

The Wells College Theatre Department and The Inns of Aurora proudly present...

Miss Valentine

Valentine's Day Weekend: February 14-15, 2020

A Holiday Weekend and Victorian-styled celebration for Valentines, Gal-entines, Pal-entines, Families, Friends, and the Aurora Community inspired by the life and work of "The Mother of the American Valentine," Esther Howland



Photos from a previous production of Miss Valentine

Miss Valentine is a charming, classic style play reminiscent of a Jane Austen novel, peppered with the love poems of Victorian Valentine cards. The romantic and empowering tale is inspired by the life of Victorian era entrepreneur Esther Howland, "The Mother of the American Valentine." Esther popularized the custom of exchanging Valentines by individually crafting cards containing mottos of love which are still sought after by collectors today. By pursuing her passion and staying true to her vision, Esther became one of the first successful businesswomen in America. The play is approximately 85 minutes long and performed by an ensemble of six actors and a harpist. At various points in the play, the cast creates life-sized Valentines reminiscent of the Howland cards.

Miss Valentine

Plotline

The play begins as Esther dreams of starting her own woman-run Valentine business, despite all odds, while she is studying at Mount Holyoke Seminary. Esther fabricates Valentines and mottos for her college classmates and, like a female Cyrano, fosters the love lives of these young Victorian women. The play weaves back and forth between Esther's life in Massachusetts in the 1850's as she realizes her dream of running her own business, and her fantasies, where the tale of Saint Valentine acts like her muse as she creates romantic cards. In the legend, Saint Valentine is imprisoned for breaking the Roman Emperor's decree against marriage and holding nuptial ceremonies. While in prison, he falls passionately in love with the warden's daughter. Saint Valentine's passionate and heart-wrenching tale mirrors the landscape of Esther's own heart. As Esther grows into a successful businesswoman, her courage inspires her college friends to grow into more confident women.



Who was *The Mother of the American Valentine*?

Esther Howland entered college in 1847, the year before the first meeting of the Women's Suffrage Movement led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton. In 1850, the National Women's Rights Convention was held in Esther's hometown of Worcester, Massachusetts. Growing up with a father who was an avid supporter of the Women's Movement, Esther was given the opportunity to live her life as a modern woman. As one of the first female college students in the United States, Esther attended Mount Holyoke Seminary along with Emily Dickinson, who is also a character in *Miss Valentine*. Coincidentally, Emily Dickinson's first published poem in the Mount Holyoke magazine was a valentine.



According to Mount Holyoke College, Esther used family connections to gather lace, colored paper, and other Valentine decorations to hand craft her own Valentine cards. Howland pioneered innovations in card design, including cards that open to reveal their messages, and the use of glitter as a decorative element. Her cards were in such high demand, that she had a thriving business overnight. To keep up with her clients' orders, Howland recruited her Mount Holyoke friends to manufacture the cards on an all-female assembly line. Her company brought in annual revenues of \$100,000, and in 1879 it was named the New England Valentine Company and moved from Esther's family home to a building of its own. In 1881, Howland sold the business to the George C. Whitney Company.

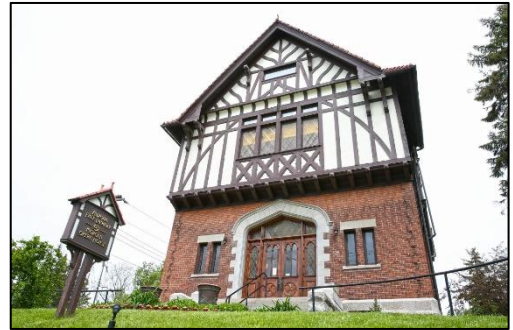
Actual Esther Howland valentines will be on display at the performances of Miss Valentine!



Wells College Presents New Play about “The Mother of the American Valentine”

“Miss Valentine” will be performed February 14 and 15 at the Morgan Opera House in Aurora.

AURORA, N.Y. — The Wells College Theatre Department is proud to present “Miss Valentine,” a new play by Nadine Bernard. “Miss Valentine” will be performed at the Morgan Opera House above the Aurora Free Library in Aurora, NY on Friday, February 14 at 6:00pm and Saturday, February 15, 2019 at 3:00pm and 6:00pm. The box office will open 30 minutes prior to each performance. Admission is \$10 for general public, \$7 for seniors, \$5 for children, and free for Wells College students, faculty, and staff.



Each February, the Department of Theatre and Dance invites an alumnus or alumna of Wells to participate in a production as a playwright, director, choreographer, actor, dancer or designer. This year’s alumni production features dramaturg Claudia Nolan ’12. Claudia is a dramaturg and theater-maker particularly interested in new play development, as well as multicultural and international theater. She is currently the Literary Associate at Premiere Stages in Union, NJ. She received her MFA in Dramaturgy at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, where her thesis focused on cross-cultural fairytales and the importance of place in performance. She has worked at Geva Theatre Center, McCarter Theatre, New Georges, HERE, MuCCC, and Bread and Water Theatre.

The production is directed by professor of theatre Siouxsie Easter. Actors involved include Wells students: Mallory Cleere ’20, Ally Collins ’20, Sarah Derocher ’23, Luke Lauchle ’20, and Maeve Wright. AJ Sage, a popular actor and director whose work has been featured at many New York State theatres guest stars as Mr. Valentine. The set is designed by assistant professor of theatre Patti Goebel. Lighting design is by Julie Bacorn ’20. Barbara Murphy is designing the costumes. The show is stage managed by Nash ’23 and Macy Salico ’23. The cast features student actors from all disciplines and class years, and the stage crew is made up of both students experienced in technical theatre and those new to the field.

Admission to “Miss Valentine” is \$10 for the general public, \$7 for seniors, \$5 for children, and free for Wells College students, faculty, and staff. Tickets are available by calling the box office at 315.364.3232 and in person at the door. For more information, please contact Professor Siouxsie Easter at seaster@wells.edu or 315.364.3232.

About Wells College

Wells College (wells.edu) is a nationally recognized private coeducational liberal arts college located in Aurora, New York, on the eastern shore of Cayuga Lake. Celebrating its 150th anniversary in the 2018-2019 year, Wells has remained committed to providing a quality education to students through small, interactive classes in multiple disciplines and engaging coursework relevant to life in a changing world. Integrated hands-on learning opportunities, a connected community, and diverse educational opportunities give students the ability to take part in their own educations and prepare them to be active citizens and leaders.

Contact: Siouxsie Easter, Professor of Theatre, seaster@wells.edu, 315.364.3232

Dinner and Show Packages Available from the Inns of Aurora

Friday February 14th, 2020

6:00pm: Performance of Miss Valentine at Morgan Opera House

8:00pm: Lovebird Dinner: 1833 Kitchen & Bar

Saturday February 15th, 2020

3:00pm: Matinee Performance of Miss Valentine at Morgan Opera House

TBA: Early bird Dinner: 1833 Kitchen & Bar

TBA: Night bird Dinner: 1833 Kitchen & Bar

6:00pm: Performance of Miss Valentine at Morgan Opera House

8:00pm: Night bird Dinner: 1833 Kitchen & Bar

Join us at a workshop and craft a Howland-inspired Valentine



Design Valentine's Day jewelry in a workshop led by a local craftsperson TBA



*Potential
Community
Involvement*

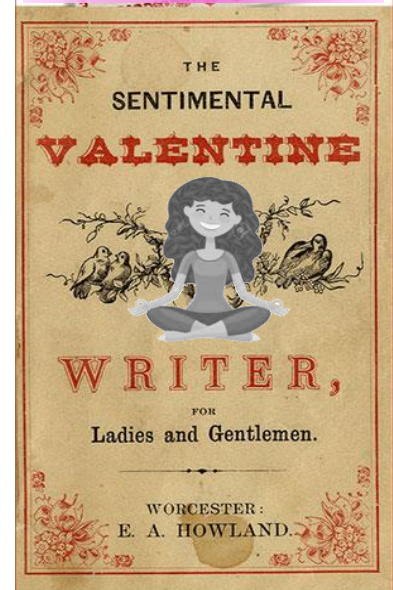
Relax with a warm cup of our specially blended Valentine tea, made with love



Our chefs demonstrate how to make beautiful Valentine's Day treats at Aurora Cooks



Tucked inside each Howland card was a customized motto. Soothe Your Soul with a Class in Mottos & Meditation!



Local vendors bring their wares to The Inns of Aurora





PLAYWRIGHT: Nadine Bernard is a Playwright and Drama Therapist in the NYC area whose plays focus on women's issues, current social issues and breaking down barriers of stigma/intolerance. She holds a BA from Cornell University and an MFA in Theater from Sarah Lawrence. Recent plays include *The Ivy Railroad* (developed in the NJ Playlab, 2019), *Female Factor* (Dreamcatcher Repertory, staged reading, February 2017), *Seize the Day After* (Director Jane Mandel, Founding Artistic Director Emerita

Luna Stage, staged readings at The Theater Project, May 2017 and Inauguration of Cornerstone, Montclair creating awareness about living with disabilities, October 2017, Drew University, Luna roundtable readings), *Opportunity of a Lifetime* (Industry reading 2016, Director Andy Sandberg, with Maddie Corman, Rachel deBenedet), *Veils* (HB Studios Playwrights Foundation staged reading series, 2014). *The Way to Summer* presented with Tovah Feldshuh and Russell G. Jones in staged reading at the Directors Company 2012. *In the Shadow of My Son*, creating awareness about postpartum depression, produced across the country and in the New York International Fringe Festival - a monologue published in Smith and Kraus Best Women's Stage Monologues 2008. Nadine is a facilitator and ensemble member of Circle of Sparks Playback Theater in Montclair, NJ. Member of The Dramatist Guild and the League of Professional Theatre Women. Contact: (917) 364-4538, ndf3@cornell.edu.

PRODUCER: Ivy Austin is a native New Yorker and lifetime entertainment professional. Her performance career has taken her from Broadway to New York City Opera to National Public Radio ("A Prairie Home Companion") to Sesame Street (and The Muppets). Ms. Austin created and produced several musical series at the World Financial Center in NYC (including Women On Broadway, The Tony Awards-50 Years of Broadway's Best Musicals, A Centennial Salute to George & Ira Gershwin, Songs from Shubert Stages, & The Great Songwriters of Hollywood) in collaboration with the Rodgers & Hammerstein Organization, Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS, Camp Broadway, The Library of Congress and WNYC. On NPR, Ms. Austin produced "Christmas at Rainbow Corner" and "Her Funny Valentine," a tribute to Lorenz Hart. Other credits include vocal performances at Avery Fisher Hall, City Center, and Carnegie Hall, and a decade as a lyricist and performer with the Thalia Follies political cabaret at Symphony Space. An alumna of Performing Arts and Colgate University, Ms. Austin is a lecturer and arts educator, and is currently pursuing a Masters of Science in Marriage and Family Therapy in hopes of serving the performing arts community in an additional capacity. A long-standing member of the League of Professional Theatre Women, AEA, and SAG-AFTRA, Ms. Austin is an associate of SunnySpot Productions, a Tony Award-winning independent theatre and events company in NYC. Please visit ivyaustrin.com and sunnyspotproductions.com.



DIRECTOR: Siouxsie Easter is a director, devised theatre artist, and a Professor of Theatre at Wells College in Aurora, NY. In 2014, she helped found the Theatre Summer School for Advanced Studies in England in Bath where she taught for three summers. She specializes in new works, devised theatre, improvisation, and Restoration Comedy. Siouxsie holds an MFA from Goddard College and an MEd in Drama from UNCG. Recent directing projects include *My Brave Face* at the Rondo Theatre in Bath, England and the workshop production of *Lobster Tale* by Alison Farina at Theatre West Fest in Trowbridge, England. Her most recent Wells College directing credits include *Eurydice* and *The Last Five Years*. seaster@wells.edu

Future Plans for *Miss Valentine* ~ “Theatre for the Heart”™

The objective of this document is to demonstrate the commercial viability of an immersive, site-specific, theatrical event, *Miss Valentine* ~ “Theatre for the Heart.”™ Our vision is a one-hour and thirty-minute event during which audiences enjoy a performance of *Miss Valentine*, a play about universal love, and Victorian high tea service. We propose that this timeless “Theatre for the Heart”™ experience will be enjoyed by Mothers & Daughters, Families, Romantic Dreamers, and all those who believe everyday can be Valentine's Day.

Our goal is to expand our producing team and capitalize a first-class, site-specific production to be performed in a theatrical setting such as a Victorian salon or tea house with whom we would partner and share revenue. This original play is performed by an ensemble of five actors and underscored by one harpist, which makes it both affordable and portable.

Strategies for development include:

- A staged presentation for potential collaborators and investors.
- Commitment from a collaborating venue.
- Public performances at venue, number of performances per week to be determined.
- Special event performances for groups may include: Birthdays, Engagements, Bridal Showers, Anniversary Parties, Sweet Sixteens, Quinceañeras, Bat Mitzvahs, Women in Business Events, Social Groups, and Valentine's Day seasonal events.
- Touring to Private In-home Parties, Museums, Colleges and Universities.
- Additional commercial opportunities: Licensing, Merchandising (greeting cards, how-to-books, Victorian clothing and collectibles) Film, and Television.
- Soliciting partnerships and cross-promotional opportunities with Valentine's Day businesses associated with Romance: Greeting Cards, Jewelry, Flowers, Chocolates, Wine, Lingerie, Dating sites, Hotels and Inns.

Experiencing “Theatre for the Heart”™

Miss Valentine offers an elegant and intimate version of the site-specific experience, as guests feel like they are transported back in time to the mid-19th century. They enter a Victorian Salon with dark wood paneling where time moves slowly, and every quiet moment is rich with experience. The hostess drapes the ladies with lace shawls and adorns the men with ascots, then escorts them to their tables. Tables are set with elegant china, a little booklet of Esther Howland greeting card verse, and pencils with vintage paper. Guests enjoy an elegant tea service with crumpets, scones, and heart-shaped



finger sandwiches, as live harp music sweeps through the room. The tea cups settle in their saucers, and the cast enters donned in Victorian attire, creating a tableau of an Esther Howland Valentine card. And the play begins. With minimal set pieces and props, the actors create the world of the play around the audience. Since actors are sometimes only an arm's length away, the audience feels like they are inside the play. They are invited to eavesdrop on intimate conversations of young love and peer through a secret window into Esther's passionate fantasies of St. Valentine. When the play comes to a close, guests can relish in the moment, as they are served truffles, coffee or hot chocolate and Victorian confections. Guests are now encouraged to write their own Valentine mottos in the Esther Howland style. Vintage-style photos are taken with friends and family against a lace backdrop. Guests' photos and original mottos will be inserted into a template, creating a personalized Valentine for a keepsake or gift. As they leave, guests are given a laced bag of tea, ribbons, perfume and chocolates, as a memento of their *Miss Valentine* experience.

Inspiration & Style

There is a whole genre of romantic, classic literature of Jane Austen, Charlotte and Emily Bronte, Edith Wharton, etc. and the films based on their books, which mothers and daughters, sisters and their dates, have reveled in for decades. *Miss Valentine* is written in this style, which we are calling "Theater for the Heart," as it offers a much-needed escape from the clutter of our minds in today's world. In addition, the interwoven scenes of Saint Valentine and the warden's daughter tantalize the audience with echoes of a Romeo and Juliet rendezvous.

As Esther crafts her cards in her imagination, the cast of *Miss Valentine* creates life sized tableaux of Valentines on stage. With the use of ribbons, lace, silk flowers, harp music and the poetry of the cards read aloud, the audience is drawn into a three-dimensional experience of Esther's gorgeous and timely cards. In the venue, artifacts of antique Valentine's, including some of Esther's cards, will be displayed, creating the enchanting and haunting sense that Esther has blessed the world with Valentine's forever.

Ancillary Commercial Opportunities

Licensing, Merchandising, Books, Film, and Television

Following the performance guests may pose for vintage-style individual or group photos, which will then be placed into Esther Howland style Valentine cards to be made available for purchase.

Online and On-site Gift Shops for *Miss Valentine* merchandise. Items for sale may include:

- Victorian Keepsakes and Clothing
- Books of Verse
- Candles & Soaps
- Teas & Tea Sets
- Journals & Calendars
- Crafting How-to Books



Contact: Ivy Austin at 646-456-8839 or email helloivyaustrin@gmail.com