

# MEDIA RELEASE

THE  
**COURT**  
THEATRE

18 July 2017

## For immediate release

### *Steel Magnolias*

Written by Robert Harling

Directed by Gregory Cooper

5 August – 1 September 2017

Tonkin & Taylor Main Stage at The Court Theatre

Show sponsored by Ballantynes

## Big hair, big laughs and big heart in *Steel Magnolias*

Step back in time for big laughs, big tears and big hair. *Steel Magnolias*, opening at The Court Theatre, is a heart-warming celebration of togetherness and female friendship.

Set in a hair salon in 1987 Louisiana, *Steel Magnolias* follows the bond between six women over three years. These Southern belles come together to gossip, laugh and ultimately support each other through all of life's ups and downs.

Originating as a tribute to the playwright's late sister, Susan, the play was written in just ten days. Inspired by family and friends, the deeply personal nature of the story and recognisable characters resonated with audiences. The original production team were surprised, however, when the wit and honesty in the crackling dialogue inspired laughter as much as tears.

Debuting off-Broadway in March of 1987, *Steel Magnolias* was a smash hit and ran for 1,126 performances. Further acclaim came in 1989 when the play was adapted into an award-winning film starring Julia Roberts, Sally Field, Dolly Parton and Shirley MacLaine.

The Court Theatre's production boasts an impressive cast known and loved by audiences: Kathleen Burns, Lara Macgregor, Yvonne Martin, Lucy Porter, Sarah Kelly and Susannah Kenton. Director Gregory Cooper – the only man in the rehearsal room – describes it as "a stellar cast... an incredible opportunity to see six incredibly talented, diverse actors."

Ross Gumbley, The Court's Artistic Director, observes; "Sharing this play is a deeply satisfying experience. From an audience's point of view, you are in the room with six wonderful characters telling an absorbing story full of laughter and tears. It's what you want every play to be."

Yvonne Martin appeared in the first production of *Steel Magnolias* at The Court in 1989. "We were on stage before the film came out," she recalls. For the 2017 season, Martin was approached to either direct or perform, and opted to play "town curmudgeon" Louisa "Ouiser" Boudreaux. "I couldn't resist the role," says Martin, "and I love being part of this cast".

Kathleen Burns was born the same year that *Steel Magnolias* was written. "The script is so, so good. The connections between the women is 100% as applicable today as it was then. The bond that women have is timeless by nature."

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Season Sponsor



The Court Theatre

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New Zealand

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This is the second show Burns has been in with an all-female cast - the first being *The Women*, which was staged at The Court in 2013.

Burns appreciates the perspective Cooper brings as director. "He's looking at what the audience wants to see and he's absolutely committed to making it as real as possible - he spent hours moving set and props around to make the best playground for us to play in. I think he's learning a lot about women, too," she laughs.

The creative team discussed updating the play to the modern day, but felt the original 1987 setting was more appropriate. This created opportunities for all the creative departments to go retro. All costumes on stage are authentic 80s clothes. "I don't think there's an op-shop in Christchurch we haven't been to," says Costume Manager Sarah Douglas.

Sarah Greenwood-Buchanan has been employed as *Steel Magnolias'* wig and hair stylist to recreate the 'dos of the day. The styles will be "big, teased, fun and fabulous," she says. Greenwood-Buchanan started hairdressing in 1983 and agrees that hairdressers are "almost fully qualified psychologists... you get to know your clients inside and out".

Cooper tasked Greenwood-Buchanan to ensure the on-stage salon was full of "hustle and bustle", with the action as realistic as possible. Greenwood-Buchanan trained the actresses playing the hairdressers (Sarah Kelly and Lucy Porter) in hairstyling techniques to make the onstage activity believable. "The audience should be focused on listening to the women talk about their lives, themselves and each other – the hair should just happen in the background. Hopefully the audience will go away, realise what unfolded before them, and think 'oh my gosh, that was amazing'," Greenwood-Buchanan says.

Cooper feels that at its core *Steel Magnolias* is "a play about friendship. It's a place where these women can come together and be completely open and honest without fear of judgement. They can talk about anything, life's sadness or madness, and be listened to. It feels that with all these new ways to communicate, maybe we've forgotten the art of listening."

*Steel Magnolias* opens on 5 August – y'all are most welcome.

## Additional Information:

### Cast:

Lara Macgregor	M'Lynn
Kathleen Burns	Shelby
Sarah Kelly	Truvy
Lucy Porter	Annelle
Yvonne Martin	Ouiser
Susannah Kenton	Clairee

### Production Team:

Gregory Cooper	Director
Nigel Kerr	Set Designer
Pam Jones	Costume Designer

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Giles Tanner	Lighting Designer
Sean Hawkins	Sound Designer / Operator
Sarah Greenwood-Buchanan	Wigs & Hair Master
Christy Lassen	Properties Manager
Jo Bunce	Stage Manager

## **Ticket Prices:**

- Adult: \$54-\$62
- Under 25: \$35-\$43
- Child (under 18): \$25-\$33
- Senior 65yrs+: \$47-\$55
- Group 6+: \$47-\$55
- Supporter: \$45-\$53

Bookings: phone 03 963 0870 or visit [www.courttheatre.org.nz](http://www.courttheatre.org.nz)

## **Show Times:**

- 6.30pm: Mon/Thurs
- 6.30pm: Forum 7 August – Discuss the play with cast and creative team after the show
- 7.30pm: Tue/Wed/Fri/Sat
- 2.00pm: Matinee Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> August

<ENDS>

Images can be found at The Court Theatre's [Media Centre](#)

**For more information or to arrange an interview please contact:  
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