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Last Bow

The Gamm stages one final production before closing the curtain in Pawtucket

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The Gamm Says Goodbye

After 15 seasons in Pawtucket, The Gamm makes a bittersweet move to Warwick

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sandra feinstein-
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IN September, The Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theatre announced that it would be taking a final bow at its Pawtucket location and making a move to the former home of the Ocean State Theatre Company on Jefferson Boulevard in Warwick. Though the change is tinged with sadness, folks at The Gamm are excited to watch the organization grow.

Board President W. Lynn McKinney has been with The Gamm since its early beginnings - back when it was founded as Alias Stage - and has witnessed its impressive impact on the Rhode Island theater scene. What stands out? "The quality of performances, the acting, and the choice of really provocative plays," he says.

With so much history in Pawtucket, McKinney says that it wasn't an easy choice to move, but that their current space has too many limitations, including a lack of space for performances and the artists.

"If you envision the theater, the back of the stage was the outside wall of the building," McKinney explains. "This means that an actor departing stage left had to go outside and walk along the cars to reach stage right." This obstacle was particularly problematic in that The Gamm runs most of its plays in the winter. The current facility also lacks adequate rooms for the actors - the men currently use a bathroom as their dressing room while the women use a converted boiler room.

Though the move will give them the support space that they're missing, McKinney understands why some may be hesitant about the change. However, he says, they will be renovating the new space to fit the intimate tone that they've established in their well-loved black box. "The new space has roughly 400 seats," he says. "Our goal is to develop a theater with under 200 seats without losing the capacity to rent the space for bigger events."

McKinney also wants to comfort those audiences worried about the drive to Warwick. "I've actually gotten in my car and done some test drives from the East Side to the new location, and for almost everyone we are adding a maximum of 5 minutes," he says. The new theater is also close to many restaurants and has a dedicated parking lot that will make finding a spot before a show much easier.

Managing Director Oliver Dow is also thrilled to move into a space with all the amenities that the theater needs. Though he's only been with The Gamm for three years, Dow knew as soon as he joined that their current space wasn't suitable. "I was in New York for 30 years and I was hired, really, to spearhead a move," he says. "One of our biggest challenges was our real estate situation, and we didn't have the long-term stability to invest in the property."

In his short time here, Dow has already seen and facilitated The Gamm's exponential growth. "When I got here, we didn't have the support staff we needed, so that was my first job - build up our business development department," he says. Now that they have the right team in place, Dow feels that this move is coming at the perfect time.

As for their many educational programs, such as the PLAY (Pawtucket Literacy and Arts for Youth) initiative, The Gamm will continue its commitment to the Pawtucket community. "We were already taking it to new towns," Dow says. "So now, being in the center of the state, we're really going to be able to cover more ground."


Artistic Director and Pawtucket native Tony Estrella also emphasizes that The Gamm will maintain its presence in the city. "When we first started here, Pawtucket was really hoping to use the arts for community building and we were proud to be the center of that," he says. Through their education programs, The Gamm has partnered with almost every classroom in the city, from kindergarten through high school.

Estrella says that some of his fondest memories are of collaborating and working with students.

Thinking back, Estrella also points to a season where they performed *Hamlet* and a play called *Festen* - two dark pieces of family drama - back to back. "We did them like that to show the two poles of what we do: taking these epic stories and playing them in an intimate space," he says. "That's not a play that a lot of theaters will do because it asks a lot of the audiences, so that's what I always point to as a perfect distillation of our identity."

Estrella says that Pawtucket will always remain part of who they are, but that he's excited for this next chapter. "We'll have a bigger area to play in," he says. "It's going to give our designers a lot more flexibility with what they can do as far as visual storytelling is concerned. It will give the audience a bit more comfortability, with that intimacy but also room to breathe."

At their annual Gala on April 9, The Gamm will say goodbye with a look back at their time in Pawtucket, and they will close this season with *As You Like It* (April 19-May 27). "The chance to do Shakespeare one last time in the space that defined who we are is going to be very special," Estrella says.

Of course, this goodbye will strike a sentimental chord. "To call it bittersweet would be an understatement," Estrella says. "So we'll look back for a bit and then we've got to move on because we have a lot of work ahead of us." GammTheatre.org 



Tony Estrella, Gamm Artistic Director and Pawtucket native: "To call [the move] bittersweet would be an understatement."

10 More Can't-Miss Spring Performances

Thinner Than Water

at Burbage Theatre Company, April-May

Three siblings reunite at the sickbed of their father in this intense production about the challenges of dealing with family. *Roosevelt Avenue, Pawtucket, BurbageTheatre.org*

***Native Gardens* at Trinity Rep, April 5-May 6**

When two couples start to disagree over their back gardens, there's room for a lot of ill will to grow. *Native Gardens*, about the clash between a young, Latinx couple and an older white couple in a well-off area of Washington, DC, is a comedic take on the little things that can blossom into big messes. *Washington Street, TrinityRep.com*

The Bolshoi Ballet live at the Avon Cinema, April 8

Catch a live broadcast of the Bolshoi performing *Giselle* from Moscow, a tale of broken hearts and revenge. *Thayer Street, AvonCinema.com*

***Forever Plaid* at The Community Players, April 13-22**

In this morbidly funny play, four high schoolers in the 1950s form the musical group Forever Plaid and are then run over by a bus on the way to their first performance. Luckily, they return from the dead to pursue their dreams once more. *Pawtucket, TheCommunityPlayers.net*

***Ragtime* at Trinity Rep, April 26-May 27**

The classic musical *Ragtime*, written by Terrence McNally and based on the novel by E. L. Doctorow,

examines three characters at the turn of the 20th century as their lives intersect in consequential ways. *Washington Street, TrinityRep.com*

Festival Ballet's *Little Mermaid* at The Vets, April 27-29

With choreography from Mark Diamond and music by Borodin, Debussy, and Glière, Festival Ballet brings the classic Hans Christian Andersen tale to the stage. *Avenue of the Arts, TheVetsRI.com*

***Zora Neale Hurston's Sweat and The Gilded Six Bits* at Mixed Magic Theatre, May 4-20**

Mixed Magic Theatre founder Ricardo Pitts-Wiley adapts and directs two short stories written by celebrated African American author Zora Neale Huston for the stage,

each exploring race and relationships in the early 20th century South. *Pawtucket, MMTRI.com*

***Menopause the Musical* at The Vets, May 10**

"Inspired by a hot flash and a bottle of wine," this musical is here to bring "the Silent Passage" out into the open, with a whole bunch of pop song parodies and lots of celebration. *Avenue of the Arts, TheVetsRI.com*

***Pirates of Penzance* at The Wilbury, May 17-June 3**

An irreverent take on an old classic, this performance by the Wilbury will be stocked with songs, wordplay, and pirates, as well as banjos, beach balls, and guitars. *Sonoma Court, Providence, TheWilburyGroup.org*