

The Muny

Municipal Theater Association of St. Louis

The Muny, Forest Park

St. Louis, MO 63112

(314) 361-1900

<http://www.muny.org>

Rating of Accessibility (out of 5 stars)

Overall Rating: 4.75 stars

- Accessible by Metro's bus routes: 5 stars
- Usher staff: 5 stars
- Availability and Quality of Live Descriptive Audio: 5 stars
- Quality of experience if visiting unaccompanied: 4 stars
- Non-visual experience of group tours: 4 stars (under revision)

This evaluation was last updated on June 27, 2016 by Stephen Kissel, Blind Community Enrichment Associate for the St. Louis Lighthouse for the Blind, with the assistance of Mr. Sean Smith, Director of Operations and Facilities for the St. Louis Muny and Ms. Jane Schell, the Muny's Director of Group Sales and Special Events.

For over ninety years, the staff and players at the St. Louis Muny have provided the residents of the St. Louis metropolitan area with a lively and professional summer season of Broadway musicals which have been thoroughly enjoyed by both sighted and non-sighted audiences. This outdoor theater, located in Forest Park, boasts an impressive array of accommodating services, including a well-trained and personable team of ushers, Braille and large-print concession stand menus, affordable seating, intriguing and interactive backstage tours, and an assertive and detailed descriptive audio service. These amenities make the Muny a perfect summer night outing for a blind or visually impaired person with a love of musicals.

The Muny's accessibility through public transportation routes has greatly improved in recent years. The nearest public transportation stop to the Muny is a Metro Link station on DeBaliviere, but thanks to Metro's Summer Trolley service in Forest Park, visitors relying on public transportation can be conveniently shuttled from the Metro station to the Muny's main entrance and box office. In addition to the trolley's normal summer hours (9:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m.), trolley services are extended during the Muny's summer season to specifically

accommodate Muny patrons arriving and departing from the theater. For further details, please see the “Getting Around” section at the beginning of this guide.

Other options for reaching the Muny include Metro’s Call-A-Ride service, local cab companies, and other sighted drivers. Like the Metro Trolley, all three of these modes of transportation will be able to let passengers off within a reasonable walking distance of the main entrance and ticket window. Adventurous explorers can also take the south-bound Number 90 bus from the DeBaliviere station to the History Museum. From this point the individual will still have about a 0.7 mile walk to the main entrance to the Muny. This is not the simplest or most direct route, and if other means of transportation are available, this route should be considered a last resort for sight-impaired individuals.

After reaching the Muny by whatever means are available, there are ushers waiting at the entrance area who may assist the person in locating the ticket window. From this point, an usher can be paged to escort the individual to his or her seat. Sean Smith, the Muny’s Director of Operations and Facilities, expects a high caliber from the performance of his ushers, and it shows when an individual witnesses the service first-hand. Not only are the Muny’s ushers extremely friendly and considerate, but they will go the extra mile to ensure that visitors have a pleasant experience. One will have no trouble soliciting sighted guide assistance in finding one’s seat, and, if requested, ushers will return to check on visitors during intermission and after the final curtain call.

The Muny also has a well-developed team of volunteers who provide live audio description for the blind during every Monday night performance. Descriptions are generally extremely informative, giving the listener a thorough explanation of the sets, costumes, choreography, and other actions visible on stage. In addition, the listener is also given a pre-show description which relates basic information found in the individual’s program and describes some of the major set pieces used in the performance. By relaying such key pieces of information ahead of time, the describers provide accurate and thorough descriptions that enhance rather than detract from the actual performance. Descriptions are received through a wireless headset which may be checked out at the souvenir stand with a valid photo ID card or driver’s license. Beginning with the Muny’s 2016 season, patrons using the descriptive audio service will now be able to pick up a clear signal anywhere in the Muny amphitheater (excluding the Free Seats section).

The Muny has been very generous each season in donating a fixed number of tickets for all Monday night performances to the St. Louis Society for the Blind and Visually Impaired. These complimentary tickets are available in pairs (to accommodate a sighted companion) through a raffle drawing. Interested patrons should contact the St. Louis Society for the Blind at 314-968-9000 for further details. This standing arrangement between the Muny and the St. Louis Society for the Blind has been deeply appreciated, and it enables blind patrons who cannot always afford full-priced Muny tickets to enjoy a theatrical performance of professional quality. Additionally, the Muny continues to reserve the top-most 1500 seats as free and open to the public. All seating sections are spacious enough to accommodate patrons with guide dogs, but requesting an aisle seat when purchasing tickets is still recommended so as not to disrupt the easy flow of traffic into and across the aisles.

As in previous years, the Muny’s concession stand is equipped with a team of friendly and accommodating vendors, as well as Braille and large-print menus, allowing blind or visually

impaired individuals to place an informed and timely order without presenting an inconvenience to other hungry patrons. If the individual is not able or does not have the time to locate the concession stand, vendors make regular rounds through the various seating sections before the performance and during intermission, and they do an adequate job of making themselves heard, so they are very easy to locate.

For groups of twenty or more ticket holders, the Muny offers backstage tours before every performance. These tours are currently undergoing major revisions, so as to make the content and format more accommodating and engaging for blind or visually impaired group members. The script itself is fairly descriptive, and the staff is working to incorporate a larger degree of tactile components to allow both sighted and non-sighted visitors a closer look at the amazing sets and costumes created for Muny productions. The backstage tour provides a fascinating opportunity to go behind the scenes and to discover what it takes to design, rehearse, and execute a professional theatrical production. The guides possess a wealth of intriguing facts about Muny performances and Muny history, and they are eager to answer any questions. Although the tour is only fifteen or twenty minutes long, the guides work hard to ensure that the experience is enjoyable and memorable for all in attendance. The tour concludes on the very stage of the Muny itself, an experience not to be missed. To arrange for a group tour, please contact Jane Schell, the Muny's Director of Group Sales and Special Events, using the contact information provided at the end of this entry. Until such a time as the new enhancements are more solidified, it may be beneficial to contact the Group Sales department, so as to alert the Muny of blind or visually impaired tour group members.

A full description of all services and amenities may be found on the Muny's website. While browsing the web pages, visitors have the ability to also view programs from current and previous seasons which are made available in a pdf format. These program notes are posted by opening night, enabling both sighted and non-sighted individuals to explore basic information about the upcoming shows, its actors, and musical selections. Although a visually impaired individual should have no problem viewing these program notes, a blind individual will have to first translate the graphical images of the programs pages into plain text using either the Kurzweil or Open Book software. Overall, the site remains very accessible to screen reading and screen enlarging software, making it very easy for a blind or visually impaired individual to plan their visit and to obtain information about upcoming performances.

The St. Louis Muny remains America's largest outdoor theater, and its sizable group of committed actors, crew members, and other staff work hard to provide patrons with exceptional productions. Furthermore, the available services such as a rich collection of online programs, a thorough descriptive audio service, and a collection of very accessible staff and crew make the Muny a prime resource for any blind or visually impaired individual who may be interested in attending, learning about, or becoming involved in theatrical productions. Whatever one's reason may be for visiting the Muny, it is bound to be a memorable experience and should be strongly recommended to anyone with an interest in theatrical and musical performances.

For specific details regarding show times and ticket prices, please call Metrotix at: (314) 534-1111.

For any further questions, please contact:

Mr. Sean Smith, Director of Operations and Facilities at the St. Louis Muny

Phone: (314) 361-1900, extension 310

E-mail: ssmith@muny.org

For questions pertaining to backstage group tours, please contact Ms. Jane Schell, Director of Group Sales and Special Events.

Phone: (314) 361-1900, extension 308

E-mail: jschell@muny.org