

New Stage Theatre  
presents



# Steel Magnolias

by Robert Harling

Directed by John Maxwell

September 13-25, 2016

*Sometimes laughter is a matter of life and death.*

Sponsored by



St. Dominic's

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**NEW STAGE**  
*Theatre*

***STUDY GUIDE***

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Presents  
**STEEL MAGNOLIAS**  
by  
Robert Harling

Directed by John Maxwell

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Stage Manager Elise McDonald	Lighting Designer Brent Lefavor	Scenic Designer/Technical Director Richard Lawrence
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Costume Designer Lesley Raybon	Properties Designer Clara Seitz	Sound Designer Chris Roebuck
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Originally produced by the W.P.A. Theatre, New York City, 1987.  
(Kyle Renick, Artistic Director)

STEEL MAGNOLIAS is presented by special arrangement with Dramatic Play  
Services, Inc., New York.

There will be one 10-minute intermission

**SETTING**

Place: Chinquapin, Louisiana 1986

**Act I**

Scene 1: April

Scene 2: December

**Act II**

Scene 1: June, eighteen months later

Scene 2: November

**THE CAST**

TRUVY JONES	Jessica Wilkinson
ANNELLE DUPUY-DESOTO	Taylor Galvin
CLAIREE BELCHER	Laurie Pascale*
SHELBY EATENTON-LATCHERIE	Annie Cleveland
M'LYNN EATENTON	Wendy Miklovic*
OUISER BOUDREAUX	Viola Dacus

\*The actor appears through the courtesy of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robert Harling was born in Louisiana in 1951. Raised in Natchitoches, Louisiana, a town that bears a strong resemblance to Chinquapin Parish where the action of Steel Magnolias takes place, Robert Harling studied acting at Louisiana's Northwestern State University and law at Tulane University Law School. He has a passion for music, as he was also in a band while in law school. Shortly after graduating from law school, he decided that acting was the better profession.

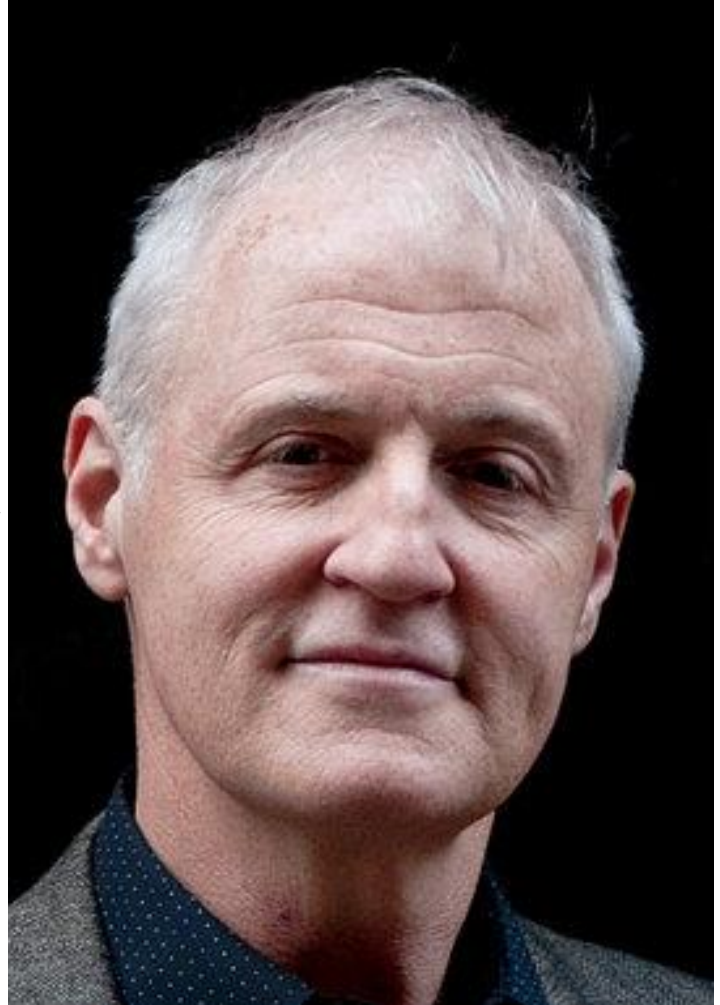
As a young man Robert was very ambitious. He moved to New York in 1978 and sold tickets on Broadway to support himself.

Robert worked at Kentucky Fried Chicken, but he still managed acting as a hobby. He auditioned for acting jobs and he also acted in quite a few commercials.

His play Steel Magnolias is based on the tragic loss of his sister, Susan Harling Robinson. Like the character of Shelby, she died as a result of complications caused by diabetes following the birth of her only child, Robert. Distraught by his sister's death, Harling threw himself into a surge of creativity, and, ten days later, he emerged from his room with the initial draft of an homage to his sister and "best friend."

Following the stage success of Steel Magnolias, Harling wrote the screenplay for the film version which was released in 1989. Harling played the small role of a minister in the movie.

He also wrote the screenplays for Soapdish (1991), The First Wives Club (1996), The Evening Star (1996), and Laws of Attraction (2004).



# **STEEL MAGNOLIAS SUMMARY**

## **Act One, Scene 1**

When the play opens, we are introduced to Truvy who is getting her hair done by Annelle. Annelle has recently finished beauty school and is seeking employment in Truvy's Salon. Seeing potential in Annelle, Truvy hires her. Then we meet Clairee, one of Truvy's customers, who is as curious as Truvy about Annelle's past. At this point it's clear Truvy and Clairee love to gossip a lot and Annelle leaves for the coffee.

Shelby arrives for her appointment with Truvy and we begin to see the dynamics of the relationships in the salon. Annelle is assigned to do the hair of the next client to arrive, M'Lynn. However, Annelle is apprehensive to doing the bride's mother's hair because she does not want to make any mistakes. It is clear that Shelby and M'Lynn have typical mother-daughter relationship. M'Lynn seems a little overbearing because she is worried about Shelby's health and well-being. The plot thickens as all the women uncover a secret about Shelby.

Shelby's focus remains on her big day as Ouiser Boudreaux enters the salon having a fit. Ouiser turns her attention to Annelle with the desire to find out some more information about her. Shelby then invites Annelle to the wedding and Truvy offers a very kind gesture to Annelle.

## **Act One, Scene 2**

It's the Saturday before Christmas and a few months post the wedding.

Shelby returns home with some shocking news, leaving everyone worried and M'Lynn in disagreement with Shelby. Annelle has found religion and taken up arts and crafts. Ouiser is upset about the townspeople and tourists parking in her yard for the festival. This causes her to be unconcerned with Shelby setting her up with Owen, an old flame of hers.

# **STEEL MAGNOLIAS SUMMARY**

## **Act Two, Scene 1**

One and a half years later we find the ladies in the salon, their usual gathering place, gossiping about the latest news. M'Lynn and Shelby have been at odds with most of Shelby's personal decisions. Although M'Lynn has made her opinion known, by saying indirect comments, Shelby is going to live her life however it makes her happy. But Shelby does have a secret. She and her mother have been hiding something from the other women.

## **Act Two Scene 2**

Annelle, who is experiencing a life-changing event, is styling Quiser's hair. At the opening of the play, Annelle was quiet and secretive; however, she is open and in love now. M'Lynn enters the scene discussing Shelby's medical battles.

This scene showcases the growth of all the characters. Despite the serious and life-changing events in the characters' lives, the playwright shows that the bonds of friendships can withstand the storms of life with a bittersweet ending.



# CHARACTER SYNOPSIS

## **Truvy Jones**

Truvy is in her late thirties to forties and owns a hair salon that is the setting for the play. It is clear that she is vain because of the references she makes about how there is no natural beauty. She is a gossip and loves to be in everyone's personal affairs. Truvy is a beautician and loves being in control of whatever the situation may be. Her two sons are Louie, who attends Louisiana State University, and Poot, who is to work with her cousin in Baltimore. She is married to a man named Spud Jones who she describes as a lazy old man. Truvy considers Annelle as a daughter even though they are not related. She also loves listening to others people's romantic experiences.

## **Annelle Dupuy-Desoto**

Annelle is thought to be eighteen to twenty five. She is new in town and began to work for Truvy because of her need for money. Annelle is a shy and creative individual. She refrains from discussing her life. She does not have a lot of money so she lives in a Ruth Robeline's boarding house and works as a beautician at Truvy's salon because she went to a trade school for cosmetology. She is kind and gracious towards the woman she meets in the beauty salon.

## **Shelby Eatenton-Latcherie**

Shelby, the youngest female in the play (approximately seventeen to twenty-one years old), is the daughter of M'Lynn Eatenton. She is about to get married to Jackson Latcherie. She has diabetes, but does not want her medical background to define her as a person because she does not want to rely on others. She is a pediatric nurse and she wants to have children. However, it is not recommended for her to have children because of her medical conditions. She has a very youthful feel to her, almost described as child-like. She is seen this way because of the types of hairstyles and colors she chooses to define herself. She wants to have a very romantic and peaceful marriage instead of the hectic relationship that her parents have.

## **Ouiser Bourdeaux**

Ouiser is an older woman in her late fifties to early sixties. She is seen as bitter and annoyed most of the time. She has a dislike towards Drum Eatenton. In her life, the things she values the most are her dog Rhett and her property. She is constantly arguing with M'Lynn's husband Drum over property but does have a deep concern with Shelby like all other characters. Even though she speaks poorly to the other women sometimes, she still considers them as her closest companion. She has been married twice and has children.

## **M'Lynn Eatenton**

M'Lynn is the mother of Shelby and of two sons named Tommy and Jonathan. She is around 40 years old. She is also the wife of Drum Eatenton, who she believes is crazy. She is the administrator of the Mental Guidance Center. Her main priority would be her daughter Shelby; she takes great care of her daughter due to her medical issues so she is seen as overprotective. On the surface, she is seen as strong and collective, but deep down she is fragile.

## **Clairee Belcher**

Clairee is the widow of a mayor and the owner of the local radio station. She is seen to be in her late fifties to sixties like Ouiser. She is known for her smart mouth and sweet tooth. Even though she puts herself down quite a lot, she always remains playful when a serious topic arises. Out of all the women, she is the only one without any children but she has close ties with her relatives.



## SETTING

Robert Harling sets the play in the fictional parish and town of Chinquapin, Louisiana. Chinquapin is the name for a type of fish and a particular breed of oak tree. Harling based Chinquapin on Natchitoches (pronounced *NACK-uh-dish*), which is where he grew up in Louisiana. The town is named after the Naktosh Indians, whose name means “Chinquapin Eaters.” Natchitoches was also the first settlement in the Louisiana territory. *Steel Magnolias* is partially based on the events surrounding Harling’s sister’s death and on the people he knew in his hometown”

The state of Louisiana is divided into 64 parishes in the same way that 48 other states, such as Mississippi, are divided into counties. The only other state not divided into counties is Alaska, which is divided into boroughs and census areas.

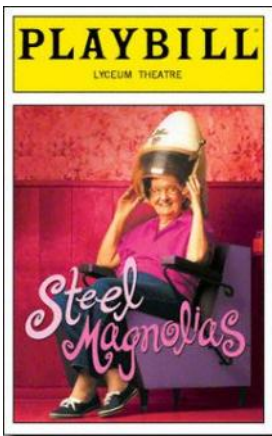
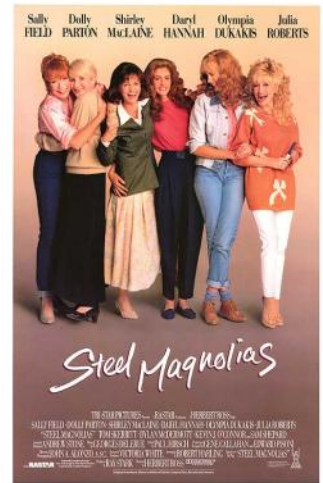


# STEEL MAGNOLIAS PRODUCTION HISTORY



*Steel Magnolias* was originally performed Off-Broadway at the Lucille Lortel Theatre after having been produced at the WPA Theatre in New York City . It opened in June of 1987 and closed in February of 1990 after 1,126 performances.

*Steel Magnolias* was made into a film starring Sally Field, Dolly Parton, Shirley MacLaine, Daryl Hannah, Olympia Dukakis and Julia Roberts. It won the Golden Globe Award for Best Supporting Actress, as well as the People's Choice Award for Best Dramatic Motion Picture.



*Steel Magnolias* was produced for the Broadway stage and opened in April of 2005. The play starred Delta Burke, Christine Ebersole, Rebecca Gayheart, Marsha Mason, Lily Rabe, and Frances Sternhagen. It was nominated for a Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Actress in a Play.

The Lifetime Television Network made an African-American version of *Steel Magnolias* in 2012. This made-for-television movie starred Queen Latifah, Jill Scott, Alfre Woodard, Phylicia Rashād, Adepero Oduye, and Condola Rashād.





# **DIABETES**

Diabetes is a disease that causes the body not to be able to produce or properly use insulin. Scientists have not yet discovered the cause of Diabetes.

## **The Three Types of Diabetes**

Type 1-When the pancreas stop making insulin.

Type 2-When the cells in the body can't use insulin correctly.

Gestational Diabetes-The temporary form of insulin resistance that usually occurs halfway through pregnancy.

## **Diabetes During Pregnancy**

Having diabetes during a pregnancy can increase the chances of the patient developing preeclampsia and depression. Preeclampsia is a condition in which the patient develops high blood pressure and an excess of protein in the urine during the second half of their pregnancy. Depression can cause the patient to be too tired to manage their diabetes and care for themselves or a child. During a pregnancy, a diabetic is at risk of having low blood glucose, also called hypoglycemia.

## **Symptoms of Low Blood Glucose (Hypoglycemia)**

Dizziness	Confusion
Sweating	Weakness
Crankiness	Headache
Increased Heartbeat	Fainting
Coma	

## **Hyperglycemia**

High blood glucose, or hyperglycemia, can happen when a patient does not have enough insulin or when their body is unable to use insulin correctly.

## **Symptoms of High Blood Glucose (Hyperglycemia)**

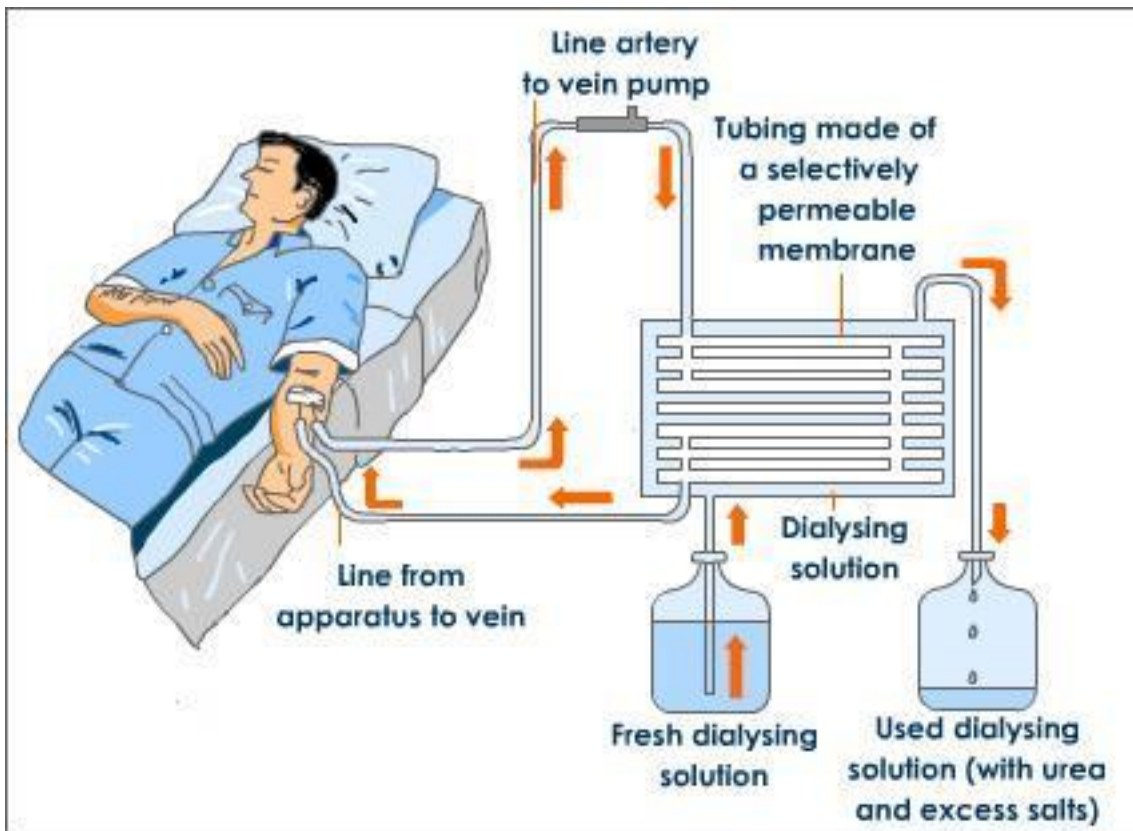
- Increased thirst
- Frequent urination
- Fatigue
- Nausea or vomiting
- Shortness of breath
- Stomach pain
- Dry mouth

# DIALYSIS

Dialysis is a process for removing waste and excess water from the blood and is used primarily as an article replacement for lost kidney functions.

The kidneys are two bean-shaped organs, each about the size of a fist. They are located just below the rib cage, one on each side of the spine. Every day, the two kidneys filter about 120 to 150 quarts of blood to produce about 1 to 2 quarts of urine, composed of wastes and extra fluid.

Kidney dialysis is a life-support treatment that uses a special machine to filter harmful wastes, salts, and excess fluid from your blood. Patients usually require dialysis when the waste products in their body become so high that they become ill.



## **REFERENCES IN STEEL MAGNOLIAS**

### **Princess Di**

A nickname for Diana, Princess of Wales of England. In the mid-1980's, she made international news with her numerous charities and regular public appearances to hospitals and schools.

### **Princess Grace**

An American actress who, after marrying Prince Rainier III, became the Princess of Monaco. Known for her beauty and fashion sense, she was inaugurated into the International Best Dressed List Hall of Fame in 1960.

### **Jaclyn Smith**

An American actress and businesswoman who is best known for her starring role in the 1970's television show Charlie's Angels. In the mid-1980's, she entered the business world with her collection of women's apparel.

### **The Petroleum Club of Shreveport**

A prestigious, member-owned club in Shreveport, Louisiana. Members are able to expand their social and business relationships, as well as have associations with more than 50 nationally-known clubs.

### **Monroe and West Monroe**

Monroe is the eighth-largest city in Louisiana. The neighboring city of West Monroe sits across the Ouachita River. Both cities are often referred to as the Twin Cities of Northeast Louisiana.

### **On the Pill**

A slang term for the use of birth-control in the form of a birth-control pill.

### **G.I. Joe**

A line of action figures that have been produced by the toy company Hasbro since 1967.

### **Spoolies**

Hair curlers from the 1940's and 50's that were advertised as the most comfortable to wear to bed.

### **Hawaii Five-O**

An American police drama series produced by CBS. The show had very recognizable theme song, and the series aired from 1968 to 1980.

**Earp**

A slang term that means to throw up.

**Elizabeth Taylor**

A British-American actress known for her numerous marriages.

**Dark Victory**

A 1939 American drama film about a young, carefree socialite who is diagnosed with an inoperable malignant brain tumor.

**Elizabeth Arden**

A Canadian-American businesswoman who founded and built a cosmetics empire. Located on New York's Fifth Avenue, her company was called Red Door Salon for its signature red front door.

**Reach Out and Touch Someone**

An AT&T advertising jingle that was coined in 1979.

**Getting Colors Done**

The process of finding colors of clothing and makeup to match a person's skin complexion, eye color, and hair color. The idea of basing these colors on the four seasons became popular in the late 1970's.

**Valium**

A medication commonly used to treat a range of conditions including anxiety.

**Deputy Dawg**

A cartoon character featured on the animated television series Terrytoons.

**Zwolle**

A small town in Sabine Parish, Louisiana.

**Tickfaw**

A small village in Tangipahoa Parish, Louisiana.

**Dago**

An ethnic slur for one from Italy, Spain, or Portugal.

**Dry Pong**

A small village in central Grant Parish, Louisiana.

**Baton Rouge**

The capital of Louisiana, and the state's second largest city.

# PRODUCTION DESIGN





# THOUGHTS FOR DISCUSSION:

## Pre-Show Questions

1. Does anyone in your family have an illness? If so, explain how your family takes care of them. Is your family overprotective or injurious?
2. Have you ever argument with a friend that later seemed frivolous in light of all you two had been through? What was the conflict about and how was it resolved?
3. Why it is that close bonds are created in a barbershop or beauty salon?

## Post-Show Questions

1. What is the significance of the title, *Steel Magnolias*, to the play?
2. In the play, Shelby brought a dysfunctional radio to the salon. How does the radio symbolize Shelby?
3. During the play, what changes did you see in Annelle?
4. Children and parents often have disagreements. Can you relate to the relationship between Shelby and M'Lynn even at your age? What are some situations in which you don't see eye to eye with your parents?

## Creative Writing Prompts

1. In the play, Shelby does something that M'Lynn doesn't agree with. What personal connections can you make to this event?
2. Illnesses are usually seen as negative occurrence. How might a person grow or become a better person when dealing with an illness or supporting a loved one who is ill?
3. What personal connections can you make with the title of the play?



# **AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE**

For many of your students, a visit to New Stage Theatre to see *Steel Magnolias* may be their first theatre experience. It may be helpful to discuss with them the expected behavior of an audience. New Stage asks that prior to the performance, students are made aware of the following:

- Stay with your group at all times and pay attention to your teachers and chaperones.
- Listen to the New Stage staff member who will board your bus and escort your group to the lobby.
- Be sure to go to the bathroom before the performance begins. It is hard to leave once the performance begins.
- Make yourself comfortable while keeping movement to a minimum.
- Please do not stand up, walk around or put your feet on the seat in front of you.
- Absolutely no gum chewing, eating or drinking in the theatre.

## **Noise**

Live theatre means live actors who can hear not only what is happening on the stage, but in the audience as well. While laughter and applause at appropriate time are appreciated by the actors, excessive noise and talking is not. Even whispering voices can be distracting to the actors and others in the audience.

- Do not talk during the performance.
- Cell phones are prohibited in the theatre. If you have one turn it off and put it away and do not bring it out during the performance.

## **Applause**

Applause is used to acknowledge the performers and to voice appreciation or approval. Traditionally, applause comes before intermission and at the performance's conclusion. Dimming the lights on the stage and bringing up the house lights usually signals these intervals. A curtain call in which the cast returns to the stage for bows usually follows a performance.



## Student Evaluation Form—Steel Magnolias

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_

What was your overall reaction to the play?

What was your reaction to the production values of the play (costumes, scenery, acting, etc.)?

What was your favorite part of the play?

Did you learn anything from this production? If so, what?

What other stories would you enjoy seeing staged by live actors?

Please list other comments and observations?

Please help New Stage by sharing your thoughts with us!  
Return this form to Chris Roebuck  
New Stage Theatre  
1100 Carlisle St/ Jackson, MS 39202  
or fax to 601.948.3538

## Teacher Evaluation Form—*Steel Magnolias*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ School: \_\_\_\_\_

What is your overall reaction to the production?

How do you feel about the production values of the performance (costumes, set, performers, etc?)

How did your students react to the production? (We would appreciate any written response from your students)

Please comment on the educational value of the program.

What is your overall reaction to the question and answer (talk-back) session?

How did you hear about the New Stage production of *Steel Magnolias*?

What other plays would you like for your students to see?

Please list other comments and observations.

Please help New Stage by sharing your thoughts with us! Return form to:  
Chris Roebuck/ New Stage Theatre/ 1100 Carlisle St/ Jackson, MS 39202  
or fax to 601.948.3538.

**Material for this study guide was  
obtained from The Alliance Theatre and  
Blinn College Division of Visual and  
Performing Arts**