

WHO'S NEXT.

EMERGING THEATER ACTORS IN NORTHEAST OHIO ▶

Cleveland is home to a thriving theater scene within and beyond the primary Playhouse Square district, extending to east- and west-side organizations putting on top-notch productions each season. At the heart of all successful plays are star actors who create special experiences for their audiences, in addition to those who work skillfully behind the scenes. Northeast Ohio has a long list of rising actors who work hard in an industry that can be competitive and challenging to break into, but who continue to raise the bar for what local productions can be. As such, in this fall stage issue of Canvas, we highlight a few talented, skilled and dedicated actors, all associated with different area theater companies which shared their names as important ones to watch.



Photo / Roger Mastroianni



Photo / Steve Wagner



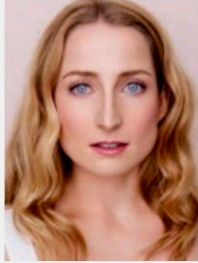
Photo / Kierstan Kathleen Conway

MADALYN BAKER

Age: 27 • **Home:** Cleveland • **Performs:** Cleveland Play House

By John Engoglia

Madalyn Baker's journey as an actor has taken her from California to New York, to Cleveland and to Moscow.



Growing up in Pleasanton, Calif., Baker was obsessed with the arts and theater, she says. Her parents were both artsy, and they took her to art

museums and shows such as "Stomp" and Shakespeare in the Park in San Francisco. She got her first role while enrolled in Shakespeare in the Park's summer program in elementary school, where she played Valentine in "The Two Gentlemen of Verona."

"I was very interested in imagination, like imagined worlds and playing pretend," Baker says. "I really fell in love with theater as a way to explore that."

Baker attended Amador Valley High School in her hometown, where she was in the marching band and drama program. She first wanted to attend Fordham University in the Bronx, N.Y., because a friend had gone there.

"I wanted to be in the place where theater was happening," Baker says.

Moving from the West Coast to the East Coast was a big change for Baker. However, she became more and more comfortable with New York City over time, and fell in love with the fast-paced city life, she says. Throughout her time at Fordham, Baker had the opportunity to do more than act as she worked with costume designers and playwrights to stretch herself as an artist.

While at Fordham, Baker studied abroad at Moscow Art Theatre School in Russia for three months. She also had the chance to go to London, but she saw the Moscow trip as a once in a lifetime opportunity. She described her trip as amazing and formative, but she also said living there was challenging due to the "backwards" society of Russia. Despite this, she says the theater and performances were nothing like she's seen in the U.S.

Baker also took improv classes at the Upright Citizens Brigade in New York, where she gained the ability to become "elastic and responsive" on stage, she recalls.



▲ Madalyn Baker plays the mechanic/aunt in "Middletown" at Cleveland Play House in February. Photo / Roger Mastroianni

"You have to make something out of nothing while you're doing it," Baker says. "It's just a good challenge mentally, and a good collaborative experience."

Following graduation from Fordham with a theater degree in 2018, Baker knew she wanted to go to graduate school to gain more intensive theater training, she says. She thought it would also give her the time, space and attention to figure out what she wanted to do as an artist and performer.

Baker applied to several schools, and met with the director of the Case Western Reserve University MFA acting program. Her audition went well, and she noted how director Don Carrier took an interest in her other artistic work besides acting, unlike other schools.

Since joining the MFA program at CWRU, which has a collaborative partnership with Cleveland Play House,




▲ Madalyn Baker, center, performs as Sally Bowles in Case Western Reserve University's production of "Cabaret" in April. Photo / Steve Wagner

Baker has played roles such as Sally Bowles in "Cabaret" and the mechanic in "Middletown" at Cleveland Play House. Playing Bowles was one of her favorite roles, she says.

"I loved playing with all those elements of someone who can really shine but has this gross underbelly to them where she's very self-destructive and drinks a lot," Baker says. "Getting to play her was such a dream."

Baker is set to graduate from CWRU in 2026. At the moment, she doesn't know what the future holds for her, but her hope is to continue performing worldwide.

"I would love to have an artistic life where I get to travel a lot – I would love to work abroad," she says. 

WHAT'S NEXT

• Baker will perform in the ensemble of "Pride and Prejudice" and as an understudy for Lizzie in the Cleveland Play House production from Sept. 7-27, at Allen Theatre, 1407 Euclid Ave., Cleveland. Call 216-241-6000 or visit clevelandplayhouse.com for tickets and more information.



"From Madalyn's initial audition for the MFA program, it was clear that this was a young woman of great creativity, originality and focus. Her talents have grown in the year in which she has been one of our students and she continues to show her range in comedy, drama and music. She is incredibly disciplined, hard-working and collaborative with the rest of her classmates. She is a joy to teach and mentor as her work-ethic is formidable and she has such a positive outlook. I directed her in a production of 'Middletown' this past year and she always brought a wealth of ideas to the rehearsal process. She is always curious and

continues to go deeper in her work and exploration of character. She is brave and not afraid to make 'out of the box' choices that are still informed by the text and given circumstances of a play."

Don Carrier, director

Case Western Reserve University/Cleveland Play House MFA Acting Program