

# THE CLASSIC *King*

A WORLD PREMIERE BY  
**RICHARD JOHNSON**  
DIRECTED BY  
**JEFF DANIELS**



the  
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theatre company

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Generally speaking, before something can be something, it starts as nothing. That's the challenge of creating a new play. That blank first page, staring back at you with not a word on it. Or, in the case of *The Classic King*, staring back at Richard Johnson.

Rick had written what he hoped was a play about Lee Iacocca. It wasn't. After setting his epic down, I asked him the question I ask all playwrights, "What do you know?"

"About what?"

"About anything."

"I've been writing about the automotive industry for thirty five years."

"So you know cars."

"I know cars."

Turns out he not only knows cars, he's fluent in the language spoken by those who make their living selling them. Without the benefit of GPS, Rand McNally or A.I., I watched Rick get under the hood and lose himself in his brand new fictional world. Scenes, characters, and dialogue poured out of him, all heading toward a story he didn't know he had in him. Like an Indy 500 driver who'd just finished a spin around the oval, after one of our story meetings, he turned to me and said, "This is fun."

I cannot tell you what a joy it's been to watch Rick write a story only he could tell. Shaping, refining, and discovering until, in the end, he pulled into that place every playwright hopes to find, that feeling of accomplishment that comes when you realize you've just created something from nothing.

Welcome to Starlight Classic Cars.



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presents

# THE CLASSIC *King*

*by Richard Johnson*

Set Design      Costume Design  
**BART BAUER**      **SHELBY NEWPORT**

Lighting Design      Properties Design  
**STEPHEN SAKOWSKI^**      **DANNA SEGREST**

Fight Director      Sound Design  
**CHRISTINA TRAISTER**      **BRAD PHILLIPS**

Stage Manager      Assistant Stage Manager  
**STEFANIE DIN\***      **MARY TOTH\***

Director  
**JEFF DANIELS**



\*Appearing through an agreement with Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.



United Scenic Artists, Local USA 829, IATSE is the union representing Scenic, Costume, Lighting, Sound and Projection Designers in Live Performance.

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## PLEASE NOTE

**There will be no intermission during the performance.**

This performance of *The Classic King* includes mature content.

Please keep the aisles clear for the actors' entrances and exits.

The making of photographs and/or recordings inside the theatre is strictly prohibited.

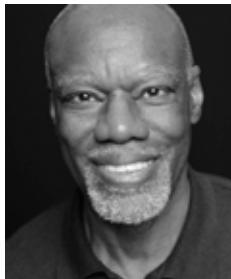
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# CAST OF CHARACTERS



**RYAN CARLSON\***  
Jerry



**RICO BRUCE WADE\***  
Mike



**DEZ WALKER\***  
Chance



**OWEN SQUIRE SMITH\***  
Braden

**Understudies:** Joe Kathrein (Jerry), Wallace Bridges\* (Mike),  
Jonathan West\* (Chance), Connor Allston\* (Braden)

**PLACE:** A used car dealership in Southeastern Michigan

**TIME:** Present

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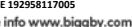
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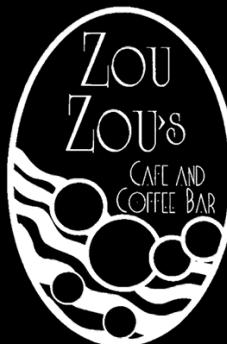
RYAN CARLSON (Jerry) is a Resident Artist with The Purple Rose Theatre Co. Offstage, he enjoys Lionel Model Trains and chilled, whole bean, fair trade French press coffee. At the end of a hard work week, Ryan has been known to open a bottle of low intervention, natural, unfiltered, skin contact wine while listening to John Prine on vinyl. He has recently found interest in home pickling and fermenting. Although he is in the early stages of perfecting these techniques, he looks forward to the journey. Ryan would like to thank you for supporting live union-strong shows. His full body of work can be found at [purplerosetheatre.org/ryancarlson](http://purplerosetheatre.org/ryancarlson) or [theryancarlson.com](http://theryancarlson.com)

OWEN SQUIRE SMITH (Braden) makes his Purple Rose debut! Originally from Grand Rapids, MI, Owen received his MFA in Acting from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, as well as his BFA in Acting for the Stage & Screen at Azusa Pacific University in California. He has performed at The Encore Musical Theatre Company, The Barn Theatre, and The Clarence Brown Theatre. He would like to thank Jeff & Richard for this wonderful opportunity, Tom Kilmer & Heath Phillips for research, the PRTC production team, cast & crew, former teachers, his family, Mom, Dad, Grandma, Lo Lo, and especially, Jesus Christ! [@owensquiresmith](http://@owensquiresmith)

RICO BRUCE WADE (Mike) makes his Purple Rose debut with *The Classic King*. He is an associate artist with the Flint Repertory Theatre, where he's appeared in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, *Death of a Salesman*, *The Boatman*, and *Into the Woods*. A Second City–Detroit alum, Rico helped create more than a dozen original comedy revues. Most recently, he wrote and directed the Learning Through Art production, *Sounds From The River* at Cincinnati's Aronoff Center for the Arts. Learn more at [ricoshow.com](http://ricoshow.com). Thanks to Jeff, Rick, this brilliant cast, and all the connections at PRTC for their support and their continued artistic commitment. Special gratitude to my north star, The Lovely Marilyn.

DEZ WALKER (Chance) is extremely excited to be performing in his 3rd production at The Purple Rose, after previously being seen in *My Mother and the Michigan/Ohio War* and *In Common*. This is also Dez's 1st full production as a proud member of the Actor's Equity union! Dez is an avid sports fan and is obsessed with food (@dining\_with\_dez). Professionally, he has worked in automotive and performed in numerous automotive themed commercials for the better part of a decade. All in preparation for this role. Or it's just a fun coincidence. Please enjoy our work! Huge thanks to all the family and friends for their support, and to the entire PRTC staff/crew for their trust in me. Cheers!

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## PLAYWRIGHT

RICHARD JOHNSON (Playwright) is the retired print editor of Crain Communications' Automotive News, the leading newspaper of the global automobile industry. He previously was the publication's European Editor based in Frankfurt, Germany and Asia Editor based in Tokyo, Japan. He later launched Crain's Automotive News Europe in London, where he was editor for eight years. Following retirement he worked on a play about the history of the Ford Motor Company after World War II and joined the Birmingham Village Players' playwrights@work group. *The Classic King* is his first play for the Purple Rose. He and his wife Alice raised four daughters around the world. Rick and Alice live in Farmington Hills.



## DIRECTING TEAM

JEFF DANIELS (Director) As a Director, Jeff helmed Lanford Wilson's *Hot L Baltimore* (1997) as well as three of his own plays: *Boom Town* (1998), the remount of *Diva Royale* (2023), and *Office Christmas Party, Grinch In Fight With Rudolph, Police Called* (2024). On film, he wrote, directed, and starred in two independent Michigan features: *Escanaba in da Moonlight* (2001) and *Super Sucker* (2002). For the past twenty five years, Jeff has written, performed and directed his one man show, *Onstage & Unplugged*, playing annually at the Purple Rose over the Christmas holidays. He has toured the country performing at various clubs, opera houses and performing arts centers. In the Spring of 2026, JD's Stage Bistro will open in downtown Chelsea.

LUCAS DANIELS (Assistant Director) is absolutely honored to be assistant directing for this world premiere of *The Classic King* by Richard Johnson at The Purple Rose Theatre Company. Also, to be Assistant Directing alongside his Dad, Jeff Daniels is absolutely amazing! Learning what he knows and observing these talented artists each day. Lucas loves being a part of the rehearsal process! Since starting here in September 2021, this is Lucas's fourth time assistant directing. Other credits include *Pickleball* by Jeff Daniels, *Diva Royale* by Jeff Daniels (2023 revival) and *Office Christmas Party, Grinch in Fight with Rudolph, Police Called* by Jeff Daniels. Lucas couldn't do this job without the love and support of his girls, Shannon, Daphne, and Delaney. Love you so much.

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## DESIGNERS

BART BAUER (Scenic Design) was given the great honor 35 years ago of working with Jeff Daniels to create a new theatre venue for Michigan playwrights and actors. This is his 40th scenic design for The Purple Rose Theatre Company. Design awards include *Sherlock Holmes* series, *Annapurna*, *Thy Kingdom's Coming*, *Stanton's Garage*, *Blithe Spirit*, and *Guest Artist*. He also spent the last thirty-plus years working as a designer for many different theatre groups, most notably Williamston Theatre, Tipping Point Theatre, Michigan State University, Wharton Center, Lansing Community College, civic theatres, community organizations, area high schools, and is a faculty member at Interlochen National Music Camp.

STEPHEN SAKOWSKI (Lighting Design) is excited to return to the Purple Rose after recently having collaborated on *Office Christmas Party*..., *Diva Royale*, and *In Common*, and is a proud Resident Designer here at The Purple Rose. Stephen is a freelance lighting designer for stage, film and television. His work is regularly seen on TV, where he is the lighting director for the NBA's special events and live entertainment. Theatrically, he received the 2020 Joseph Jefferson Award for Best Lighting Design for the world premiere of *All Quiet on the Western Front* in Chicago. Stephen is a Professor of Theatre and Chair of the Department of Theatre & Film at the University of Toledo and is also a proud member of USA-829.

SHELBY NEWPORT (Costume Design) is a professor of theatre and chair at the University of Michigan-Flint. She received her M.F.A. from Purdue University and completed her undergraduate studies at Cornell College. She designs regionally at Tipping Point Theatre, Detroit Public Theatre, Flint Repertory Theatre, and is a Resident Designer at Purple Rose Theatre. Her designs have been seen internationally in London and Margate, England. Shelby is thrilled to be designing costumes for this new play, it is her fifteenth production at PRTC, previously she designed costumes for *Bert & Trixie Visit the Vet*, *Office Christmas Party*..., *In Common*, *Pickleball*, *Roadsigns*, *Diva Royale* (2018 & 2023), *Flint*, *God of Carnage*, *Smart Love*, *Morning After Grace*, *Superior Donuts*, *Stone Carver*. More at [www.shelbynewport.com](http://www.shelbynewport.com).

BRAD PHILLIPS (Sound Design) is a professional musician best known to Purple Rose audiences for his many appearances with Jeff Daniels' *Onstage & Unplugged*. A violinist, fiddler, mandolinist, guitarist, and vocalist, he is a Resident Designer at PRTC, contributing music and sound design to productions, including *The Last Romance*, *Flint*, and the *Sherlock Holmes* trilogy. He also co-composed, co-musical-directed, and performed in *Willow Run*. Brad has performed with Stevie Wonder, Aretha Franklin, Iggy Pop, Pat Metheny, The Verve Pipe, and currently tours with Patti LuPone's *A Life in Notes*. A University of Michigan graduate and faculty member, he proudly calls The Purple Rose his creative home and thanks his parents, children, and fiancée Hope—here's to 40 million! #starstuff

## DESIGNERS (cont.)

DANNA SEGREST (Properties Design) is very happy to be working on this world premiere play by Richard Johnson. As a trade show contractor, Danna's dad was part of starting Autorama in Detroit, so her car roots run deep. It is wonderful to be collaborating with Jeff and Bart again on this production. Danna has enjoyed being part of the Purple Rose Theatre Company since volunteering at our first auditions. She became an Equity Stage Manager for *Shoe Man* by Jeff Daniels and has stage managed many Purple Rose shows. Danna became the Resource Manager in 1994 and took the title of Resident Properties Designer in 2001. Danna continues to wear many other hats as well, including Resident Designer, Archival Photographer and Box Office Assistant. Danna is so happy to continue serving her theatre home as Resident Properties Designer. Thanks to Wade and Reeve for always being on my team!

## STAGE MANAGEMENT

STEFANIE DIN (Stage Manager) is thrilled to be working on another world premiere! Stefanie is also a Resident Stage Manager at the Williamston Theatre, an Artistic Associate with The Michigan Shakespeare Festival, and was the Tech Director/Tour Coordinator for their high school tours of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Macbeth*. She was also part of Central Michigan University's Theatre Department, and The Purple Rose's Apprentice Program. Stefanie thanks Katie, Jeff and Rhiannon for bringing her back and Syd and Mary for everything they do. Special thanks to Tony for always being an outstanding friend and mentor, her extraordinary family and friends for their love and support, and Brian and Keeley for being her inspiration every day. Love hard. Be kind. Always.

MARY TOTH (Assistant Stage Manager) (she/they) is a Michigan-based stage manager who is joining the Purple Rose for her second season! She was previously the PSM for *Norma & Wanda* and *Fourteen Funerals*, ASM for *Bert & Trixie Visit the Vet*, and a Production ASM for *Office Christmas Party*, *Grinch in Fight with Rudolph*, *Police Called*. Some of Mary's other favorite stage managerial credits include: *Six Men Dressed Like Joseph Stalin* (staged reading) and *The Greenshows* at Utah Shakespeare Festival; and *Kinky Boots*, *A Little Night Music*, and *La Traviata* at Quisisana. After spending most of her childhood in Brighton, Mary is honored to return to Southeast Michigan to work with the Purple Rose Theatre Company this season.

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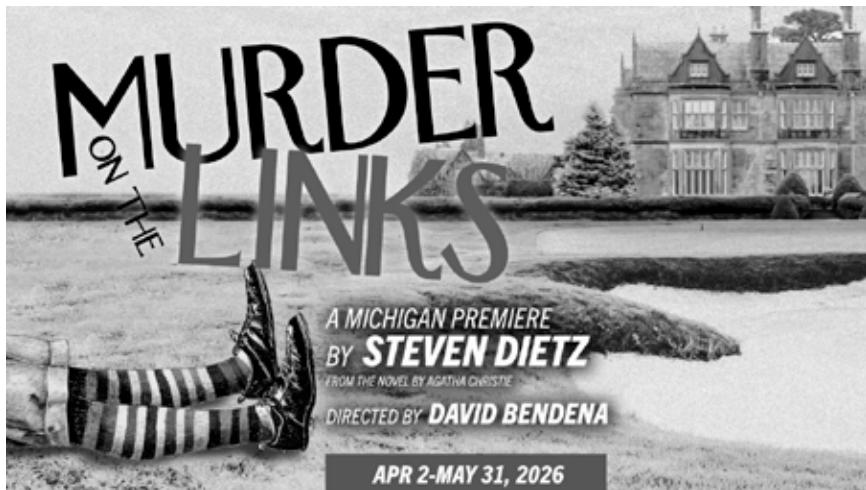
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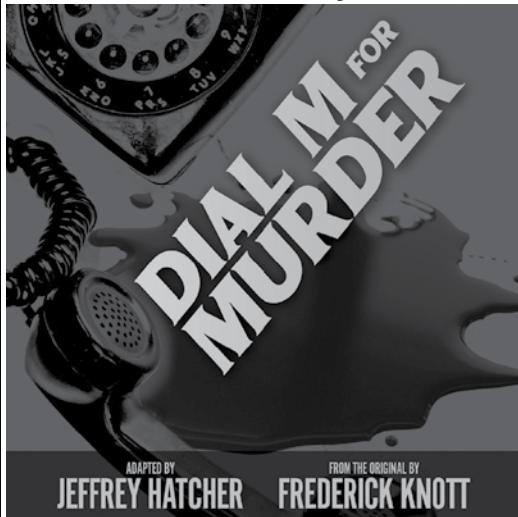
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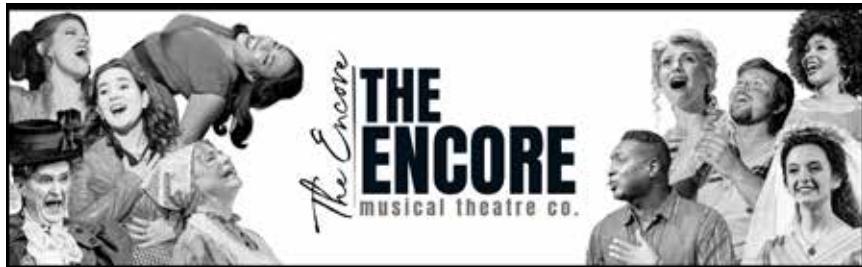
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# THE CLASSIC *King*

by Richard Johnson

At this performance, the role of  
*Jerry*  
will be played by Joe Kathrein.



Joe Kathrein is a dad, husband and Michigan State grad happy to be back in his hometown raising his son, John, and dog, Clyde. Regional theatre includes *Long Days Journey Into Night* (u/s for Jamie) at The Geffen Playhouse. TV: *Sheriff Country*, *Fire Country*, *Chicago PD*, *Locke & Key*, *Grimm*, *Low Winter Sun* and *Mayor of Kingstown*, among others. Film credits include *Dial a Prayer*, the upcoming horror film, *Delirium*, and Hallmark's *Fly Away With Me*. He trained at the William Esper Studio in NYC. Socials: @josephkathrein

# THE CLASSIC *King*

by Richard Johnson

At this performance, the role of  
*Mike*  
will be played by Wallace Bridges\*.



WALLACE BRIDGES originated roles in two world-premiere plays at the Purple Rose Theatre. He played Lenny in *Duck Hunter Shoots Angel* (2004) and Johnny in *A Jukebox for the Algonquin* (2023). Wallace has been teaching theatre arts and directing plays at Eastern Michigan University for more than three decades and is a Fulbright U. S. Scholar, having taught theatre courses at the University of Ghana. He also directed *A Raisin in the Sun* (2016) there and at the National Theatre of Ghana. Wallace holds memberships with the Actors' Equity Association and the Screen Actors Guild - American Federation of Television and Radio Artists. He last appeared in a feature film as Rudy in *No Sudden Move* (2021), sharing the screen with Don Cheadle.

\*Member, Actors' Equity Association

# THE CLASSIC *King*

by Richard Johnson

At this performance, the role of  
*Chance*  
will be played by Jonathan West\*.



JONATHAN WEST (he/him) was last up as George in Robert Hawlmark's *A Very Northville Christmas*, directed by Dave Davies, at the Tipping Point Theatre. Recent work includes performing as Bert in Matt Letscher's *Bert & Trixie Visit the Vet*, directed by Rhiannon Ragland at the Purple Rose, and as Prospero in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, directed by Sam White at Campus Martius. Last on film for Mark Broe's *Ana Sees Her Dad*, he won Best Actor at the 2025 Made-In-Michigan Film Series and has appeared opposite Jack Kesy in Geert Heetebrij's *The Manifestation*. Jonathan has also recorded voice work for the *Film Reroll* podcast, the *Chilling Tales for Dark Nights* podcast, and various video games and commercials at Ozone Music & Sound.

\*Member, Actors' Equity Association

# THE CLASSIC *King*

by Richard Johnson

At this performance, the role of  
*Braden*  
will be played by Connor Allston\*.



CONNOR ALLSTON is excited to be taking the Purple Rose stage once again! He was last seen here as the Generic Man in Jeff's *Diva Royale*, and is thrilled to be working with him once more on *The Classic King*. His other recent credits include M in Duncan MacMillan's *Lungs* and Richard Dreyfuss in *The Shark Is Broken* at Tipping Point Theatre. Connor has been around the country in the Broadway national tours of the musicals *Tootsie* and *Kinky Boots* but calls Michigan his home. He would like to thank Jeff, Richard, the cast, and the PRTC staff and creatives for this opportunity and his wife Marissa for the never-ending support. IG: @connor\_allston

\*Member, Actors' Equity Association

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