

SUMMER, 1976

BY DAVID AUBURN



a story of motherhood, ambition and independence

Directed by Bari Newport

Audience Enrichment Guide

Dramaturgy by Ali Tallman

LEHMAN BROTHERS
FABRICS AND SUITS



The Lehman Trilogy at GableStage

Gable Stage Theatre Company

GableStage, one of the longest running and most acclaimed theatre companies in South Florida, is in its 26th Season at Coral Gables' Biltmore Hotel. Founded in 1979 as the Florida Shakespeare Theatre, GableStage originally performed the plays of Shakespeare in the Casino Gardens at Vizcaya. In 1987 the Shakespeare Theatre moved to Coral Gable's Minorca Playhouse until Hurricane Andrew destroyed the playhouse in 1992. GableStage temporarily found its new home at the Carousel Theatre in Coral Gables before moving into the former horse stables at the historic Biltmore Hotel in 1998.

Since then, GableStage has grown into one of the most recognized and respected regional theatre companies in the country. In its 26 years, the theatre company has employed more than 2,000 artists (actors, directors, designers, musicians, writers and craftspeople) who live and work in our community; welcomed more than 650,000 patrons, including more than 175,000 Miami-Dade students; and contributed upwards of \$10M to the local economy.

In June of 2021, after the death of legendary producing artistic director Joseph Adler and a 20-month closure due to the pandemic, the theatre company's Board of Trustees started on a vibrant new chapter with the hiring of Bari Newport as producing artistic director.



How I Learned What I Learned at GableStage



Native Gardens at GableStage



In Newport's short tenure, the company has grown tremendously. The company's extensive community outreach, distinctive roster of educational offerings and ambitious mainstage programming have cemented GableStage's reputation as a formidable leader in the field.

In 2023 GableStage added seven Carbonell Awards (for a total of 71) to its collection and was voted Best Theatre Company by Miami New Times and Coral Gables Magazine.

GableStage's 26th Season continues to fulfill its mission of providing South Florida audiences with theatrical works of artistic excellence that confront today's issues and ideas.

Bari Newport, Artistic Director

Meet the Playwright & Director

David Auburn

David Auburn (playwright) is a playwright, screenwriter, and director. His plays include “Summer, 1976”, “The Adventures of Augie March”, “Lost Lake”, “The Columnist”, and “Proof” (2001 Pulitzer Prize, Tony Award, New York Drama Critics Circle Award). Film work includes “The Girl in the Park” (writer/director), “Georgetown”, “Proof”, and “The Lake House”. He is Associate Artistic Director at the Berkshire Theatre Group, where he has directed “Abe Lincoln in Illinois”, “Dracula”, “The Importance of Being Earnest”, “The Skin of Our Teeth”, “The Petrified Forest”, “Cat on a Hot Tin Roof”, “Anna Christie”, and “A Delicate Balance”, among other plays. Other directing credits include “Long Day’s Journey into Night” (Court, Chicago) and the Off-Broadway world premiere of Michael Weller’s “Side Effects” (MCC). A former Guggenheim Fellow, he lives in New York City.

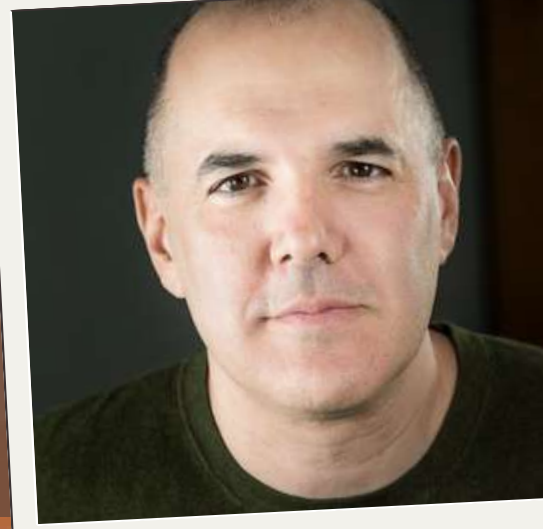


Photo: Todd Cerveris

Bari Newport

Bari Newport (director) joined GableStage as producing artistic director in June 2021. Bari’s tenure follows the legendary leadership of Joseph Adler, “the godfather of South Florida theatre” and the producing artistic director of GableStage from 1988 - 2020. Bari is known for her creative methods of centering a theatre company in a community. Whether it’s giving out hundreds of potted plants on Earth Day or designating Thursdays as Give a Dog a Bone Days, Bari’s belief that a theatre company is a citizen in a community rather than simply a place where plays are produced, has been the bellwether of her career. Bari came to Miami from the Penobscot Theatre Company in Bangor, Maine where she served as producing artistic director for nine and a half seasons. Previously, she was artistic associate at the Tony Award winning Alliance Theatre in Atlanta, artistic/literary manager at the Pasadena Playhouse, associate producer at Atlanta’s Horizon Theatre and associate director of Florida Repertory Theatre. As a producer, Newport has been responsible for the creation and stabilization of a wide range of artistic initiatives, including extensive work in new play development, education, and community engagement. Her work as a director and actor has been seen at Horizon Theatre Company, Greenbrier Valley Theatre, American Stage, Cumberland County Playhouse, Florida Repertory Theatre, Penobscot Theatre Company, Sacramento Theatre Company, Westport Country Playhouse and the Williamstown Theatre Festival. At GableStage, Bari has directed “The Price”, “The Year of Magical Thinking”, “Heisenberg”, “We Will Not Be Silent”, “A Doll’s House Pt. 2”, “The Thanksgiving Play”, “The Lehman Trilogy”, and “Appropriate”. She earned her BFA from the University of Southern California and her MFA from the University of Iowa. Bari is a 25 year member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society and the Actor’s Equity Association. Email her at bnewport@gablestage.org.



“Summer, 1976” is a memory play, in which two women in the present recall their experiences over the Summer of 1976. What was going on in America at that time?

Culture

- Disco was at its peak with hits like Elton John & Kiki Dee’s “Don’t Go Breaking My Heart”
- Punk rock emerged in NYC clubs like CBGB, featuring The Ramones and Patti Smith.
- Martin Scorsese’s “Taxi Driver” (released Feb. 1976) sparked debates about violence and urban decay.
- Nostalgic sitcoms like “Happy Days” and “Laverne & Shirley” dominated TV, reflecting 1950s revivalism
- Summer Olympics: The Montreal Games (July–August) saw Nadia Comăneci’s historic perfect 10 in gymnastics. The U.S. men’s basketball team controversially lost to the USSR in the finals.



Politics

- Gerald Ford had been President since Nixon’s 1974 resignation in the wake of the Watergate scandal.
 - In August, Ford would narrowly beat Ronald Reagan to win the Republican nomination for President, after which he would go on to lose the 1976 election to Jimmy Carter.
- In July, The Supreme Court ruled that the death penalty is not inherently cruel or unusual and is an acceptable form of punishment under the Constitution.
- Congress debated the Toxic Substances Control Act (passed October 1976), aiming to regulate chemicals like PCBs (man-made chemicals used as coolants and lubricants in electrical equipment)
- The Church Committee’s* findings on CIA/FBI abuses (e.g., assassination plots, domestic spying) spurred reforms, including the eventual Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA).



*United States Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities

Society, Innovation, & Trends

- Technology:
 - Apple Computer Co. (founded April 1, 1976) released the Apple I in July, pioneering the personal computer revolution.
 - The first color photos of Mars are transmitted to Earth in July.
- Feminism: We were approaching the end of the Second-Wave Feminist movement, which was fighting for reproductive and financial rights, as well as workplace equality. (for more information, see pg. 7)
- LGBTQ+ Rights: Harvey Milk campaigned in San Francisco, building momentum for his historic 1977 election as California’s first openly gay elected official.
- Crime:
 - The “Son of Sam” serial killings began in NYC on July 29.
 - Patty Hearst’s high-profile trial for bank robbery concluded in March, but her sentencing (September) kept the case in headlines.

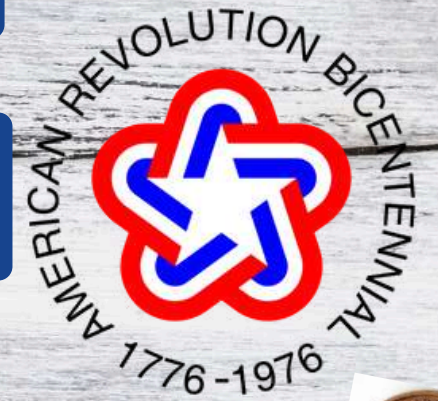


America's Bicentennial



The Bicentennial was a series of celebrations & special observances in honor of the creation of the United States as an independent republic, culminating on July 4, 1976. That date marked the 200th anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence by the Founding Fathers in the Second Continental Congress!

This was the Bicentennial Logo, commissioned by the American Revolution Bicentennial Commission. Members were appointed by President Gerald Ford and were responsible for organizing most of the Bicentennial events.



Ohio's commemorative stamp celebrating the Bicentennial.



A Bicentennial commemorative coin from Dayton, OH.



In Ohio, the celebrations included historical reenactments, sporting events, concerts, parades, and plenty of fireworks!



David Auburn: "That summer started to feel like exactly the right setting. Partially because of the Bicentennial and its metaphor of independence, people discovering or rediscovering the meaning of independence for themselves. But more generally, I had a sense of people exploring new possibilities in that period, and women in particular reexamining the nature of their lives at the time."

Next Big Anniversary: Semiquincentennial in 2026 - 250th anniversary of the United States Declaration of Independence!



Columbus, OH in 1976

Columbus, the state capital of Ohio, stood in 1976 as a thriving governmental, educational, and economic center. Anchored by The Ohio State University (OSU), the city boasted a diversified economy driven by manufacturing (automotive, steel, and appliances) and insurance giants like Nationwide Mutual Insurance Company. The population, based on 1970 U.S. Census data, was approximately 539,677, though estimates by 1976 suggested growth near 550,000 as suburbanization accelerated.

The Columbus Recreation and Parks Department managed roughly 370 parks. By 1976, the Columbus Register of Historic Properties had already designated 82 landmarks, and ongoing efforts contributed to what is today over 170 listings on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Ohio State Fair, a staple since 1850, drew record crowds in 1976 as part of the U.S. Bicentennial celebrations, with attendance exceeding 1 million. The fair showcased agriculture, industry, and entertainment, solidifying its status as one of the nation's largest.

While the 1970s brought economic strain nationwide, Columbus' mix of education, government, and diversified industry helped it fare better than many of its Rust Belt peers. The city's infrastructure grew alongside its population, with Interstate 270's outerbelt expansion facilitating suburban development. Its blend of Midwestern practicality and forward-thinking investments in education and infrastructure laid the groundwork for its modern reputation as a thriving, inclusive metropolis.

The Ohio State University



In 1976, The Ohio State University (OSU) was navigating growth, academic innovation, and societal change as one of the largest universities in America. Enrollment totaled approximately 48,477 students, making it among the largest U.S. universities. This included undergraduates, graduate students, and veterans accessing post-Vietnam War GI Bill benefits. The university employed roughly 3,500 faculty members and 13,000 staff.



OSU expanded programs in emerging fields like computer science and environmental studies. It also established new programs for African American Studies (est. 1972) and Women's Studies (est. 1975). Student activism persisted around civil rights, gender equity (fueled by Title IX's 1972 passage), and environmentalism, though protests were less confrontational than the late 1960s'.



Under coach Woody Hayes, the football team finished the 1976 season 9-2-1, ranking 6th nationally. Women's athletics, bolstered by Title IX, saw increased participation in sports like basketball and track, but funding and facilities would lag behind men's programs until the 1980s.



OSU's first LGBTQ+ student group, HomoCourage (renamed Outlaws in 1976), operated discreetly due to societal stigma. While national LGBTQ+ activism grew post-Stonewall, campus efforts remained limited to underground support networks amid administrative and cultural resistance.



The mid-1970s marked a transitional period for OSU, bridging 1960s activism with institutional reforms. This era laid groundwork for future expansions in diversity, academic programming, and gender equity, cementing OSU's role as a research and athletic leader.



Academia, 1976

In 1976, 78% of academia faculty positions were tenured/tenure-track, offering stable careers with lighter teaching loads (3-4 courses/year) and minimal grant pressure. Adjunct roles (~30% of faculty) were part-time and lacked benefits, yet were less exploitative than today's "gig academia" systemic crisis.

Today, 73% of faculty are adjuncts, earning ~\$4,000 per course with no job security. Tenure-track roles have plummeted to ~25-30%, and tenured professors face relentless grant-seeking, administrative duties, and publish-or-perish demands absent for their predecessors in the 1970s.

Women in Academia

At OSU in 1976, women comprised 45% of undergraduate students and 30% of graduate students, reflecting national trends of rising female enrollment.

Gender disparities persisted among faculty and leadership at the time: only 20% of faculty and 12% of full professors were women. Today, women across academic institutions comprise 49% of faculty -- of which only 34% of full professors. Racial diversity remains disproportionately lower in senior roles.

Staff roles, particularly administrative and clerical positions, were predominantly held by women, aligning with broader workforce patterns of the era.



OSU nursing students, hard at work, 1976

Second-wave Feminism

In the summer of 1976, second-wave feminism was nearing its conclusion. (1960s–1980s)



Second-wave feminism emerged in the 1960s, expanding beyond first-wave suffrage goals to address systemic gender inequalities. Key catalyzing works included Betty Friedan's "The Feminine Mystique" (1963), critiquing suburban domesticity, and Simone de Beauvoir's "The Second Sex" (1949), which influenced feminist theory.



In 1966, 28 women (including Friedan) co-founded the National Organization for Women (NOW), advocating workplace equality and abortion rights. The movement gained momentum with legislative milestones: Title IX (1972), banning sex discrimination in education, and Roe v. Wade (1973), legalizing abortion. The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), passed by Congress in 1972, fell three states short of ratification by 1982.



Activists like Gloria Steinem and Shirley Chisholm highlighted intersections of gender, race, and class. Radical groups organized protests, such as the 1968 Miss America pageant demonstration, symbolically discarding oppressive beauty standards.



Critiques emerged over the predominance of white, middle-class perspectives, prompting women of color and lesbian feminists to challenge exclusionary narratives. Angela Davis was at the forefront of advocating for marginalized women within the women's rights movement, and linked feminism to anti-racist and anti-capitalist struggles. By the 1980s, these tensions, alongside achieved legal reforms, paved the way for third-wave feminism's focus on intersectionality and inclusivity.

David Auburn: "It's about the possibilities that were opening up or challenging people at that time, especially women. Even as a kid, you knew there was a lot in flux. There were divorces and strange arrangements among your parents and friends that you couldn't quite decipher."

American Women's Rights Timeline

1960: FDA approves the first commercially produced birth control pill in the world, giving women agency over when and if they have children.

1963: Equal Pay Act prohibits sex-based wage discrimination between men and women performing the same job in the same workplace.

1964: Civil Rights Act (Title VII) bans employment discrimination based on race, religion, national origin, or sex.

1969: California adopts the nation's first "no fault" divorce law, allowing divorce by mutual consent.

1971: "Reed v. Reed" strikes down an Idaho law favoring men in estate administration, marking the first time the Supreme Court invalidates gender-based discrimination.

1972: Shirley Chisholm becomes the first woman & first Black candidate to run for a major party's presidential nomination. (She had previously been the first Black woman to be elected to the United States Congress, in 1968.)

1972: "Eisenstadt v. Baird" ruled unmarried women have the same right to birth control as married people.

1972: Title IX prohibits sex discrimination in federally funded education programs.

1973: "Roe v. Wade" declares that the Constitution protects women's right to terminate an early pregnancy, legalizing abortion.

1974: Equal Credit Opportunity Act grants women financial autonomy through access to lines of credit and loans without requiring male co-signers.

1975: "Taylor v. Louisiana" denies states the right to exclude women from juries.

1978: Pregnancy Discrimination Act bans workplace discrimination against pregnant women.

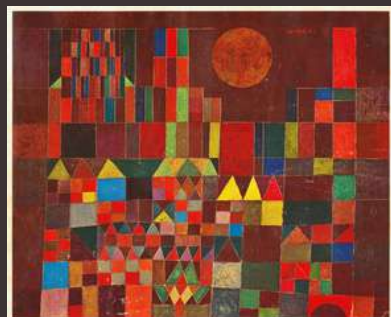
Paul Klee

Paul Klee (1879–1940), a Swiss-German artist, was a pivotal figure in modern art, associated with Expressionism, Surrealism, and the Bauhaus school, where he taught from 1921–1931. His work blended whimsical abstraction, vibrant color theory, and symbolic imagery, influenced by his musical background and global travels. Klee's unique style merged childlike spontaneity with sophisticated geometry, seen in works like "Twittering Machine" (1922). He championed intuitive creativity, famously describing drawing as "taking a line for a walk." His innovative techniques and theories reshaped modern art, inspiring giants like Joan Miró, Wassily Kandinsky, and later Abstract Expressionists (e.g., Pollock), who embraced his emphasis on subconscious expression and experimental media.

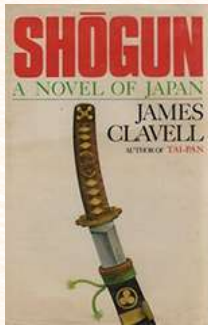


"Summer, 1976" unfolds like a Paul Klee canvas – layering fragments of memory to reveal truths hidden beneath the surface. Klee believed that art "makes the hidden visible" and playwright David Auburn mirrors Klee's methodology, fracturing time and weaving the zenith of the characters' connection with its dissolution. We're left with a retrospective of a friendship, their bond a fleeting constellation of shared joints, neglected ambitions, and the unsteady thrill of self-re-invention.

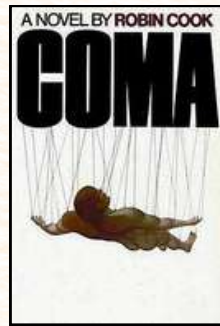
One of our characters, Diana, is an artist who was largely influenced by Klee's work. Explore some of his pieces below:



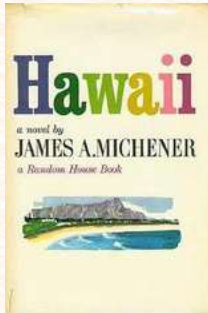
Alice's Bookshelf



James Clavell's "Shōgun": Loosely based on Japanese historical events & figures, it had a significant impact on westerners' knowledge of, and interest in, Japanese history and culture. It was extremely popular in the mainstream - a bestseller - and put Clavell on the map. FX's "Shōgun" is its most recent adaptation.



Robin Cook's "Coma": A thriller that journeys into the inner workings of a hospital, it highlights the dilemmas and problems faced by a woman in a male-dominated profession. Robin Cook's first commercial success, it was critically acclaimed & highly awarded.



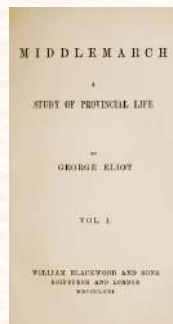
James Michener's "Hawaii": Narrates the stories of the original Hawaiians who sailed to the islands from Bora Bora, the early American missionaries and merchants, and the Chinese and Japanese immigrants who traveled to work and seek their fortunes in Hawaii. A best seller, it established Michener's trademark style.

Diana's Bookshelf

Fyodor Dostoevsky's "The Brothers Karamazov": A philosophical drama dealing with faith, doubt, and reason revolving around patricide, in modernizing Russia. It's had a deep influence on many public figures over the years, including Albert Einstein, Virginia Woolf, Martin Heidegger, Cormac McCarthy, and Sigmund Freud.



George Eliot's "Middlemarch": Follows the distinct, intersecting stories of multiple characters, exploring issues like the status of women, the nature of marriage, idealism, self-interest, religion, hypocrisy, political reform, and education. It's widely seen as Eliot's best work and one of the greatest English novels.



Authors Henry James ("The Portrait of a Lady", "The Turn of the Screw"), Virginia Woolf ("Mrs. Dalloway", "To the Lighthouse"), & Thomas Hardy ("Far from the Madding Crowd", "Tess of the d'Urbervilles"): They are considered by many to be among the greatest and most important novelists in the English language.



Recommendations

More from David Auburn:

Proof

The Columnist

The Adventures of Augie March

Lost Lake

Skyscraper

Amateurs

Women's Experiences at Different Times in History:

Rapture, Blister, Burn by Gina Gionfriddo

The How and the Why by Sarah Treem

Fefu and Her Friends by Maria Irene Fornes

The Revlon Girl by Neil Anthony Docking

In the Next Room by Sarah Ruhl

Top Girls by Caryl Churchill

Uncommon Women and Others by Wendy Wasserstein

Other Side of the Game by Amanda Parris

Toni Stone by Lydia R. Diamond

The Drowning Girls by Beth Graham, Charlie Tomlinson, & Daniela
Vlaskalic

Acting Class

1. OBJECT WORK

There are many objects in “Summer, 1976” that connect to the characters’ memories. Use Viola Spolin's "Object Work" exercise to utilize props to unlock imagination and create story.

1. Place a prop (e.g., an old photo, a pencil, a letter) in the center of the room.
2. Students take turns briefly & silently interact with the object as if it holds a secret memory of a special moment in their past. No dialogue—only physicality and facial expressions.

Afterward, discuss: What story did the object tell? How does this remind you of the way Diana & Alice interacted with objects in the show?

2. EMOTIONAL MEMORY

The characters in “Summer, 1976“ are remembering a long-ago summer and friendship. Use Stanislavski’s "Emotional Memory" exercise to access personal emotions and use them to fuel a character’s truth.

1. Recall a memory where you felt love and distance towards someone at the same time (e.g., saying goodbye to a friend after summer camp, having a long distance friend online or after moving, etc.).
2. Write a short letter to that person, telling them the story about the first time you met them. What you saw, thought, felt, etc.
3. Using this emotion, perform the letter as if it was a monologue.

How does your personal emotion inform your delivery of the letter?