

# Shaker Bridge taps New York actor, director, and educator for Managing Director role

By Sara Lieberth  
Standard Correspondent

Fulfilling a dream both professionally and personally, New York theater director, educator and former actor Adrian Wattenmaker has taken the helm as Managing Director of the Shaker Bridge Theatre in White River Junction.

Wattenmaker moved to the Upper Valley in August just before the current season — a longtime dream, he says, “to escape the concrete,” of the big city and opt for a quiet life filled with the types of nature-based adventures he enjoys, and that the area offers in terms of hiking and kayaking, but especially skiing.

“I’d been wanting to move up to Vermont for some time,” he told the Standard, “I love the outdoors and have been an avid skier in the past.”

Born in Michigan but most recently hailing from Jersey City, N.J., Wattenmaker has been a fixture in the New York City theater world for nearly three decades, with credits ranging from small and large productions, many of them award-winning productions to virtual performances during the pandemic, which hurt the live performance arts in a big way.

He explains it was a mutual friend who “ran in all the same theater circles I did” and who recommended him for the position, sight unseen, knowing of his desire to relocate out of New York.

He brings a three-pronged background first as an actor, then theater educator and director, despite originally moving to New York to pursue work in film in the early 1990s, he says: “I pursued acting for a decade, then transitioned into directing after grad school”

The education portion of his career began at the New York Film Academy, where he developed the acting program that was launched as the Academy’s acting school in 2003. Wattenmaker moved to the School of Creative and Performing Arts in 2009, where he was head of the acting program, and eventually, director of the L.A. campus. He earned his B.A. in Theatre Arts from Towson University and his MFA in Directing from Brooklyn College.



**Adrian Wattenmaker is the new Managing Director at White River Junction's Shaker Bridge Theatre.**

Courtesy of Adrian Wattenmaker

As an actor, he contributed to Off-Broadway productions of “Requiem for a Heavyweight” and the award-winning production of Sam Shepard’s *Seduced*. Among his many theatre and film credits, Wattenmaker has worked in association with Studio USA/Universal, NBC (“Law & Order” and “SNL”), Greg Stump Productions/Delamo Films, Setton Sun Productions, Four Act Films, Atlantic Theater Company, Second Stage Theater, LAByrnth Theater Company, The Amoralists Theatre Company, HB Playwrights Foundation, Theatre Row, and 59E59 Theaters.

## Now more space, staff, and audience

As a director, his accomplishments include Associate Director of the 2022-23 Tony Award-nominated Broadway production of Stephen Adly Guirgis’ Pulitzer Prize-winning play “Between Riverside and Crazy.” He directed Margaret Ladd and Lyle Kessler in Lyle’s play “Obituary” as part of LAByrnth’s 30th Anniversary Series. As Associate Artistic Director of Hudson Theatre Works (Weehawken, N.J.), credits include Eugene O’Neill’s “Hughie,” the world premiere of Neil LaBute’s “A Good Thing,” and the world premiere of John Patrick Shanley’s “The Wake” (as Producer).

Relatively new to the area itself, Shaker Bridge Theatre relocated to White River Junction in 2023, having called Enfield, N.H., home for the past 15 years. Now housed in the Briggs Opera House, the move increased the size of the performance space itself, from 80 to 100 seats at its former locale to the current potential for up to 240 seats in the new Upper Valley home.

“Enfield was a small, intimate theater, and while we will try to maintain some of that experience, the move allows us to be more accessible for more people,” Wattenmaker states.

Metrics of further growth can already be seen in ticket

sales, which he says are up 50 percent, as well as season ticket holders, up 54 percent year on year.

“Shaker Bridge, and what Bill started here, is ideal to keeping that intimate, personal theater experience.”

As Managing Director, Wattenmaker will oversee the day-to-day operations, including working closely with the non-profit’s Board of Directors, “serving on all the committees,” he jokes, with a focus on fundraising, finances, grant acquisitions, staffing and maybe even a bit of directing next year.

Under the guidance of Artistic Director Bill Coons, who is credited with maintaining and building the regional audience during his tenure with Shaker Bridge from its onset, the Theatre has more staff than ever before, as they look to keep the momentum going.

Remaining on the bill for the rest of this season are “The Wickhams: Christmas at Pemberley,” running Dec. 5-22, “The Effect,” Jan. 23 to Feb. 9, and “Maytag Virgin,” May 8-25. For the current season, which is the company’s 17th, Coons developed a lineup of all-women playwrights, the second year in a row of dedication to the theme.

He says hiring Wattenmaker in conjunction with the Board of Directors was as much about Adrian as it was taking some of the load off his plate.

“With our move to White River Junction and our surprisingly rapid growth,” Coons offers, “it became clear that my job as Artistic Director was becoming too large for one person. My job is much easier when I have a partner who is so good at so many things.”

Rounding out the Shaker Bridge staff are Craig Mowery, Set Designer, who likewise serves as Technical Director of Pentangle Arts at the Woodstock Town Hall Theatre, Clif Rogers as Stage Manager, Joy Kosta as House/Box Office Manager (who just completed a reading of her musical *Tango*

Tonight! at Pentangle, and Martie Betts as Costume Designer, who likewise runs the costume department for Parish Players in Thetford, Vt.

“With Adrian here, I am continually amazed at his clarity of focus and his unrelenting drive to steer this theatre,” Coons adds. “His management style makes solving enormously

complex challenges look simple and his lively imagination brings ideas and solutions that move us into the future. An added bonus to having Adrian here is that everyone feels so comfortable and valued around him. He’s what we need to keep moving forward.”

