



# **The Humana Festival: The History of New Plays at Actors Theatre of Louisville (Theater in the Americas)**

*Assistant Professor Jeffrey Ullom*

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Far from the glittering lights of Broadway, in a city known more for its horse racing than its artistic endeavors, an annual festival in Louisville, Kentucky, has transformed the landscape of the American theater. The Actors Theatre of Louisville—the Tony Award–winning state theater of Kentucky—in 1976 successfully created what became the nation's most respected new-play festival, the Humana Festival of New American Plays.

*The Humana Festival: The History of New Plays at Actors Theatre of Louisville* examines the success of the festival and theater's Pulitzer Prize–winning productions that for decades have reflected new-play trends in regional theaters and on Broadway—the result of the calculated decisions, dogged determination, and good luck of its producing director, Jon Jory.

The volume details how Actors Theatre of Louisville was established, why the Humana Festival became successful in a short time, and how the event's success has been maintained by the Louisville venue that has drawn theater critics from around the world for more than thirty years.

Author Jeffrey Ullom charts the theater's early struggles to survive, the battles between troupe leaders, and the desperate measures to secure financial support from the Louisville community. He examines how Jory established and expanded the festival to garner extraordinary local support, attract international attention, and entice preeminent American playwrights to premier their works in the Kentucky city.

In *The Humana Festival*, Ullom provides a broad view of new-play development within artistic, administrative, and financial contexts. He analyzes the relationship between Broadway and regional theaters, outlining how the Humana Festival has changed the process of new-play development and even Broadway's approach to discovering new work, and also highlights the struggles facing regional theaters across the country as they strive to balance artistic ingenuity and economic viability.

Offering a rare look at the annual event, *The Humana Festival* provides the first insider's view of the extraordinary efforts that produced the nation's most successful new-play festival.

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