



RED BANK: TWO RIVER INTROS NEW SEASON



Returning Broadway veterans Brandon J. Dirden and Jessica Stone — plus rookie playwright Robert Rechnitz, pictured with wife and fellow Two River Theater Company founder Joan — are among the creative forces powering a just-announced 2015-2016 season of shows on Two River stages.

It's a highly anticipated rite of spring in Red Bank — one that John Dias jokingly referred to as “this totally kooky annual event” — but when the artistic director of Two River Theater Company played host for the 2015-2016 Season Announcement on Monday night, he was entirely serious in first thanking the “loyal, passionate” audience members who “want to be the first to hear what we’re doing each year.”

Kicking off in mid-September, and comprising eight productions on two stages of TRTC’s branded Bridge Avenue arts center, it’s a schedule that boasts fresh takes on familiar classics, and first looks at a couple of world premiere works. There’s some engagingly quirky casting; the return of several fondly regarded members of the extended Two River family — and a debut original work by a forever-young upstart who holds a special resonance with the Red Bank audience.

Seven Guitars (September 12 – October 4, 2015). For the inaugural offering of the new season, the Two River team returns to the famous cycle of plays by the late great African American playwright August Wilson — this time with the “pursuit of happiness” drama (set in the years following the end of World War II) of a musician attempting to stake out his own small place in the promised American dream. Broadway and TV actor Brandon J. Dirden, who co-starred in the TRTC staging of Wilson’s *Jitney* a few seasons back, makes his directorial debut here with a cast highlighted by his brother (and his co-star in *Top Dog/ Underdog*) Jason Dirden.

A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum (November 14 – December 13, 2015). Stephen Sondheim’s first major work as composer and lyricist has held up through the years as a modern classic with firm foundations in the authentic farces of ancient Rome — and with the celebrated young director Jessica Stone (Two River’s *Absurd Person Singular*) at the helm, the perennially popular toga-party declares “When in Red Bank, do as the Romans did,” casting every part in the traditionally co-ed production with male actors.

A Little Shakespeare: Pericles (December 2-12, 2015). The program called *A Little Shakespeare* — in which a cast of teen actors from area high schools perform an abbreviated version of a classic from the quill of the Bard — returns to the Marion Huber “black box” space for a rare take on the relatively lesser-known Shakespeare romance, set to be performed by the grownups in a Spring 2016 mainstage production.

Lives of Reason (January 9 – February 7, 2016). At the just-starting-out age of 84, Two River Theater Company founding father Robert Rechnitz turns playwright; collaborating with his fellow former faculty member from Monmouth University Kenneth Stunkel on a comedy-drama set among the sheltered cocktail parties of academia. Two River returnees John Ahlin and Maureen Silliman co-star in the play that makes its world premiere inside the sleek auditorium named for Joan and Bob Rechnitz — while making a welcome surprise return as director is former TRTC artistic director Jonathan Fox, who presided over the company’s exciting transition from “gypsy” troupe to stewards of their own state-of-the-art Red Bank landmark.

Ropes (February 20 – March 20, 2016). Continuing a tradition of promoting new works by Latino playwrights, Two River’s Huber space hosts a new translation of Mexican author Bárbara Colio’s study of three brothers, and the tightrope-daredevil dad who abandoned them. New to the Red Bank stage is a special block of shows performed entirely in Spanish.

Pericles (April 16 – May 8, 2016). Shakespeare’s (possibly co-authored) play as it’s never been experienced before — set in an “end of the world bar,” and augmented by original songs (some adapted from the Bard’s verse; others with all-new lyrics) composed by actor and singer Rinde Eckert.

I Remember Mama (June 4 – 26). John Van Druten’s warm 1944 family portrait (adapted from the novel *Mama’s Bank Account* by Kathryn Forbes) is given a compelling twist, courtesy of NYC’s Transport Group and director Jack Cummings, with all of the play’s roles — men, women, children and teens — performed by actresses age 65 and over.

Where the Wild Things Are (June 9-12). The annual kid-friendly production — moved from the year-end holiday season to the doorstep of summer — offers all ages a highly interactive “guided play” experience of Maurice Sendak’s classic children’s book, produced by Vancouver’s Presentation House Theatre.

Check the Two River website for updated info on season subscriptions and individual tickets to shows in the 2015-2016 schedule. Then take it here for tickets to the world premiere musical *Be More Chill* — the final show of the current season, about which much more to come here on **redbankgreen**.