

“The biggest, most fantastic thing in theatre will be... MUSICALS.”

This mantra has been a guiding star in my life, cleverly teased into dialogue by Karey Kirkpatrick & John O’Farrell for a character in the play you’re about to witness. Being entrusted by Theatre Cedar Rapids with the directorship of this particular musical fills me with joy and a deep sense of fulfillment. It’s a validation of all those hours spent as a child, devouring cast albums from the Cedar Rapids Public Library like other kids gobble up candy, and my inner 10-year-old is ecstatic.

Returning to the Theatre Cedar Rapids stage is a dream come true and a significant milestone in my personal journey. Early visits to this theatre with my mom to watch productions like *Grease*, *Starmites*, and *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* in the early 90s ignited something inside of me that has lasted a lifetime. I made

my debut on the TCR stage in the 1993 Youtheatre touring production of *Cool Yule* (green cast), followed by a string of shows that shaped my youth: *Echoes* (1994), *Santa’s Frosty Follies* (1994), *Hello, Dolly!* (1997), *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* (1999), *Crazy for You* (2000), and *The Who’s Tommy* (2001).

My formative years at Theatre Cedar Rapids not only deepened my love for the theatre as an art form but also as a medium for community-building. The talented people I met, both peers and mentors, generously spent their time, energy, and expertise for the enrichment of the community. As a director here today, I pay homage to those who directed and guided me back then: Jim Kern, Damon Cole, Alison Shaffer, Richard Barker, Michael Harrington... among many others.

Left to Right: *Hello, Dolly!* (1997), *The Who’s Tommy* (2001), *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* (1999)



It was only when I left for college that I realized the uniqueness of what Cedar Rapids had in its long and storied history of supporting quality arts in the community. More on that later.

In 2020, I found myself at a crossroads after 16 years in New York City, working on Broadway (and thus realizing another bucket-list item). Everyday for 5+ years, I had the surreal privilege of walking into the New Amsterdam Theatre during my tenure in the administrative office of Disney Theatrical Productions. It was during this time I reconnected with Theatre Cedar Rapids, visiting rehearsals for their productions of Disney titles, sharing insights with casts and artistic teams.

However, as the pandemic shook the industry, I faced the uncertainty of a downsizing in New York. Some credit must be given to my husband, Ash, who nudged me to act on my belief that theatre's true essence thrives in communities and schools, where it impacts more lives. Theatre fosters empathy, compassion, teamwork, creativity, and a commitment to a greater purpose – qualities that are hard to quantify academically. Making theatre literally makes us better people. We chose to leave New York, affording me the opportunity to reignite my passion for directing.

Now based in Boston, I serve as the

Content and Marketing Director for the Educational Theatre Association, championing theatre education's importance in schools. I've also resumed my role as a freelance director, finding my way back home to my roots, and I am so grateful to make my living in this field.

So, while on the surface, *Something Rotten!* is a puffy piece sure to leave you grinning, for me, it embodies a deeper celebration of what Cedar Rapids has nurtured for generations: the understanding that musicals like this one unite us, strengthen our community, and make us better. Oh, and the longstanding tradition of seeing people you know bursting into spontaneous dance onstage – a tradition we Cedar Rapiidians cherish very much.

May this show serve as a tribute to anyone who has enriched the community by volunteering their time and energy to its theatre scene. I sincerely hope you enjoy the show as much as we've enjoyed bringing it to life for you.



**Matt
Hagmeier Curtis**
Director

