



Steel Magnolias

by Robert Harling

Directed by Stephen E. Dreikorn
Teatr Polski Arnold Szyfman Theatre
Warsaw, March 29, 2017

PROGRAM

■ ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The U.S. Embassy Warsaw's Public Affairs Section would like to thank the following people and organizations for making today's event possible:

Teatr Polski

The Marshall's Office of the Mazowieckie Voivodship's Department of Culture, Promotion, and Tourism

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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Hello Theatre Goers,

I would first like to thank all of you for joining the U.S. Embassy Warsaw as we celebrate International Women's Month with a staged reading of one of the most famous modern American dramas, *Steel Magnolias*. Indeed, few plays have had such meteoric success. In only two years the play went from its world premiere in New York City to a blockbuster hit and award-winning film.

Perhaps one of the main reasons for the play's unexpected and amazing success is its relatability to those who watch it. Perhaps it is due to the depiction of the power of the bonds of female friendship to overcome a tragedy. Or perhaps it is because the play explores the dangers, risks, and tragedies of diabetes in a time when the disease was not very well understood. Most likely it was a combination of all of these. In any case, the U.S. Embassy is delighted to share this play with the public here in Warsaw as way to commemorate International Women's Month and to showcase a fine work of American theater.

Before I conclude, I must also take a moment to thank Teatr Polski; the American Center Warsaw; the Department of Culture, Promotion, and Tourism of the Office of the Marshal of the Mazowieckie Voivodship; the U.S. Embassy's Federal Women's Program; and the U.S. Embassy's Public Affairs Section for helping with today's production. Without all this support, today's staged reading would not be possible. Finally, please sit back, relax, and enjoy being transported to mid-1980s Louisiana for a night of humor and sadness, fun and tragedy, but above all else a night honoring the strength and determination of women throughout the world.

Many Thanks,

Stephen E. Dreikorn,
Director and Deputy Press Attaché

■ SYNOPSIS

The action is set in Truvy's beauty salon in fictional Chinquapin, Louisiana, where all the ladies who are "anybody" come to have their hair done. Helped by her eager new assistant, Annelle, the outspoken, wise-cracking Truvy dispenses shampoos and free advice to the town's rich curmudgeon, Ouiser; an eccentric millionaire, Miss Clairee, who has a raging sweet tooth; and the local social leader, M'Lynn, whose daughter, Shelby, is about to marry a "good ole boy." Filled with hilarious repartee, the play moves toward tragedy in the second act when the characters suddenly realize their mortality.

SETTING

The action of the play takes place in Truvy's Beauty Salon in the fictional town of Chinquapin, Louisiana in the mid-1980s.

Act I: Scene 1: April
 Scene 2: December, that same year

Act II: Scene 1: June, eighteen months later
 Scene 2: November, that same year

CHARACTERS - in order of appearance

Narrator/Host (Persia Walker): The host of tonight's performance. He/she will read the descriptions of the play and guide you through tonight's journey at Truvy's Salon.

Annelle (Sylvia Bochenek): Very shy late teens early 20s hair-dresser from out of town.

Truvy (Marci Smith): Owner of a small town beauty shop. She knows everyone's business and shares it with anyone who will listen.

Clairee (Kathleen Morenski): Widow of the former mayor of Chinquapin. She is a millionaire who knows everyone's business. She is very close lifelong friends with Ouiser.

Shelby (Katherine Koehler): Roughly 25-year-old, she is the prettiest girl in town, and loved by all.

M'Lynn (Margaret Bunnell): Mother of Shelby. She is over-protective at times and finds the need to have a firm grasp on the world at all times.

Ouiser pronounced Weezer (Urszula Chlebinska): She is the same age as Clairee. She is a wealthy old bitty, and is loveably miserable. She is very close lifelong friend to Clairee.

DJ (Summer Session): The disc jockey on the local radio station, KPPD.

CAST AND CREW - BIOS



Sylwia Bochenek (Annelle) Being a student at the Faculty of Applied Linguistics of the Warsaw University, Sylwia is mostly passionate about languages and foreign cultures. Her hobbies also include indie and folk rock music. If she had no common sense, she would spend all her savings on concert tickets and traveling. As much as she would love to, she does not have any pets. She does, however, have a sister that is two years older, but needs just as much attention as a three-month-old puppy. Sylwia hopes that taking part in this performance of *Steel Magnolias* will be a new challenge for her and an interesting way to end her internship at the U.S. Embassy Warsaw.



Margaret Bunnell (M'Lynn) is a life-long amateur thespian. She began acting in community theatre projects as a child. More recently, she was an active member of the International Players of Accra (Ghana), a locally-renowned troupe of expats. With the International Players, Margaret played numerous roles including the evil witch Evelyn in the annual British Pantomime production of *Once Upon a Time* as well as performing lead roles in several vignettes during a production staged to raise funds for breast cancer research. She has a B.A. from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill where she studied Journalism and Mass Communication, and an M.A. Emerson College where she studied Management Communication and Public Relations. Originally from North Carolina, she is excited to blend a love of entertaining with her southern-belle upbringing (yes, the accent is genuine!) to bring you "M'Lynn" in this staged reading of *Steel Magnolias*.



Urszula Chlebinska (Ouiser) Urszula Chlebinska is scared to death about the whole issue, as she has never participated in such a type of production, especially in English. However, she loves *Steel Magnolias* the movie, so she will try to do her best not to disappoint the listeners. Ula has some stage experience as once upon a time she used to study singing at the Bednarska Music School. As she was into musicals, she trained for the famous *METRO* musical for two months, but due a prolonged and intensive party time she lost her voice and could not sing a note when was requested to. About quarter of a century ago she had a real privilege to become a Second Award winner at the Festival of Stage Songs in Wroclaw. Apparently famous back then in Poland Professor Bardini said that she was really funny! Ula also took part in *Three-penny Opera* by Bertold Brecht at Ateneum Theatre in Warsaw playing "singing crowd." At some point in her life she became a Karaoke star at Ground Zero disco in Warsaw. Her picture was even in the newspaper with a sign underneath saying: "Anyone can sing!" Nowadays Ula occasionally entertains her neighbors while in the shower or scares other drivers by singing along with the car radio, especially during the summer. She promised not to sing this evening.

CAST AND CREW - BIOS



Angelica Dreikorn (Cosutme & Makeup Coordinator) is passionate about arts, communication, and social development. She studied ballet and scenic arts with the Royal Academy of Dance in Mexico for 12 years. She completed her university studies in Communication and Advertising at the University Iberoamericana in Mexico and Creative Advertising in Del Salvador University in Argentina. Over the past few years she organized several art performances for fundraising events for NGOs and coordinated campaigns as the Creative Advertising Director in a prestigious Advertisement Agency in Mexico. She previously worked as a producer for a local radio station in Tijuana, Mexico, and as the Communications and Public Relations Director for Red Cross Mexico in Tijuana. One of her hobbies is painting which she has studied since childhood. She is married to Stephen, and they have one son. She enjoys being a wife and a mom.



Stephen E. Dreikorn (Director) is the Deputy Press Attaché at the U.S. Embassy Warsaw. Theatre was one of Stephen's three majors at Ashland University where he earned his Bachelor of Arts degree. His theatre concentrations were acting, directing, and stage combat. Stephen acted in one professional theatre production, *Johnny Appleseed*, in which he was also the Fight Captain, Assistant Weapons Master, and a Pyrotechnic. His previous directing credits include *Quare Medicine* by Paul Green and *A Business Lunch at the Russian Team Room* by Christopher Durang. Stephen has acted in more than 20 plays in community theatre, high school, and college with lead roles in several plays including *The Phantom Lady* by Pedro Calderon de la Barca, *When We Are Married* by J.B. Priestley, and *Sabrina Fair* by Samuel Taylor. He earned a Master of Arts in Public Diplomacy from the Institute of World Politics. He and his wife, Angelica, have a son, Zacchaeus. Stephen is thankful for this opportunity to do theatre again after a long drought!



Katie Koehler (Shelby) - Katherine Koehler is from Charleston, South Carolina. She earned her bachelor's degree in voice at Florida Southern College, where she studied with the great Mezzo Soprano Beverly Wolff. While at Florida Southern, Katherine performed lead roles in *La Perichole*, *Into The Woods*, *The Threepenny Opera*, *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* and *The Cemetery Club*. After graduation, Ms. Koehler was offered a full scholarship to Georgia State University in Atlanta, where she earned her Master's degree in Vocal Performance. In 2009 she won the Encouragement Award at the South Carolina National Met Council Auditions. She has performed several roles in her hometown of Charleston, including an incredibly popular run of *Musical of Musicals: The Musical!* with the Piccolo Spoleto festival. Ms. Koehler joined the U.S. Department of State as an Office Management Specialist in January 2013. Previous assignments include Kathmandu and Islamabad.

CAST AND CREW - BIOS



Kathleen Morenski (Clairee) is the Political Counselor at the U.S. Embassy Warsaw. A native of New England, she is eternally grateful to her friend and fellow diplomat, Grace Shelton, for ensuring she speaks properly in this production. Kathleen is a voracious reader, an avid skier, a world traveler, and a lifelong theatre enthusiast. In the 1990s while living in Toronto, Canada, she performed in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Yeoman of the Guard* and Alan Jay Lerner's *My Fair Lady*.



Jerzy Roguski (Production Manager) U.S. Embassy Warsaw American Spaces Unit Director, has been with the U.S. Embassy Warsaw Public Affairs Section for close to three decades and has worked on hundreds of cultural, educational and information programs. He is currently responsible for a network of 26 American Spaces all over Poland. His interests include: ITP, graphics design, and skiing.



Monika Rokicka (Assistant Production Manager) has been with the Embassy since 1994. Once a researcher and librarian now is responsible for partnerships with Polish libraries and American Spaces in Poland. She loves hiking and trekking.



Vanessa Shannen (Stage Manager) is proud to be part of this production of *Steel Magnolias* as Stage Manager. Her stage management credits include *Little Women*, *Tom Sawyer*, Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and *Romeo and Juliet*. She also has previously worked as a choreographer for the Diamond Bar Public Theatre's production of *A Midsummer's Night Dream*. Before enjoying working backstage, in college she performed as characters *Mickey Mouse*, *Minnie Mouse*, and *Tinkerbell* at Disneyland in Anaheim, California. Vanessa currently is working as Security Clerk in the Regional Security Office at the U.S. Embassy. When she is not at work, you can usually find her in a bookstore, playing video games, or traveling the world in search of the perfect margarita with her husband Paul.



Marci Smith (Truvy) is delighted to be performing in her first production. A native of South Carolina, her Southern accent is all natural. Marci is a beauty salon veteran, receiving her first perm at age 4 and experiencing many unfortunate hair styles and hair colors since. A master's level social worker by training, she is currently working as an office management assistant in the security office at the U.S. Embassy. Accompanying her husband, Aaron Fishman, she has enjoyed overseas postings to Krakow, Poland; Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; Moscow, Russia; Accra, Ghana; Tbilisi, Georgia; and Warsaw, Poland. In her free time, she enjoys dance fitness, binge watching Netflix, and does copious amounts of laundry. Her most notable role to date has been as mother to her two children, Abby and Evan.

CAST AND CREW - BIOS



Summer Session (DJ and Assistant Stage Manager) Summer Session is a Texan native. She loves travel and comedy, and has participated in hair shows, featuring casual design to creative fantasy looks. She lives out loud and loves vibrant color and feels life is what you make of it! She likes to be a living inspiration to anyone who needs a lift in life. She likes to make people look good. When you look good on the outside you can't help but to feel good inside!



Persia Walker (Narrator/Host) Persia Walker is the author of the 1920s Jazz Age novels *Black Orchid Blues*, *Darkness and the Devil Behind Me*, and *Harlem Redux*. Critics have praised her books as “remarkable” and “extraordinary” works of crime fiction. Persia was born and raised in New York City. She has degrees from Swarthmore College and Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism. She was a news writer for *The Associated Press* in Washington DC and New York, and also worked for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty in Munich. She became a U.S. diplomat in 2011. She has lived in Germany, Brazil and now Poland.



Jagoda Zakrzewska (Assistant Production Manager) is the Director of the American Center Warsaw. She studied sociology and Public Relations. Her previous jobs include being a former TV and radio journalist and producer. Since 2011 she chose to pursue her passion and has worked coordinating and producing cultural programs and events. She has managed the American Center Warsaw from its very beginning early last year with the goal of connecting people in Poland with America. As such she is a proud member of the American Spaces network in Poland. Jagoda is also an art lover, who enjoys being inspired by people.

This amateur production of *Steel Magnolias* is presented by special arrangement with SAMUEL FRENCH, LTD, and produced in cooperation with the Marshall's Office of the Mazowieckie Voivodship's Department of Culture, Promotion, and Tourism.

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