



# A RIDE THROUGH THE COUNTRY

A NEW PLAY BY *RAY KENNEDY*

ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS

*ROBERT LAYTOUN & CYNDI & RON McNEIL*

DIRECTED BY

*HOLLI SAPERSTEIN & STEVE VERNON*

STARRING

*GREG KING DEBRA GILLINGHAM ERIN HUNTER CINDY COLUCCI*

*JENNY WRIGHT MICHELLE BRAXTON ELIZABETH MICHAELS*

*FRACASWELL HYMAN MATTHEW THOMAS REID*



*JULY 10-20, 2025*

THUR-SAT 7:30 PM / SUN 3 PM

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# ***A Ride Through the Country***

Written By Ray Kennedy

## **Setting:**

The Backroads of Southeastern North Carolina, Recently  
There Will Be a 15 Minute Intermission

## **Crew:**

Directed by Steve Vernon and Holli Saperstein

Light Design.....Pi Starsong  
Costume Design.....Maran Kennedy  
Set Design and Construction.....Terry Collins  
Sound Design.....Steve Vernon  
Stage Manager and Board Operator.....Ronnie Funderburke

## **Cast:**

Debra Gillingham.....Louie  
Greg King.....Ray  
Fracaswell Hyman.....Dr. Morris  
Erin Hunter.....Marian  
Cindy Colluci.....Aunt Sue  
Elizabeth Michaels.....Miss Charlotte  
Michelle Braxton Currin.....Gaelynn  
Jenny Wright.....Miss Helen  
Matthew Thomas-Reid.....Kevin  
Marian Kennedy and Brian Whitted.....Singers of "Sweet, Sweet Spirit"  
by Doris Akers

## **Bios**

Ray Kennedy (Playwright)- "What a Difference A Day Makes" - the famous iconic song by Dinah Washington has a new meaning here ...insert "Covid" instead of "A Day." Ray, with much time on his hands, put paper to pen during those long days of no work from his idyll in sunny Delray Beach, Florida. What followed was three plays: ***The Thursday Night Bridge Circle***, (Produced in Wilmington by Opera House, Raleigh by Burning Coal, Vancouver by United Players, and Charlotte by Theatre Charlotte) and ***Lessons At The Piano*** -(produced in Wilmington by Opera House/Justin Smith and the Wilson Center/Shane Fernando.) His third play, ***A Ride Through The Country*** debuts

here at Thalian Hall produced by Big Dawg Productions.

Ray has worked in the entertainment space since he was 19 years old, most notably as a dancer (A Chorus Line National Tour,) Director/Choreographer,(The Kennedy Center) a Fashion Event Director, (The USO, Las Vegas, New York,) and a 23 year career as a Cruise Ship Entertainment Producer, (The QE2, Cunard, American Hawaii, Palm Beach Princess Cruise Lines.) Special thanks to Steve Vernon and Holli Saperstein for making this production happen, to the wonderful cast and crew, Susan Bristow for her stories, and Pat Walsh, Rachael Murray and Sarah Rodgers for listening, pushing and always believing in this story. And a special thank you to John Murchison. You were always my cheerleader and never missed a show. For this one, you got the best seat in the house. This show is dedicated to Kevin, Marian and of course, his mother Louie.

Debra Gillingham (Louie) is thrilled to be back onstage after a 3-year hiatus. She is grateful to Ray, Steve, Holli and this amazing cast and is happy to help bring this message of love, family and perseverance to the stage. She dedicates her performance to her late father and brother-in-law as well as healthcare workers and caregivers everywhere.

Greg King (Ray) is thrilled to be back in Wilmington for this lovely production! Greg was last seen in Wilmington as Older Frank Ashurst in ***The Madness Of May***, and was last seen on stage in ***The Play That Goes Wrong*** at the Cape Fear Regional Theater. Favorite roles: Tim in ***The Cake***, Stucky in the world premiere of Music City, Tateh in ***Ragtime***, Billy Flynn in ***Chicago***, Harold in ***The Full Monty***, Joseph in ***Joseph And The Amazing Technocolor Dreamcoat***, Philippe in



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**Phantom** and Carl in the World Premier of **Lunch At The Piccadilly** at CFRT. Greg also spent many years on the high seas performing on cruise ships with Ray Kennedy Entertainment. Thanks to the creative team at Big Dawg, Ray, and Carlos for keeping everything together while I pursue my passion.

Erin Hunter (Marian) is thrilled to be playing the role of Marian with this talented cast and crew. She loves working with Big Dawg any chance she gets. Ray's recounting of this special time with his mother and his family touched her deeply and she is honored to be a part of sharing this story with you. Thank you to Steve, Holli, Ray, and everyone involved. A big thank you to her husband Jarrett for being her best friend and constant support and a huge thanks to all of you for supporting live theatre.

Cindy Colucci (Aunt Sue) is thrilled to be expanding her horizons with her first appearance with Big Dawg Productions. She has been performing on Wilmington stages for over forty years, and most recently she can be seen (and heard) with the Ray Kennedy Cabaret Series at Tempo33 and Live Oaks Estate. Cindy has many wonderful memories of the folks you will see portrayed on the stage tonight, and is honored to be a part of this wonderful piece of history. She would like to thank her family at home and at Coastal Vascular Institute for all the love and support.

Elizabeth Michaels (Miss Charlotte) is a recipient for Outstanding Actor Award from Thalian Association for **Driving Miss Daisy**. She was last seen in **Steel Magnolias** and **Six Seconds** and numerous productions at the Brunswick Little Theatre. From Philadelphia she frequently



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portrayed Rosie the Riveter and Dolley Madison in her one woman shows. A member of SAG/AFTRA Elizabeth has extensive voice-over experience for training films, industrials, commercials and PSAs and is a narrator for audio books for Audible.com. Thanks to Ray, Holly and Steve for this opportunity!

Michelle Braxton Currin (Gaelynn) is a native of North Carolina. She is a graduate of Meredith College in Raleigh. She enjoys traveling, volunteering and the performing arts. Michelle has entertained audiences from New York to New Orleans and throughout the Caribbean. She currently resides in Fuquay-Varina as a newly wed with her loving husband Ronnie. You may have previously seen Michelle on stage as Miss Mona in **Best Little Whorehouse In Texas**, Aunt Eller in **Oklahoma**, Matron Moma Morton in **Chicago**, Dolly Levi in **Hello Dolly**. She sends a heartfelt thank you to her precious husband Ronnie, Ray, Marc, Curt and her entire family and fantastic friends for their support! Special love to the entire crew and cast of this show!!!

Jenny McKinnon Wright (Helen)-This isn't a big, splashy musical like Jenny has done for decades! It's great to be back in Thalian Hall working with such a spot-on script, cast, & directors who make this story hit all the emotions! Enjoy the ride!

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Matthew Thomas-Reid (Kevin) is honored to be a part of this remarkable cast telling such a bittersweet and beautiful story. He moved to Wilmington 3 years ago with his son Sebastian and amazingly supportive husband Ben. He is thrilled to take part in his first show with Big Dawg!

Fracaswell Hyman's (Dr. Morris) favorite roles include Thomas Nostradamus in ***Something Rotten***, Troy Maxson in ***Fences***. Recently Fracaswell has appeared in ***Man Of La Mancha*** as Don Quixote, and ***Death Of A Salesman*** as Willy Lowman (2024 Wilmington Theater Award, Best Actor.) Onstage or behind the scenes, theatre is #myhappyplace. Contact: [www.fracaswellhyman.com](http://www.fracaswellhyman.com), or Instagram: @fracaswell

Marian Kennedy (Costume Design) has spent 36 years as a Director/ Costume and Prop designer at North Lenoir High School in La Grange, NC. From big Disney musicals to smaller ensemble shows, she loves Musical Theatre and working with the cast and creative team. She is a graduate of Mount Olive University and Campbell University (undergrad in Music) and a summa cum laude graduate of ECU with a Masters in Music. Marian loves the "thrill of the hunt" and looking for that elusive costume piece or prop. She thanks Steve and Big Dawg for producing this piece and dedicates this show to her mother, Louie Kennedy, who taught her a lot about fashion, a correct and level hem length and the importance of accessories!



Theatre for All is a 501(c)(3) non-profit company whose mission is to empower people with disabilities, nurture community connections and overturn stereotypes through the performing arts.

**TheatreForAll.org**

Holli Saperstein (Co-Director) is an actor, director and producer. She was the Director of TWO JEWS TALKING, THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK, THE EXPLORERS CLUB, THE CAKE and CRIMES OF THE HEART, which earned her Best Director. Her production company, Panache Productions, has won awards for their outstanding productions including FUN HOME and LIZZIE. She has been seen on stage in various roles for Opera House, Thalian Association and Big Dawg. Holli can also be seen in film and television roles. Holli is additionally the Executive Director of the Wilmington Railroad Museum.

Steve Vernon (Co-Director) is the Artistic Director of Big Dawg Productions. He has dabbled in theatre for a long time. Special thanks to Ray, Holli and the cast and crew!

Special Thanks to Panache Theatrical Productions, Patricia Walsh, Rhonda Bellamy and The Arts Council of Wilmington, Gina Gambony, and YOU, the Audience!

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Big Dawg Productions extends its sincere thanks to all those who donated to us in the last year. Every dollar supports local theatre, local actors and crews, and allows us to continue bringing unique and thought provoking (or at least funny) theatre to the stage and expand our community impact with new programs.

### **GRANT SPONSORS**

The Arts Council of Wilmington/NHC, The Landfall Foundation, The Wilson Center at Cape Fear Community College

### **EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS**

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### **PRODUCERS**

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### **DIRECTOR'S CIRCLE**

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## **History of Big Dawg Productions**

Founded in 1995, Big Dawg Productions initially performed in rented spaces like Thalian Hall's Studio Theater, the company established its first permanent home in 2008 at the historic Cape Fear Playhouse on Castle Street, opening in 2009 with *A Thousand Clowns*. Following the pandemic, the company returned to Thalian Hall's Studio Theatre, where the company reopened with the acclaimed *The Lifespan of a Fact*, delighting sold-out audiences with one of the first live post-pandemic productions in the area.

## **Big Dawg's Mission**

To produce entertaining, thought provoking, and socially responsible theater, with an emphasis on involving youth and the community in the performing arts.

## **Board Of Directors**

Zach Peschl - President

Randy Davis - Vice President

Chad Hsu - Treasurer

Terri Hsu - Secertary

Jennifer Cox, La'Tuan Danns, Jeff Loy, Holli Saperstein, Benjamin Thomas-Reid

Steve Vernon - Artistic Director

## **AND**

Our small, but dedicated group, of community advisors and volunteers who work in the community to support the company in fundraising, and outreach.

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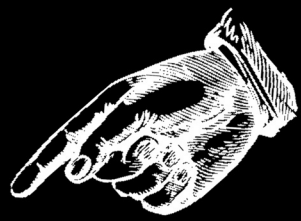
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