

Contact:  
Noreen Heron  
[www.heronagency.com](http://www.heronagency.com)  
773.969.5200

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## **FIRST FOLIO ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT OF FOUNDING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

### ***THEATER WILL CEASE OPERATIONS IN 2024***

OAK BROOK, Ill. — First Folio Theatre’s Board of Directors has announced that Founding Executive Director David Rice will be stepping down in the spring of 2024. In conjunction with that decision, the Board has also determined that First Folio will cease operations at the end of the 2023-2024 season.

First Folio Theatre was founded by David Rice and his late wife Alison C. Vesely in 1996 as First Folio Shakespeare Festival and their first show was a production of William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* on the theater’s new outdoor stage at the Mayslake Peabody Estate Forest Preserve in Oak Brook. For the next seven years, Alison and David focused exclusively on producing Shakespeare-under-the-Stars. In 2004, however, the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County had completed enough of the renovation necessary to allow it to open the historic Mayslake Hall mansion to the public. This provided an opportunity for First Folio to expand its offerings and to mount shows indoor as well, allowing the theater to produce a full four-show, year-round season. This remained the norm until 2019 when, following the close of *Henry V* in August of that year, the outdoor summer stage was razed and First Folio chose to limit itself to the three-show indoor season.

Although the original mission of First Folio was primarily to present Shakespeare, as the company grew and developed, their mission also came to include a focus on developing opportunities for women in the theater. To that end, First Folio has had more shows directed by women in the past 25 years than almost any other Equity theater in the Chicago area. First Folio has also led the way in opportunities for women designers, resulting in multiple Jeff Nominations and Awards for the many women who have worked there, including Angela Weber Miller for scenic designs (10 nominations); Cassy Schillo, Wendy Huber, and Margaret Garofalo for props designs (a total of 3 nominations and 1 award); Rachel Lambert and Elsa Hiltner for costume designs (a

total of 3 nominations); and many women designers in the areas of lighting, projections, and stage violence design.

Over the two-and-a-half decades since that first show, First Folio has mounted over 80 productions, including twenty-five productions of Shakespeare's works on their outdoor stage. The theater has also produced 14 world premieres, 6 of them specifically commissioned for First Folio. In addition to the designers and directors listed above, other noteworthy artists whose work has appeared at First Folio include Kevin McKillip (3 Jeff nominations), Nick Sandys (4 Jeff nominations), Christopher Kriz (4 Jeff nominations and 2 awards), and Michael McNamara (1 Jeff award).

Although his primary role at First Folio has been as Executive Director, David has also been seen onstage upon occasion, including playing Feste in *Twelfth Night* (2002), H.C. Curry in *The Rainmaker* (2013), and Sandor Turai in *Rough Crossing* (2014). However, he made his mark more strongly as a playwright, with First Folio presenting six world premieres of Rice's works. The first of those was *The Madness of Edgar Allan Poe*, a site-specific production which took audience members through five different rooms of Mayslake Hall, as they experienced scenes from both the life and the works of the great American author. This play earned Rice his first Jeff Award Nomination for New Adaptation in 2007. First Folio went on to remount *Poe* five more times and it has since been produced elsewhere. Rice's other plays include a musical adaptation of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, which earned him a pair of Jeff Awards in 2013, one for New Adaptation and a second for Original Music, which he shared with composer Michael Keefe.

Following the death of his wife Alison in 2016, Rice continued to guide First Folio with the help of Managing Director Kate Danziger and Associate Artistic Director Melanie Keller, as well as the Board of Trustees. Upon retirement from First Folio, Rice intends to go on writing plays and says he will also continue to trod the boards, "if there are any theaters out there who will hire an old codger like me!" Rice also stressed the debt of gratitude he owed to all the artistic associates who helped create the 80+ productions that he had the joy of shepherding, as well as to the great patrons and donors whose support made this possible. Particular gratitude goes to the Illinois Arts Council Agency and the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation, whose continuing support was essential to First Folio's success.

First Folio will be announcing its 2022-2023 season this coming spring and will announce its final three-show season in early 2023. Following the end of the 2023-2024, First Folio's board and staff will take the necessary steps to liquidate the company's assets and dissolve the not-for-profit corporation. Further information on those steps will be released at a later date.

#### **FAST FACTS ABOUT FIRST FOLIO**

- 72 mainstage productions and 12 dark night/online productions to date
- 58 mainstage shows and 10 dark night/online shows directed by women to date

- Over 1000 costumes covering over 2500 years of history have been produced for First Folio productions
- Over 300 original pieces of music have been composed for First Folio shows
- More than 80,000 tickets sold to the outdoor shows between 1997 and 2019
- More than 100,000 tickets sold for the indoor shows to date
- 859 acting roles cast to date
- 44 Jeff Nominations, 7 Jeff Awards and 2 After Dark Awards to date