



A RIDE THROUGH THE COUNTRY

A NEW PLAY BY *RAY KENNEDY*

ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS

GOERGE KELLER, CYNDI & RON McNEIL & ROBERT LAYTOUN

DIRECTED BY

STEVE VERNON

STARRING

GREG KING DEBRA GILLINGHAM ERIN HUNTER CINDY COLUCCI

JENNY WRIGHT MICHELLE BRAXTON ELIZABETH MICHAELS

FRACASWELL HYMAN MATTHEW THOMAS REID



APRIL 16-19, 2026

THUR-SAT 7:30 PM / SUN 3 PM

BIGDAWGPRODUCTIONS.ORG

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 – Jeff Loy
Costume Design – Marian Kennedy
Set Design – Terry Collins
Set Construction – Tim Tyson, Randy Davis
Sound Design – Steve Vernon
Stage Manager – Penelope Grover
Board Operator – Ronnie Funderburke

Cast:

Debra Gillingham.....Louie
Greg King.....Ray
Fracaswell Hyman.....Dr. Morris
Erin Hunter.....Marion
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**, debuted 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.

1995

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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 FULL MONTY, Joseph in JOSEPH AND THE TECHNICOLOR DREAMCOAT, Philippe in 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 Tempo.33 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 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 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 WHORE HOUSE 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!

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, 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!

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!

A special thanks to the donors that made this production possible:

Gold Star Producers (\$1500 +)

George Keller, Cyndi & Ron McNeil, Robert Zaytoun

Silver Star Producers (\$1000-\$1499)

Hugh MacRae III, Mary Boney Denison & John Clark, Karen Pennington

Benefactor (\$400-\$999)

Peggy Baddour, Mary Baggett, Charlotte Davis, Richard Trubia

Big Dawg's Mission

To produce entertaining, thought provoking, and socially responsible theatre, with and emphasis on involoving youth and the community in the performing arts.

Board Of Directors

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Jennifer Cox, Jeff Loy, Benjamin ThomasReid
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.

Get Involved

If you are interested in becoming a board member or volunteering with Big Dawg Productions send a message to BigDawgPro@gmail.com



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

A Big Thank You To Our Amazing Donors & Sponsors!

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

Dr. LucyBeth Nieves, Arriba & Topher Davis, R E Frerichs MD & Tony Harrelson, Cynthia McNeil, Ned & Arleen Rhodes

Producers

Charles Calhoun, Mary Boney Denison & John Clark, Dan Levine, Hugh MacRae III, Robert Zayton

Director's Circle

Maureen & Paul Baron, Mark Basquill, Beth Bell, David & Laura Kay Berry, Griffin & Rowan Davis, Charlotte Davis, Paula Davis, Dawg Lovers a group of dedicated followers, Mary Anne Deaton, Lorraine O. Hiester, Michael Lauricella & Andy McVey, L&L Rentals, Lee Lowrimore & Dorothy Rankin, Nancy Nail, Steve Rassin, Richard Trubia, Shirley Valentine, Katherine Vernon, Blanche Williamson, Charles & Michaele Wezwick, David Zuckerman

Benefactors

Peggy Baddour, Juli Rehder & Mary Baggett, Aaron Carlson, Louise & Steve Coggins, Wanda & Ron Copley, Meg Davenport, Karen Day, Amy and Mark Deloach, Emmett & Hubert Haywood, Jon Fycyk & Zach Peschl, Sonda Jaffe, Elle Lafleur, Ann Longley, Tracy Pope & John Michael Mielcarski, Dr. Jeff Turner, Chuck Whitlock

Patrons

Victor Alocci, Deborah Bowen, Nicole Horton, Marion Kennedy, Christina Miller, Russell and Susan Morgan, Caroline Neal, Maria Louise Winslow

Friends

Josh Bailey, Maggie Miller, Adrian Monte, Suzanne Nystrom, Susan Sanzari, Laura Smith, Cathy & J.J. Street, Melissa Watson, Nancy Wheeler

Our 2026 Season

May 14-17, 21-24

Men On Boats

by Jaclyn Backhaus

A wildly inventive, razorsharp comedy that reimagines the 1869 expedition of John Wesley Powell and his crew as they chart the uncharted canyons of the American West. Ten explorers. Four boats. One Grand Canyon—and no men. In this daring, hilarious retelling, an ensemble of women and female-presenting performers take on the roles of rugged adventurers, flipping the script on history and exploring who gets to tell the story of discovery. Filled with humor, heart, and breathtaking theatricality, *Men on Boats* is a thrilling journey through uncharted territory—past and present.

“[MEN ON BOATS] is marvelously destabilizing both as history and theater. The stalwartness and selfishness of the adventurers—their cockiness and cluelessness—become biting satire when sent up by women.”

—New York Magazine.

July 9-12, 16-19

The Shark is Broken

by Ian Shaw and Joseph Nixon

The first summer blockbuster movie is being filmed, but no one working on the movie would know it. Dive deep into the tumultuous, murky waters of the making of a major motion picture with testy, feuding costars, unpredictable weather, and a shark prop whose constant breakdowns are looking like an omen for the future of the movie. In this comedy cowritten by Ian Shaw and Joseph Nixon, the short tempers of *Jaws* stars Robert Shaw (father of cowriter Ian), Richard Dreyfuss, and Roy Scheider take center stage as they bond, argue, drink, gamble, and pray for an end to the shoot, not knowing it will change their lives forever.

“THE SHARK IS BROKEN wittily excels not just as a clever time capsule, but as an examination of male bonding and competitiveness, ego, frailty, fame, and filmmaking.”

—The Daily Beast.

August 13-16, 20-23

The Explorers Club

by Nell Benjamin

London, 1879. The prestigious Explorers Club is in crisis: their acting president wants to admit a woman, and their bartender is terrible. True, this female candidate is brilliant, beautiful, and has discovered a legendary Lost City, but the decision to let in a woman could shake the very foundation of the British Empire, and how do you make such a decision without a decent drink?

Grab your safety goggles for some very mad science involving deadly cobras, irate Irishmen and the occasional airship.

“You don’t have to be British to lose your composure and howl with laughter at THE EXPLORERS CLUB, a witty spoof of all those bold Victorian adventurers who ravaged foreign lands and annihilated indigenous cultures in the name of science.”

—**Variety.**

October 15-18, 22-25

Chemical Imbalance: A Jekyll and Hyde Play

by Lauren Wilson

A fast-paced, wickedly funny reimaging of Robert Louis Stevenson’s classic tale. In this contemporary adaptation, Dr. Henry Jekyll is a brilliant but socially awkward psychiatrist who experiments with a revolutionary drug designed to “cure” the darker impulses of his most troubled patient—himself. When the volatile and uninhibited Edward Hyde emerges, chaos erupts in a blur of mistaken identities, outrageous encounters, and razor-sharp comedy. Blending gothic suspense with laugh-out-loud farce, *Chemical Imbalance* explores the duality within us all—proving that sometimes the scariest monster is the one we’ve tried hardest to suppress.

“An evening of exhilarating entertainment... An inventive, original comedy of horrors.”

– **San Francisco Examiner**

December 10-13, 17-20
Jacob Marley's Christmas Carol

By Tom Mula

“Marley was dead, to begin with...” —and what happens to Ebenezer Scrooge’s mean, sour, pruney old business partner after that? Chained and shackled, Marley is condemned to a hellish eternity. He’s even given his own private tormentor: a malicious little hell-sprite who thoroughly enjoys his work. Desperate, Marley accepts his one chance to free himself: To escape his own chains, he must first redeem Scrooge. So begins a journey of laughter and terror, redemption and renewal, during which Scrooge’s heart, indeed, is opened; but not before Marley—in this irreverent, funny and deeply moving story—discovers his own.

“Of all the holiday shows dotting the theatrical landscape, none shines brighter than Jacob Marley’s Christmas Carol.”

– **The Life**

“Delectably zany... inspired theatre... gives the audience cause to ache, and to lugh, and in the end, to exalt.”

– **City Beat**

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A NEW PLAY BY RAY KENNEDY



MEN ON BOATS

BY JACLYN BACKHAUS



"A WILD RIDE WORTH TAKING!"
ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY



THE SHARK IS BROKEN

BY IAN SHAW AND JOSEPH NIXON



The Explorers Club

By Nell Benjamin



CHEMICAL IMBALANCE

A JEKYLL & HYDE PLAY
by Lauren Willson

TWICE
THE
PERSONALITY.

TWICE
THE
LAUGHS.

A MADCAP COMEDY OF MONSTROUS PROPORTIONS



Jacob Marley's Christmas Carol

By Tom Mula



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