) has worked continuously as a vocal coach, life coach and music director for over 25 years. She has performed with such houses as New Orleans Opera, Virginia Opera, Cincinnati Opera, The Florentine Opera, Milwaukee Opera Theatre and Skylight Music Theatre. She has held teaching and coaching positions at Southern Methodist University, the University of Oklahoma and the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee. She earned her certification as a Life Coach in Positive Psychology and is currently coaching individuals and couples at Lakeshore Psychology Services in Mequon, Wisconsin.

David Bonofiglio (Conductor) holds a BFA in piano performance from Cardinal Stritch University. Selected credits as music director: *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor® Dreamcoat*, *Juliet & Romeo*, *Oliver!*, *An Evening with Sir Tim Rice*, *Xanadu*, *School of Rock*, *Evita*, *MAMMA MIA!*, *The Full Monty*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* for Skylight Music Theatre; *Little By Little*, *Scrooge In Rouge*, *A Cudahy Caroler Christmas*, and *Jesus Christ Superstar* for In Tandem Theatre. Associate music director: *A Christmas Carol* for Milwaukee Rep.

Jonathan Berg-Einhorn (Scenic Designer)

(he/him) previously had the privilege of designing Skylight's 24-25 season and is very fortunate to return for the 25-26 season this year. Jonathan has worked with companies such as, Paramount Theatre, Metropolis, Porchlight Music Theatre, Kokandy Productions, American Blues Theater, Haven Theatre, Music Theater Works, Citadel Theatre, and Redtwist Theatre, to name a few. Jonathanbergeinhorn.com.

Michelle Therese Grimm (Costume Designer)

is happy to return to Skylight after designing costumes for *Fiddler on the Roof* this season.

BIOS CONTINUED

Seattle credits include 5th Avenue Theatre, Pacific Northwest Ballet, Seattle Opera, Village Theatre, and Cornish College of the Arts. Michelle has a B.A. in Theatre Arts from Marquette University where she currently works in the costume shop, and an M.F.A. in Costume Design and Tech from Northern Illinois University. She lives in Cedarburg with her husband and three children.

Alan Piotrowicz (Lighting Designer) has designed throughout Milwaukee, including All In Productions, Cooperative Performance, Falls Patio Players, First Stage, In Tandem, Milwaukee Chamber, Next Act, Renaissance Theaterworks, Theater RED, and Theatre Gigante. Work outside Wisconsin includes TITAN Theatre Company in New York City, Hope Repertory Theatre in Michigan, and The Ivoryton Playhouse and Brief Cameo Productions in Connecticut. Training: UW-Madison and the Santa Fe Opera. Much love to Jason. www.alanpiotrowicz.com

John Tanner (Sound Designer) is a composer, recording engineer, and sound designer. He works in scoring, arranging, recording, and music composition for television, documentaries, radio, industrial video, and theatre. His original music has won Golden Reel Awards; Telly Awards; and National American Advertising Federation Awards. John has earned both Gold and Platinum albums for his engineering work.

Karly Amato* (Production Stage Manager) is a Philadelphia based AEA Stage Manager. She is thrilled to be joining the team for her first production at Skylight Music Theatre! Recent Regional credits include Execution of Justice, *The Witnesses (World Premiere)*, *A Showcase of One Acts* (Chautauqua Theater Company), *Primary Trust* (McCarter Theatre Center), *The Seasons* (Opera Philadelphia), *Wishing to Grow Up Brightly (World Premiere)*, *Oedipus in Seattle, tick, tick... BOOM!* (Theatre Horizon), and *Antony & Cleopatra, A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Quintessence Theatre Group). She would like to express her gratitude to her team, friends, and family for their support.

Madeline M. Scott* (Production Stage Manager) lives in Chicago and loves Lake Michigan! Milwaukee credits: *The Forgotten Girl, Three Little Birds, and Arthur* (First Stage). Regional credits include productions with Children's Theatre Company, Court Theatre, Goodman Theatre, Paramount Theatre, Seattle Children's Theatre, Timeline Theatre, and Teatro Vista. Proud member of Actors' Equity Association. Special thanks to fiancée Natalie, and Mom!

Kian D. Arnold (Assistant Stage Manager) is a 2024 graduate from The University of Minnesota- Duluth's Theatre program. Recent credits for the Milwaukee based Stage Manager includes Rodger and Hammerstein's *Cinderella* (Duluth Playhouse, ASM), *John Proctor is the Villain* (College of Saint Scholastica, SM), Utah Shakespeare Festival (Run Crew). For more on Kian's work, visit www.kdarnoldsm.com.

Michael Unger (Artistic Director) Artistic Director since September 2019, Michael has directed Dennis DeYoung's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (nine Broadway/World Awards – including Best Director and Best Musical), the Deaf and Hard of Hearing production of *Spring Awakening*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor® Dreamcoat*, *Frankenstein, Oliver!*, *Juliet & Romeo*, *School of Rock*, *Noises Off*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *A Jolly Holiday: Celebrating Disney's Broadway Hits*, the virtual *Being Earnest*, as well as *Me, Myself and I* for Skylight's Education program. He was previously the Associate Artistic Director of Off-Broadway's York Theatre where credits included *You're A Good Man Charlie Brown* and *Big*. For nine years, he was the Producing Artistic Director of NewArts, started in response to the Sandy Hook Elementary School tragedy, directing 17 productions working with over 650 area-children. Other selected directing credits include *A Christmas Carol* (McCarter Theatre - 18 years), *Two Point Oh* (NY Times Critics' Pick), *Time Stands Still* (Cape Cod Chronicle Best 2015), *My Sister in This House* (Deaf West, Ovation Recommended), and new versions of Kander and Ebb's *The Happy Time* and *The Rink*. World premiere directing credits include *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, *Caligula*, and *A ROCKIN' Midsummer Night's Dream* (featured in the award-winning documentary film "Midsummer in Newtown"). He has directed 14 operas plus benefit concerts honoring Susan Stroman, André DeShields, Maltby and Shire, and Leslie Uggams, as well as for the communities of Sandy Hook, CT and Parkland, FL.

Susan Varela (Executive Director) was named a 2025 Women of Influence by the Milwaukee Business Journal. Her professional career began as a performer, which landed her in New York City for 20 years. She performed on Broadway in *Les Misérables* and at the famed Radio City Music Hall; across North America in National Tours and all the way to Hamburg, Germany. Before joining the Skylight staff, she performed here in *Sweeney Todd*, *Into the Woods*, *The Wizard of Oz*, and *Les Misérables*. Susan has produced, directed, performed and written for the stage and television alongside her husband, actor Andrew Varela.

BIOS CONTINUED

She currently serves on the board of directors for Brew City Opera and The Historic Third Ward Association and is a member of TEMPO - a group of executive women leaders in Milwaukee.

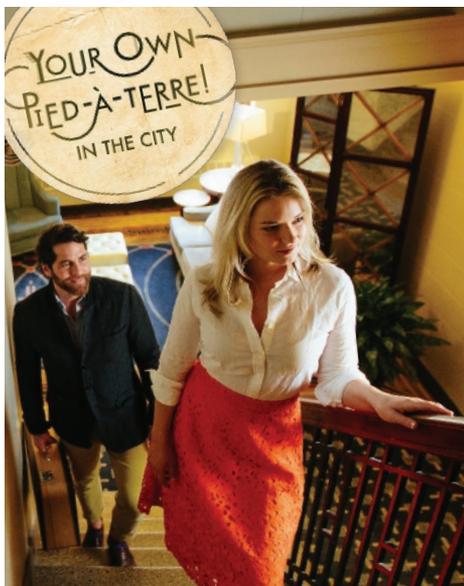
Lee David Zlotoff is a producer, director and screenwriter best known as the creator of the TV series *MacGyver*, which ran on ABC between 1985 and 1992 and was sold throughout the world. He then produced the television series *The Man from Snowy River*, loosely based on the Banjo Patterson poem 'The Man from Snowy River'. Additionally, he wrote and directed the 1996 film *The Spitfire Grill*, which won the Audience Award at the Sundance Film Festival and was nominated for the Grand Jury Prize. Zlotoff graduated from Brooklyn Technical High School in 1970. He then went on to St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland.

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