



2023

ANNUAL REPORT

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Holly Labbe

Treasurer

Pam Mandigo

Members at Large

Liz Marin

Francisco Escalera

Sarah Enloe

ARTISTIC STAFF

Artistic Director

Aili Huber

Artistic Associate

Heidi Jablonski

From the Board Chair

We built it in 2022, you came... and then you came back in 2023 and brought your friends! As Board President of Silk Moth Stage, I cannot thank you enough for trusting us. Our mission is risky. We produce “new classics,” which means we’re likely staging shows you’ve never heard of by playwrights whose names are less familiar to you. Our actual location is undisclosed until you’ve committed to us by volunteering, purchasing a ticket or becoming a corporate sponsor. Still, you trusted us. You invested your time, your energy and your money in us and because of that, we not only met but exceeded our 2023 goals in terms of audience numbers, fundraising and artists’ pay.

Sometimes folks mistake Silk Moth Stage for a community theater rather than the small professional theater that it is. Perhaps that’s because we say we offer “community events with a play at the center.” We value community. Who gets to participate? What are the barriers to access? The answers to those two questions are important to us and you helped us broaden both the audience and artist pools by reducing barriers, whether they be financial, geographic, family structure, ability/disability. As far as what makes us a professional theater: our artists — actors, directors, musicians, designers — are highly trained and paid for their work. It is people first for us.

On behalf of the Silk Moth Stage Board, I’m pleased to share with you our 2023 Annual Report and again express my gratitude for trusting us to create meaningful, unique theater experiences in the Shenandoah Valley. See you at the bonfire?

With gratitude,
Holly Labbe
Board President
Silk Moth Stage



“This is exactly the kind of work I want to create—building bridges between professional artists in rural Virginia and those working at the most prominent levels of theater.”

From the Artistic Director

2023 was truly a banner year for us. We smashed all of our records—attendance, fundraising, artist pay (to be fair, we only had one year to beat). We moved forward in our mission to produce “new classics” in an audience-connected, imagination-driven, place-grounded style.

Our total budget for 2023 was under \$13,000. One of our goals this year was to double artist compensation over last year, and we achieved this goal. We paid \$8130 directly to local artists. The entire rest of our budget was spent at local businesses, from our insurance broker to our picnic dinner provider. We brought one hundred people to Rockingham County, some traveling from nine other states, including New York, Arizona, and Michigan. While they were visiting us, they stayed at local rentals and ate at area restaurants. The arts are a well-documented engine for economic growth, and we are proud to be supporting the businesses of Rockingham County.

Artists from outside of our region are starting to pay attention to what we are doing. Melissa Moschitto, the playwright of *Artemisia's Intent*, saw the care we take with our artists and audiences, and felt that her text would be respectfully handled here. She came from New York to see the show, and described our company as “a magical, artist-centered oasis.”

We’ve received play scripts and letters of interest from professional artists all around the country, including *Wonder of Our Stage*, which Monica Cross sent because she thought it would be a good fit for our space and aesthetic. We agreed, and produced the world premiere of this play, which we believe should become a staple in the “Shakespeare-adjacent” season slot for classical theaters all over the country.

This is exactly the kind of work I want to create—building bridges between professional artists in rural Virginia and those working at the most prominent levels of theater.

We also partnered with Our Community Place, thanks to a grant from the Arts Council of the Valley, to provide tickets, meals, and transportation to bring our unhoused and ALICE neighbors to see our world premiere production of *Wonder of Our Stage*. For some of them, it was their first experience of theater; others were long-time theater-goers who hadn't been able to see a play in years. We consider this initiative a resounding success, and one of our favorite events of the entire year. We plan to continue it in 2024.

We are committed to finding creative ways to make theater accessible to our community, regardless of their financial situation, while also honoring the work of our artists by paying them, and by working to increase their pay to a fair and livable level.

Within a hundred miles of our location, there are only three other theaters that regularly pay actors. Silk Moth Stage has a unique mission in our region and creates unique opportunities for professional artists that are otherwise entirely unavailable. We also are challenging and transforming our community's expectations of what theater-going experiences can be.

If you're in Rockingham County in the spring or fall, we hope you'll join us for an experience like no other.

As ever,
Aili Huber
Artistic Director
Silk Moth Stage



The artistic team from Artemisia's Intent play in the photo booth. From left: Heidi Winters Vogel, Heidi Jablonski, David Vogel, Aili Huber. This photo, along with most of the ones in this report, is by Tiffany Showalter.

Mission, Vision, Values

Mission Statement

Silk Moth Stage produces events with new classics at the center. Our productions are place-based, artist-centered, and audience-connected.

As a starting point, we borrow Shakespeare and Company's definition of the classics: *The highest truths, universally told, with healing powers.*

Vision

We create artisanal theater—small batch, home-grown, high-quality. Every year, we deepen the quality of the art we share with our audiences and expand our ability to support our artists in doing their most vibrant and full work.

Values

Silk Moth Stage is a small professional company. We expect artists to behave in accordance with generally accepted standards of professional behavior, which includes respecting other artists, challenging oneself to grow in one's art, and creating a collaborative environment where we can all push ourselves to take risks.

We invite people to reconsider what a theater experience can be. In a Silk Moth Stage play, actors work in an outdoor environment. They make contact with the audience directly. The audience surrounds the performance space. Before and after the show, audience and actors connect to talk about our shared experience of story creation. At Silk Moth, the audience is a crucial piece of the work.

We are creating accessible opportunities for professional artists to do their best work, and for local audiences to experience high-quality performances. Through access initiatives, we invite people to bring their whole selves to the process by inviting them to share what they need, and finding creative ways to meet those needs. Our accessibility initiatives address barriers of geography, economics, disability, and prejudice.



Premiere Magic

Artemisia's Intent

Our first show of the 2023 season was the regional premiere of *Artemisia's Intent*, which told the story of Artemisia Gentileschi, a Renaissance painter, sexual assault survivor, and feminist icon. Prior to our production, this play had only been performed in New York City, by the Anthropologists, the company that originally created it.

We were honored to have Mariah Freda, the original Artemisia, and Melissa Moschitto, playwright, director, and deviser, visit us for performances.

This show is incredible: a powerful story masterfully told...5 stars...The story and the acting (oh, the acting!) took my breath away
—Jennifer Murch



Premiere Magic

Artemisia's Intent



The production was directed by Heidi Winters Vogel, with costume design by Heidi Jablonski, set design by David Vogel, and graphic and sound design by Aili Huber, who also produced the show. Sarah Levine McClelland portrayed Artemisia. Michael Richardson performed music before each show.

Utterly brilliant.
Script, Acting,
Directing.
—Sarah Enloe



Premiere Magic

Wonder of Our Stage



In the affecting performances of the five-person cast, *Wonder of Our Stage* made a powerful case for the very act of making theatre as the constant yearning towards becoming more human.

—Dr. Peter Kirwan

In the fall, we staged the world premiere of *Wonder of Our Stage*, by Monica Cross. This charming play examined the Shakespearean authorship question and reached the obvious conclusion that Shakespeare was...an automaton.

Aili Huber directed this production, with costume design by Rachel Herrick. The cast included Ariel Tatum, Robert Gotschall, Cory Drozdowski, Katherine Mayberry, and Kara Hankard. Prior to the show, audiences enjoyed music by Jessie Trainum and Clymer & Kurtz.

Playwright Monica Cross traveled from Wisconsin to join us.

Premiere Magic

Wonder of Our Stage

Thanks to a generous grant from the Arts Council of the Valley, we were able to welcome guests from Our Community Place, a local organization that works with people who don't have houses. For some of them, this was the first play they had ever seen. For others, it was a reconnection with an art form they had long loved.



All the Artemisias

Artists talking to artists is the most fascinating thing.
 —Lauren Gunderson, “All the Artemisias”

Artemisia Gentileschi is having a bit of a moment. In the last five years, there have been at least one novel, four plays, and an opera written about her. As we were preparing for our production, the Silk Moth team convened “All the Artemisias,” a live-streamed discussion between The Anthropologists’ Lynde Rosario and Melissa Moschitto, world-famous playwright Lauren Gunderson, Charles Ives Award winners Ginger Strand and Laura Schwendinger, and our own creative team. In this powerful conversation, we unpacked the question, “Why Artemisia? Why now?” and expanded our perspectives on this challenging and fascinating woman.



Guest Artists

While Silk Moth's core mission is focused on our local community and creating opportunities for professional artists who make their homes here, we are attracting nation-wide interest from people who see what we are doing and want to be part of it. Last year, we welcomed David and Heidi Winters Vogel from Indiana, Katherine Mayberry from Michigan, Melissa Moschitto from New York, and Monica Cross from Wisconsin, to participate in creating these productions.



From left: Melissa Moschitto, David Vogel, Aili Huber, Heidi Winters Vogel, Sarah Levine McClelland, Heidi Jablonski

Guest Artists



Playwright Monica Cross enjoys a performance of Wonder of Our Stage

Artists from outside of our valley keep us connected to the broader conversation of American theater and help us grow and develop. We give them the chance to do new plays in a unique environment, and to get to know the beauty and diversity of our community. Everyone benefits from these partnerships.

Statement of Financial Position

Silk Moth Stage enjoys strong support from our community. You show up for us by buying tickets, telling your friends about us, donating to our general fund, hosting our guest artists, and sporting our stylish shirts. We received financial support from 37 unique donors. While several contributors gave over \$200, the most common amount was \$35.

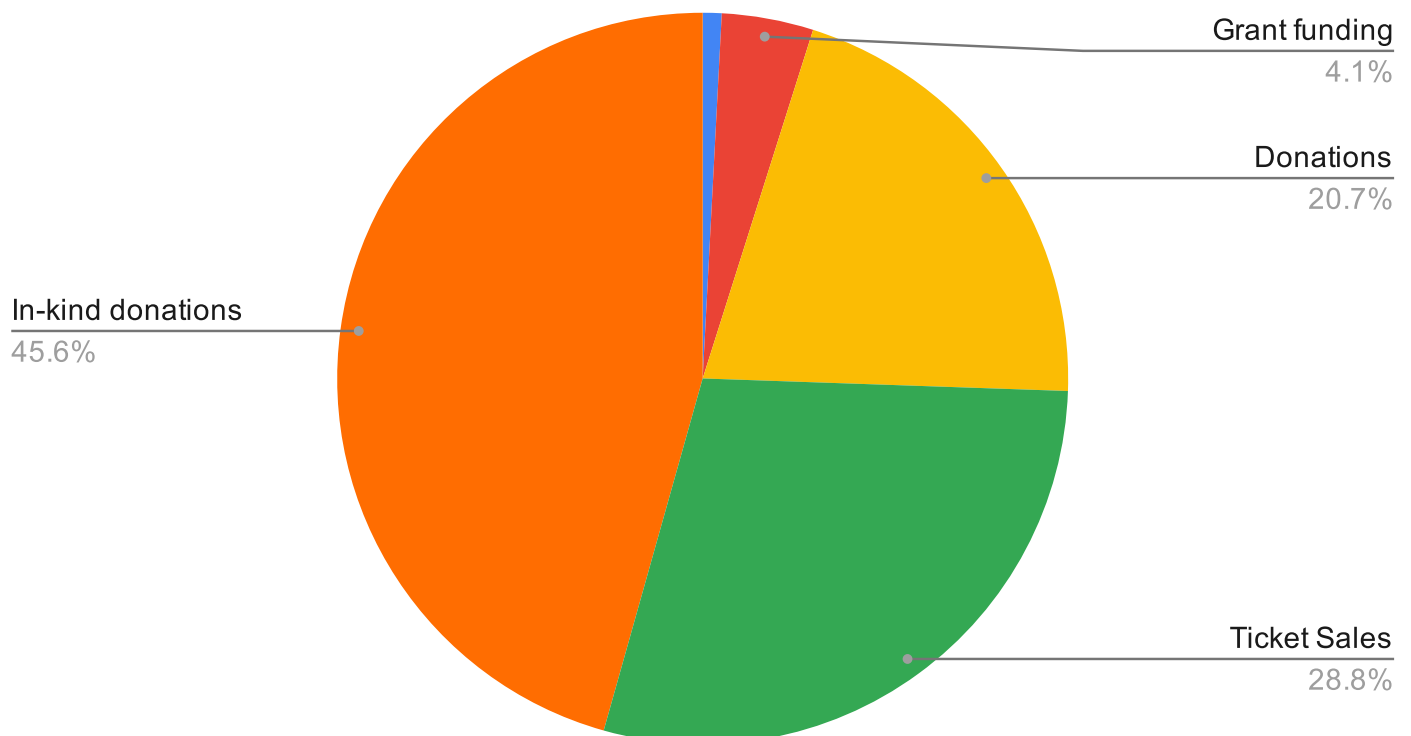
We gratefully received funding from the Shenandoah Valley Electric Co-operative's Operation Round Up, and the Arts Council of the Valley's Creative Inspiration Grant in support of our 2023 season. Our strongest fundraising event of the year was the Great Community Give, where we raised nearly \$2500 in one day!

Thanks to the community's commitment to high-quality theater, we were able to double artist pay over our 2022 season, welcome people who might not otherwise have access to live theater, and improve our cash reserve, ensuring that we will be able to pay artists even when the weather cancels our performances.

We have no outstanding liabilities, and closed our 2023 season with \$4900 in cash reserves

Thank you for all you have done and continue to do to make our theater a success.

Income by source



Statement of Financial Position

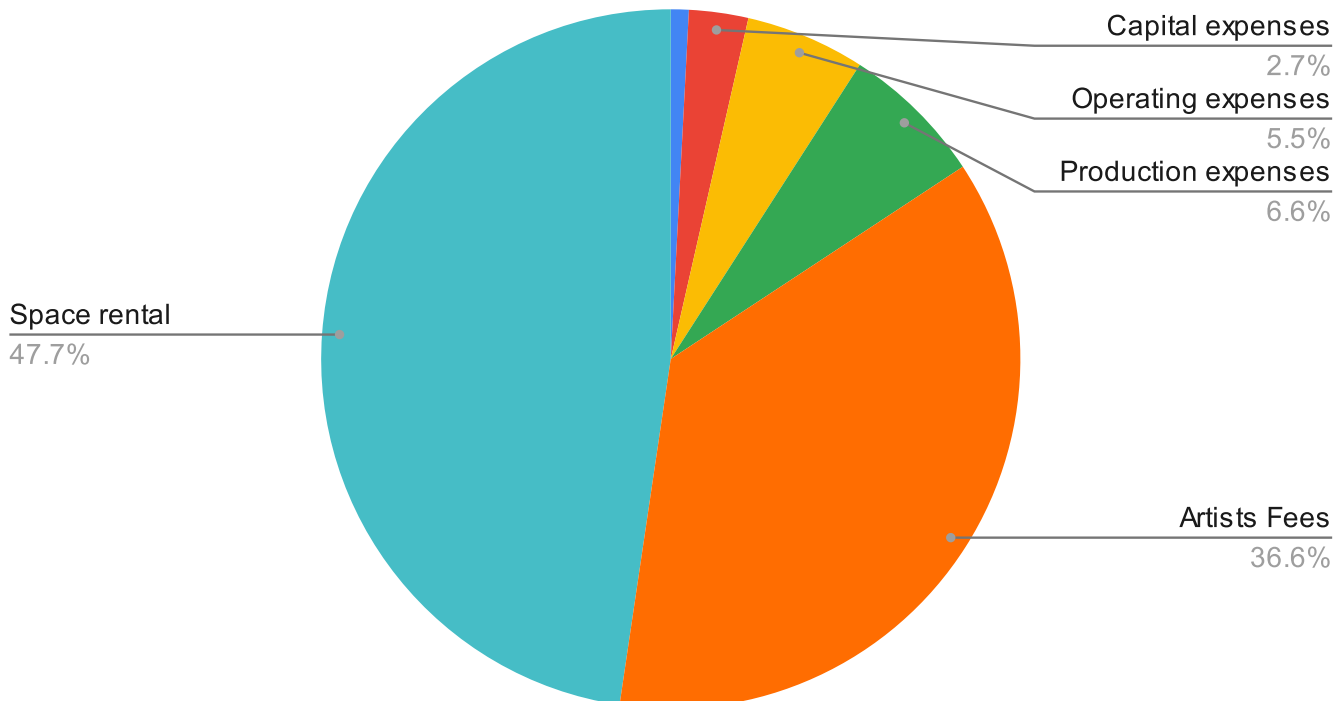
Our expenses are very low, as we don't own much, and are trying to keep it that way. We have strong relationships with area college, high school, and community theaters that generously lend props, set pieces, costumes, and occasionally space. In our 2023 season, we received this type of support from Bridgewater College, Harrisonburg High School Theater, Eastern Mennonite University Theatre, James Madison University's School of Theater and Dance, and Mary Baldwin University's Shakespeare and Performance graduate program. We reciprocate by connecting these programs with guest artists for workshops, promoting and supporting their work, and sharing our resources.

Our biggest cost would be space rental, but that is provided as an in-kind donation. This allows us the budget flexibility to create accessibility for audiences and artists.

We had a handful of capital expenses this year, including new signage, a lightbox over the stage, and a flexible speaker system.

We believe that budgets are moral documents. Our budget is in line with our values when it prioritizes people over things.

Expenses by category



2023 Supporters

Special thanks to all of our 2023 supporters!

Flower (>= \$1000)

- Mary McDermott
- Anonymous

Fire (\$500-\$999)

- Anonymous

Sunset (\$100-\$499)

- Noah Yoder
- Josh Preston
- Stanley Drozdowski
- Christie Hoover Seidel
- Hadley and Jan Jenner
- Jacob Lester and Dallas Hetrick
- Pam Mandigo
- Aili Huber
- Anonymous

Picnic (\$50-\$99)

- Noel Levan and Laura Dent
- Laura and Myers Carpenter
- Juan Carlos Molina
- Virginia and Jake Hart
- Miriam and Nathaniel Fairfield
- Rhoda and Kenton Derstine
- Gary Auerbach

River (\$25-\$49)

- Heather Harris
- Heidi Jablonski
- Shannon Alabanza
- Virginia Showalter
- Nancy Heisey
- Rori Preston Leath
- Jamie Hiner
- Carmen Witmer

S'more (< \$24)

- Paul Riner
- Aleise Gingerich
- Holly Labbe
- Sarah Enloe
- Heidi Vogel
- Leigh Beauchamp
- Nina Alabanza
- Bethany Chupp

In-kind donations

- Sue Klassen and Johann Zimmerman
- Jennifer and John Murch
- Huber family

Artist Pay

One achievement we are especially proud of is our increase in artist pay. From 2022 to 2023, we doubled artist pay; in 2024, we are raising it by a further 20%.



Why is it important to pay artists?

When we pay artists:

- **We honor their work and their training.** The artists we work with are highly skilled. Many of them have terminal degrees in their specialization, or have been doing the work for decades. Paying for expertise is appropriate.
- **We are creating accessibility and equity.** We're not there yet, but we have a plan to increase artist pay every year until it reaches an industry standard level, which we project will happen by our 2027 season. By paying artists fairly, we create opportunities for artists to work, without taking resources from their families. If we do not pay artists, the only people who can afford to make art are those who have trust funds.
- **We are making it possible for local audiences to experience professional-quality art.** Many of our artists have built careers out of living in the Valley and traveling elsewhere to create theater. It's a good business model for life; the cost of living here is relatively low, and they can go where the money is for short periods of time. They live here, but they do their best work in other communities. By creating paid opportunities for them right here, we make their work accessible to their friends and neighbors.

Ticket Sales

Our ticket sales increased by 14% from 2022 to 2023. We even had our first sold-out performance this fall! We continue to offer free tickets to volunteers and those with financial need.

Additionally, we have astounding numbers of return visitors. Over the past two years, over 30% of people who have seen one Silk Moth show have come back for at least one more. Nearly a quarter of patrons saw both of our 2024 shows. These are excellent numbers; the industry benchmark for good repeat business is 25% over two years, for theaters with many more performances per year than we have. Thank you for coming back, and for bringing your friends!



A group of friends gathers at the fire after a performance

A Flat Circle: Stories About Time

Underneath the Lintel

We are beyond excited about our 2024 season. We are opening with *Underneath the Lintel*, by Glen Berger, a story of a globe-trotting, mystery-solving, time-traveling librarian on a quest to collect a tremendous overdue fine (along the way, she learns about love, loss, and longing). Directed by Aili Huber, and performed by Diana Black, this show runs May 10-12 & 17-19 at 7 pm, with music beginning an hour before.

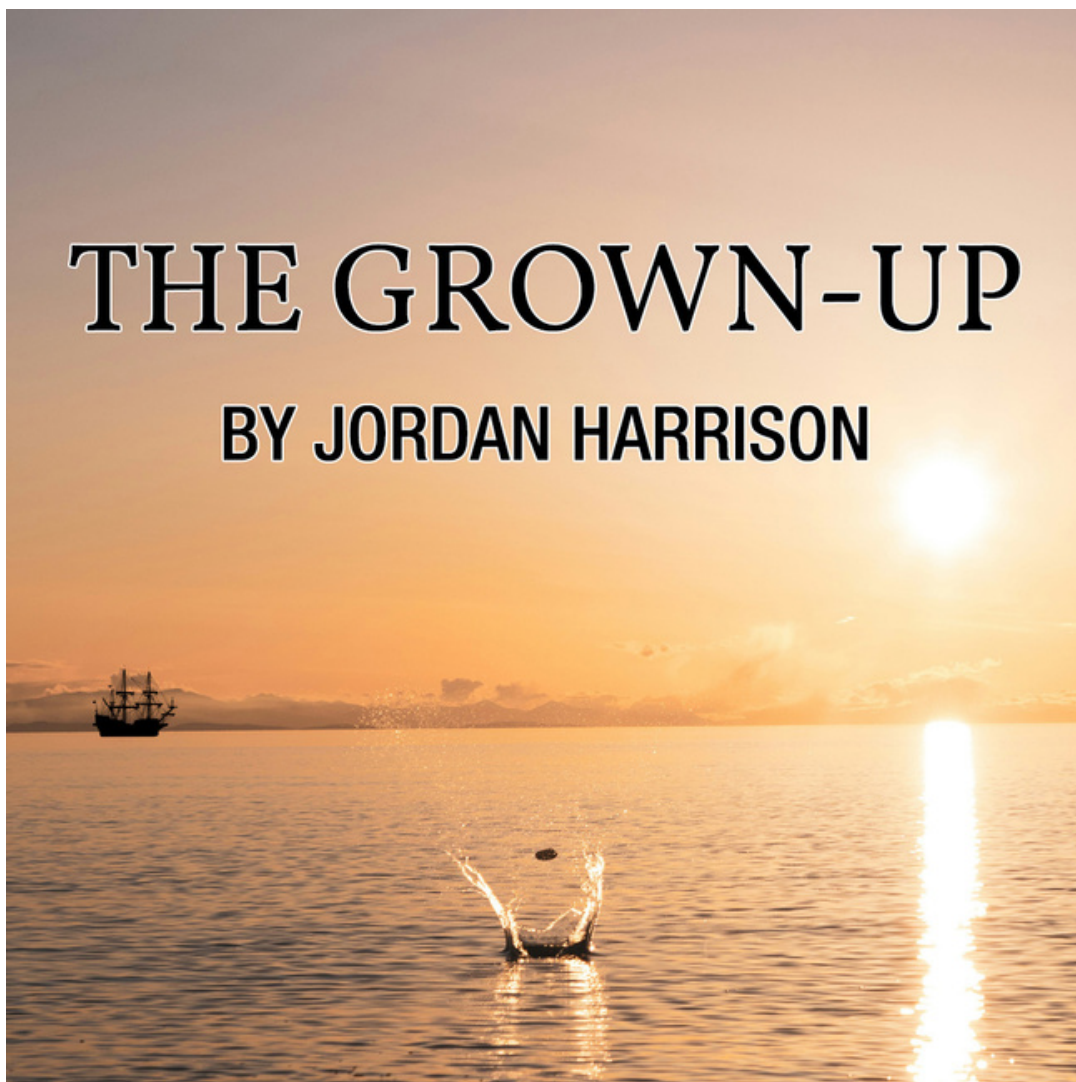


Because *Underneath the Lintel* features a librarian, and because we are obsessed with libraries, we're having a special library-worker-appreciation event on May 12. Library workers can [get discounted tickets](#) and will be entered in a drawing for a book-themed gift basket. Throughout the run, we will have ways to support and honor local libraries.

A Flat Circle: Stories About Time

The Grown-Up

Our second show is *The Grown-Up* by Jordan Harrison. The story of a guy in a time warp, skipping forward through his life at breakneck speed, complicated by pirates, beauty queens, and the intrepid sister who tracks him through decades, trying to bring him home. Directed by Sarah Levine McClelland, with music by Chris Johnston, this show will run September 13-15 & 20-22, at 6 pm, with music beginning around 5.



Tulip-Tree Silkmoth

In what has been variously described as “innovative,” “genius,” “engaging,” and “perhaps the most questionable branding strategy of all time,” Silk Moth Stage commissions a new silk moth logo from a local artist every year.

This tulip-tree silkmoth, created by local artist, writer, and Virginia Master Naturalist Anna Maria Johnson, will represent our 2024 season.

We love this graceful moth, dancing on a silk, and resting on the sassafras trees that surround our stage.



Opportunities for Support



We had a successful first Great Community Give (GCG) in 2023, where we raised \$2500, fully funding actor pay for *Wonder of Our Stage*.

This year's focus for GCG is going to be *accessibility*:

- Funding continuation of our partnership with Our Community Place
- Raising money for ASL-interpreted performances
- Supporting the artist accessibility line item in every show budget
- Training a member of our team in audio description for low-vision patrons

We welcome your support of these initiatives on April 17!

While you're there, take time to support other non-profits in our area. These organizations make Harrisonburg and Rockingham County an extraordinary place to live.

Recurring Donations

Did you know that it is simple and easy to set up recurring monthly donations? You might not miss a few dollars each month, but they would make a difference for us.

Corporate Sponsorship

If you would like us to mention your business at every performance to an audience of smart, community-minded, good-looking people, get regular shout-outs in our marketing, and score free tickets, please consider our corporate sponsorship program. Last year, we brought over 100 people to Rockingham County for our shows. They'd love to hear about your business and visit it while they're in town.

Thank you!

We could not create Silk Moth Stage without the generous support of our patrons.

Thank you—for coming to shows, for volunteering, for sharing our posts, for funding our initiatives.

We are creating something unique, in and for the Shenandoah Valley.

We can't wait to see you on the lawn.

