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Mary John Founder of Milwaukee Repertory Theater Passes away at 96

March 7, 2022 (Milwaukee, WI) - [Milwaukee Repertory Theater](#) is saddened to announce of the passing of its founder [Mary John \(1925-2022\)](#). Born in Green Bay, WI Mary forged a plan to create a professional theater for the city of Milwaukee and established Drama Inc, now Milwaukee Repertory Theater, in 1954. She was part of the growing regional theatre movement, which was led in large part by women. She knew a city needed a theater to allow the arts to thrive and impact the community and on January 25, 1955 at the opening night of the Fred Miller Theater she wrote in the program:

“Drama Inc. was established by three thousand Milwaukeeans joined together, not for the glory of any individual or for the exploitation of the public, but for the purpose of bringing a permanent professional theater to Milwaukee. We have combined energy, talent and money to create an art form, just as the painter joins the canvas, brush and color, expecting to communicate and find beauty. We hope that each performance will provide enjoyable participation for you, make lasting impressions and give your life a little more pleasure and meaning. If that happens, then the effort will have been amply rewarded, and the Fred Miller Theatre will carry a warmth worthy of its namesake.”

As managing director, **Mary John** brought A-list talent including Geraldine Page, Betty White, Ethel Waters, Eva Le Gallienne and Edward Everett Horton to Milwaukee audiences. She also founded the School of Professional Arts which operated in conjunction with the theater and provided the accredited speech and theatre program for University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. John moved to New York in 1959 and received her Ph.D. from New York University in theatre and speech and went on to produce several Broadway and Off-Broadway musicals.

“We send our deepest condolences to Mary’s family and hope her meaningful legacy gives them solace,” said Artistic Director **Mark Clements**. “It’s hard to put into words the impact she has left us. Her vision and fortitude to create a professional theater in Milwaukee has changed the scope of the city and given so many an artistic home. We carry her vision and know that if not for her and the generous support of the community we wouldn’t have the opportunity to create thought provoking and entertaining work for the past 68 years.”

For more information on Mary’s legacy which stretches from Milwaukee to New York, Dallas, Florida and beyond visit www.MilwaukeeRep.com/MaryJohn.

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About Milwaukee Repertory Theater

Milwaukee Rep is the largest performing arts organization in Wisconsin with three unique performance venues in the Patty & Jay Baker Theater Complex— the Quadracci Powerhouse, Stiemke Studio and Stackner Cabaret.

For over six decades, Milwaukee Rep has been a centerpiece of Milwaukee's vibrant arts and cultural scene with productions ranging from Broadway musicals to Shakespeare to American Classics and New Works that are entertaining, inclusive and impactful. Under the leadership of **Artistic Director Mark Clements** and **Executive Director Chad Bauman**, Milwaukee Repertory Theater ignites positive change in the cultural, social, and economic vitality of its community by creating world-class theater experiences that entertain, provoke, and inspire meaningful dialogue among an audience representative of Milwaukee's rich diversity.

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