

JANUARY 2026



FROM THE WINGS

PHASE ONE OF RBTL'S PROJECT RESTOURATION COMPLETED

Earlier this month, Phase One of PROJECT RESTOURATION, which focused on enhanced accessibility, adaptability and amenities, reached completion, paving the way for Phase Two. This came with the reopening of both East Main Street entrances into the West Herr Performing Arts Center and Auditorium Theatre and the parking lot located east of the building.

Work began in the summer of 2025 with the replacement of steps, railings and retaining walls and widening of sidewalks (see photos on page 5), resulting in a safer environment as patrons arrive and depart the venue. The steps leading up to the West Herr Auditorium Theatre entrance reopened in the fall, following the grand opening of the reimagined west entrance. The January 13-18 engagement of "Spamalot," marked the first time in more than a year that all three primary entrances into the building were usable.

The work to the front façade of the Performing Arts Center and Auditorium Theatre is the latest in a series of renovations. Phase One, which began in 2023, also included refurbishing two elevators and creating a crossover point for access to the second-floor Theatre lobby, which now features a new lounge/concession space and additional restroom facilities. On the ground floor, historic brass doors (which had darkened over time due to oxidation), have been restored, along with a new lounge/entertainment space and west entrance with drop-off area.

Plans are currently underway for Phase Two, which will include expanding the main floor Rothschild Lounge to the room's original size and once again featuring its grand stone fireplace, reconfiguring backstage dressing areas for cast and crew and preparing smaller-scale performance spaces for use. Future work will also focus on the stunning and historic Cathedral Hall, a former lodge room from the building's time as a Masonic Temple, to accommodate a variety of performance and entertainment opportunities. This will further RBTL's goal of creating a renowned entertainment hub for the region and establishing Rochester as a true arts and cultural destination.

To date, almost \$20 million has been committed to PROJECT RESTOURATION, with the total transformation cost estimated to be \$65 million. Moving forward, community involvement is critical for progress and realizing the vision of a beautifully restored cultural landmark. Upon completion, the complex will shine as the anchor of the Neighborhood of the Arts for future generations. Those interested in helping to support this innovative effort, can make a tax-deductible donation at WestHerrPAC.org.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

WICKED

February 18 - March 1

JO KOY: JUST BEING KOY TOUR

March 7

112

March 14

BAT OUT OF HELL THE MUSICAL

March 21

BRIT FLOYD

March 22



WEST HERR
PERFORMING ARTS CENTER
875 EAST MAIN STREET
ROCHESTER, NY 14605
RBTL.ORG



@RBTLAUD

WICKED: FROM PAGE TO STAGE

The last time “*Wicked*” defied gravity on the Auditorium Theatre stage was in 2017 and now it's set to fly back to Rochester for a two-week engagement February 18-March 1. “*Wicked*,” is based on the 1995 novel “*Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West*” by Gregory Maguire. According to “*Wicked*” composer and lyricist, Stephen Schwartz, it was only a few years after the novel's debut that development for the Broadway production began. Members of the creative team broke down the process of bringing the “untold story of the witches of Oz” from page to stage.

Q: What inspired you to write “*Wicked*”?

A: Gregory Maguire (Author, “*Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West*”) – I was living in London in the early 1990's during the start of the Gulf War. I was interested to see how my own blood temperature chilled at reading a headline in the usually cautious British newspaper, the Times of London: Sadaam Hussein: The New Hitler? I caught myself ready to have a fully-formed political opinion about the Gulf War and the necessity of action against Sadaam Hussein on the basis of how that headline made me feel. The use of the word Hitler - what a word! What it evokes! When a few months later several young schoolboys kidnapped and killed a toddler, the British press paid much attention to the nature of the crime. I became interested in the nature of evil, and whether one really could be born bad. I considered briefly writing a novel about Hitler but discarded the notion due to my general discomfort with the reality of those times. But when I realized that nobody had ever written about the second most evil character in our collective American subconscious, the Wicked Witch of the West, I thought I had experienced a small moment of inspiration. Everybody in America knows who the Wicked Witch of the West is, but nobody really knows anything about her. There is more to her than meets the eye.

Q: What attracted you to the project?

A: Stephen Schwartz (Music & Lyrics) – First, I'm often attracted to an idea that takes a familiar story and spins it, looking at it from another direction. Second, the idea of taking what is one of the iconic villains of American culture, the Wicked Witch of the West – so much “the villain” that we don't even know her name – and looking at the story from her point of view, that seemed to me a brilliant concept. It was clear a show about her could explore some of my favorite themes: the difference between surface appearances and what's really going on underneath, how life is more complex and has more ambiguity than we tend to be comfortable with and, certainly, than our public discourse admits to.



Jessie Davidson as Elphaba in the National Tour of WICKED. Photo by Joan Marcus



Zoe Jensen as Glinda and the National Touring Company of WICKED. Photo by Joan Marcus

Thirdly, the character and her world were obviously inherently musical. Oz is a fantastical, larger-than-life setting full of characters who almost demand to sing, and the witch herself is so full of big emotions – rage and ambition and longing – I just thought the idea was screaming to be a musical.

A: Winnie Holzman (Book) – It's the whole idea that things are not as they seem. What you think you know, you don't really know. It is the premise of the novel that you know certain things, but you don't know the deeper story.

Years before Stephen asked me to do it, I had bought the book and immediately called my agent and asked them to look into the rights. I had only read the back of the book, and I was so intrigued by what the book was about – taking this extreme figure of iconic wickedness and making her the heroine. I just love that she behaves in a human wicked way, and not in a wicked witch way.

(continued on page 3)

(continued from page 2)

Q: How long did it take you to bring "Wicked" to life?

A: Schwartz – We actually were working on the show about four years, which is pretty fast for a big Broadway musical... Once I had heard about ["Wicked"], it took awhile to secure the rights, because Universal had them – actually Demi Moore's production company had them. I had to follow a trail through her production company to Universal to [producer] Marc Platt (who was in charge of the studio at that time). And then persuade him to consider doing it as a stage musical as opposed to a film.



Jessie Davidson as Elphaba and Zoe Jensen as Glinda in the National Tour of WICKED. Photo by Joan Marcus

We spent about a year at least working on an outline. We went through several drafts of the outline, until we really felt we had the story telling right. It's a very complicated story to work out; there's a lot of plot, there are a lot of relationships between the characters that either had to be used or dropped, there are a lot of surprises and twists and turns to the plot that needed to be figured out so everything worked logically. It was almost like plotting a mystery novel. I remember reading an interview with J.K. Rowling who of course wrote the "Harry Potter" books and how she had spent a year working out the world – for example, the rules of Quidditch – before she wrote anything. We did a similar amount of work.

Q: What are some of the similarities between the stage version of "Wicked" and the novel?

A: Maguire – Books are all about secrets. You don't read a book if you can tell by the flap copy what's going to happen at the end. And in a way the stage is like that too. The stage is all about what evolves in terms of plot and what evolves in terms of character so I'm not going to give any secrets away. I WILL say that a great deal of what I think of as the dark serious part of the book has been retained. It has been touched with another kind of magic so that it passes unto the eyes in a different way.

Q: What was the approach for designing "Wicked's" costumes?

A: Susan Hilferty (Costume Designer) – I knew I was inventing a world, a parallel universe you'd recognize but at the same time was completely

distorted. I looked at the original illustrations for the 'Wizard of Oz' books – which is where the Edwardian influence comes from – but with a contemporary eye. The silhouette is twisted, asymmetrical. The idea was to distort the human figure, but in a high-fashion kind of way. The way the animals looked is also invented: the monkey-skins, faces, tails, the goats. The 1939 movie didn't help: that was a '20s world, and nothing made sense to this story.

Q: What aspects of the show did you keep in mind while bringing the costumes to life?

A: Hilferty – My goal was to create a third world, a world that we considered to be a parallel universe. It's a world where animals can talk, so we know it's not our world. It's a world that deals with a kind of inventiveness, things that we might call magic. The boundaries of the world are different than anything we know or are familiar with, but at the same time, the issues for the people of this world of Oz are in many cases the same kind of issues we deal with. So, I knew it had to be something that was of the imagination but in some ways had to thread back to things that we knew.

Limited seats are still available to see "Wicked" at the West Herr Auditorium Theatre. Tickets for Rochester's most "popular" musical can be purchased at Ticketmaster.com or the Auditorium Box Office.

RBTL TO COLLABORATE WITH WRITERS & BOOKS FOR YOUTH EDUCATION CAMP

RBTL and Writers & Books are teaming up for a collaborative February Break Camp experience unlike any other! "Books & Broadway: Wicked" will engage in a variety of creative reading, writing and art-based activities centered around the Broadway sensation, "Wicked." It will focus on themes of acceptance, connection and independence and will be led by education and literary staff from Writers & Books and RBTL. Plus, there will be some surprises and interactions with the touring Broadway show throughout the week!

Campers will also have the opportunity to purchase discounted tickets for themselves, as well as family members, for the Thursday, February 19 matinee performance of "Wicked."

The week is "unlimited" with possibilities!

The Details:

- When: February 16-20
 - Drop-off: 8:45 a.m.-9:00 a.m.
 - Pick-up: 3:00 p.m.-3:15 p.m.*
 - *Thursday pick-up: 1:30 p.m. if NOT staying for performance / 5:00 p.m. if staying for performance
- Where: West Herr Auditorium Theatre & Performing Arts Center
- Who: Open to students ages 9-12
- Cost: \$350 for members* / \$400 for non-members (plus optional reduced ticket)
 - *Members = Writers & Books members or RBTL Broadway Subscribers



[REGISTER HERE](#)

For more information, contact RBTL Director of Education, Holly Valentine, at holly@rbtl.org or 585-277-3338.

Tell us your thoughts!

As we continue to grow our Community and Educational programming, we want to hear what you are interested in. Simply click [this link](#) for a chance to weigh in and to give us some ideas!

THE BROADWAY LEAGUE WANTS TO HEAR FROM YOU!



Periodically, The Broadway League, the national trade association for the Broadway industry, creates a survey for patrons, to learn about the impact of touring Broadway productions on cities like Rochester. The results help the League, presenters, producers and government agencies make decisions on touring and funding, and how we may serve you better.

Please consider taking a few minutes to complete the survey linked below, to help RBTL and The Broadway League learn more about our audiences! All responses are anonymous. Thank you!

[CLICK HERE TO TAKE THE SURVEY](#)

WEST HERR PERFORMING ARTS CENTER FRONT FACADE COMPLETION



♥ VALENTINE'S FEATURE: BROADWAY COUPLES WE LOVE ♥

François & May - *& Juliet*

Anastasia & Dmitry - *Anastasia*

Marius & Cosette - *Les Misérables*

Satine & Christian - *Moulin Rouge!*

Angel & Collins - *Rent*

Elphaba & Fiyero - *Wicked*