

# Turning 50 and still a hit: 'The Wedding Singer' kicks off Annapolis Summer Garden Theatre season



Annapolis Summer Garden Theatre kicks off its 50th anniversary season on May 26th with the musical comedy *The Wedding Singer*, based on the film. (Courtesy photo / HANDOUT)



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Annapolis Summer Garden Theatre's current season to feature most ambitious musicals to date

Love. Life. Laughter.

Those are the three words to describe Annapolis Summer Garden Theatre's current season, which organizers say features the most ambitious musicals to date.

The ASGT is kicking off its 50<sup>th</sup> year this weekend with the romantic-comedy musical "The Wedding Singer." The musical opened on Thursday and there will be performances every Thursday through Sunday until June 18. The season will also feature the rock opera "Rent" and comedy "The Producers."

"We're using it as an opportunity to celebrate history and chose to stretch ourselves with three big musicals," said Lauren Winther-Hansen, ASGT's communications director. "We're not resting on our laurels, we're really pushing ourselves."

The ASGT was founded in 1966 with the intention of giving local actors the opportunity to perform during the summer with the other theater organizations were on hiatus. From the beginning, the performances were outdoors at the historic William Paca House & Gardens. The first productions were "You Can't Take It With You" and "Brigadoon." The next year, the organization moved to Compromise Street, where ASGT still performs today in the outdoor theater.



For 50 years, Annapolis Summer Garden Theatre has presented live musical theatre at their outdoor space at City Dock, offering patrons a unique way to enjoy a summer evening in Annapolis. (Courtesy Photo / HANDOUT)

In the last 10 years, the ASGT has started to put on "edgier" productions, opposed to the traditional musicals, said Carolyn Kirby, the president of ASGT's board of directors.

For several years, only one of the three ASGT musicals would be a newer or well-known musical, like "Avenue Q" or "25th Annual Putnam Spelling Bee" Kirby said. But the theater soon realized that these performances were bringing in a younger audience. Now, the ASGT makes it's a priority to be an accessible theater for teenagers and young adults in both the performance and the price, she said.



This season, ASGT will put on the Tony Award and Pulitzer Prize winning musical "Rent." From left: Athena Blackwood, David Colton, Christian Gonzalez, Tim German, and Loghan Bazan. (Courtesy photo / Handout)

Ten years ago, the organization wouldn't have put on "Rent," Kirby said.

"To a lot of people, (Rent is) still very edgy, but really the world has changed in the last 20 years," she said. "It's time for us to do a new Rent. It's the time for it."

Many local theater companies would only tackle one "big production" musical a season, said Wedding Singer director Mark Briner. The fact that ASGT has three big shows speaks to the varied talent, he said.

The musical "The Wedding Singer" is based on the 1998 movie starring Adam Sandler and Drew Barrymore. Briner described the show as "breezy and light-hearted," and will feature music similar to Michael Jackson, Madonna and Cyndi Lauper. Many of the show's choreography are inspired by MTV music videos.

"I've been doing this for more than 20 years," he said. "This is just unparalleled to allow me to creatively flush out what I see in my head."

Jerry Vess will direct his ninth ASGT production this summer with "Producers." Since he's been a part of the company, the organization has created high standards for itself, which has sparked interest from talent from all over the region.

"Everyone wants to be in these plays," Vess said. He added that almost 70 people auditioned to be in "Rent," which typically has a small company size.

The ASGT stands out among the other local theater organizations because of the opportunity to perform outside in downtown Annapolis, Vess said.

"Even though you hear horns, people yelling and ambulances whizzing by, when you step inside there's magic happening," he said.

### **The Wedding Singer**

**When:** Starting May 26, performances will be at 8:30 p.m. Thursdays through Sundays, and select Wednesdays, until Labor Day. There will be no performances on July 4.

**Where:** 143 Compromise St, Annapolis

**Tickets:** Tickets are \$22. They can be ordered online at [summergarden.com](http://summergarden.com) or picked up at the box office

For more information, visit [summergarden.com](http://summergarden.com).

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