

NOVEMBER NIGHTS

New
Play
Series



PRESENTING THE WORLD PREMIERE OF *ICE MAIDENS* BY STAN PEAL

Q&A with the Playwright, Director and Artistic Director

What excites you most about working on *Ice Maidens*?

Stan: The opportunity to put it through the paces of a full production, and to premiere one of my plays in my old stomping ground, Minnesota.

Hal: The script is very much evocative of our region, filled with glorious imagery and vivid characterizations. I think the story, and Stan's unique voice, will ring true to our community.

What is the history behind this piece?

Stan: It came from my first visit to Lanesboro. There was something welcoming and invigorating about the cool, crisp air. Cold is usually a negative metaphor in plays – I wanted the cold and ice to be positive and explore the idea of a baptism by ice – to see how the cold can purify and bring new life.

Hal: Stan was commissioned two years ago and spent a year of intermittent weekends working with the company. We then spent a week of intensive work before hosting a staged reading last fall.

What do you hope to learn from a full production that you can't get from a reading?

Scott: A staged reading is sort of like putting a car on a test track. You get a chance to run a few laps to see how it holds up, but it's still a safe environment. When a play gets a full production, it's like handing that new car over to people who will abuse the hell out of it. The director, the designers, the actors – they pull at the seams, twist it as hard as they can, try everything they can think of to break it down before building it back up again. When a script withstands that kind of workout, then you know you've got something.



Artistic director Hal Cropp, playwright Stan Peal and director Scott Dixon discuss the script of *Ice Maidens*. (photo: Jason Underferth)

What are the obstacles playwrights face in developing a script, and how does working with **Commonweal** help overcome them?

Stan: It's a constant reminder that theatre is collaborative and even the playwright is not an isolated artist. There are fragile moments in the beginning of the development of an idea, but as that idea gains its own life and strength, the playwright has to be willing to let go a little and send it through the collective process unique to the theatre. The **Commonweal** seems to have a particular sensitivity to the gradual curve of this shake-up process.

Scott: Producing a new play is a leap of faith, no two ways about it. You can't really mitigate that risk, but you can feel good about taking it if you have a passion for the script. Any play produced by **Commonweal** is on our stage because one of us feels passion for it. That passion doesn't guarantee success, but it promises one interesting ride!

HISTORY OF NEW PLAYS AT THE COMMONWEAL

Vandals, Preachers & Tellers of Tales adapted by Hal Cropp (1994) • The writings of Mark Twain, Henry Ward Beecher and Artemus Ward were woven together with live music from 19th century America.

A Child's Christmas in Wales adapted by Kristen Underwood (1994) • Dylan Thomas' poetic tale received an original adaptation full of music, imagination and remembrances.



A Country Christmas

by Hal Cropp (1995) •

Our third holiday show was set on Christmas Eve, 1938 – the night electricity first lit up rural Bluff Country homes.

Gulliver's Travels adapted by Will Huddleston (1997) • The citizens of Lilliput and Brobdingnag from Jonathan Swift's controversial satire were given a vivid theatrical treatment.



Heartland Portrait by Robert Wolf (1998) •

This work of dramatic fiction was inspired by real life stories of four families, four decades and a time of dramatic transition for farmers.



Star of

England adapted by Eric Bunge (1999) • Shakespeare's Henry IV parts 1 & 2 and Henry V combined to form an epic narrative celebrating Prince Hal's rise from rascal to hero.

The Giving Star by the Commonwealth company (2000) • Born out of necessity after losing the rights to another play, this gem sparkled with holiday tales and a magical journey.

Photos -- clockwise from right:

Beautiful Again, Acclimate, Heartland Portrait, Giving Star, Marguerite Bonet

A Christmas Carol by the Commonwealth company (2001) • Director Robert Larson and the company drew inspiration from Charles Dickens' novella – the result has become an enduring Commonwealth favorite.



Beautiful Again by Melanie Marnich (2003) • This tale of family, fidelity and a transformative hairdo received several workshops with the company before its world premiere.

Marguerite Bonet by Val Smith (2004) • After finding it in a published compilation of plays, we were thrilled to be the first company to give this moving piece its first full production.

The Nutcracker & The Mouse King by Scott Dixon (2005) • An adaptation of the original E.T.A. Hoffmann novella, brought to life in distinctive Commonwealth style.

Acclimate by Victoria Stewart (2006) • This modern adaptation of Ibsen's *Lady from the Sea* was commissioned by the Commonwealth and set in contemporary Lanesboro.

Ice Maidens by Stan Peal (2008) • Continuing the tradition of commissioning plays created for our company — and audience.

About the Playwright

Stan Peal was part of the theatre scene in Minneapolis/St. Paul for ten years before moving to Charlotte, NC in 2001. There, he and wife Laura Depta founded Epic Arts Repertory Theatre, where Stan serves as Managing Director and Resident Playwright. Original plays include *The Friar & The Nurse*, about a secret love affair between Romeo's Friar and Juliet's Nurse, and *The Expanding Sky*, a musical about real-life muleskinner-turned-astronomer Milton Humason. He is the recipient of a 2002 NC Arts/ASC Regional Artists Grant, and an EST/Sloan Foundation Commission. Visit www.stanpeal.com.

WHY WE DO NEW PLAYS

As the major professional theatre serving our region, we have a responsibility to provide the broadest selection of great theatre possible. A major component of that service is the encouragement, development, and production of new works written to speak to and about our community and its issues.

While all great theatre is universal, the paradox of theatre is that only through specificity can universality be achieved. Works that amplify, glorify, or clarify the struggles in which our friends and neighbors are engaged also lend themselves to the greater human condition.

We also believe that plays written not only for a specific audience but for a specific group of artists also stand the best chance of achieving this universality. Consider the works of Shakespeare, Moliere, Chekov, or, more recently, Lanford Wilson and Tracy Letts; though each of these playwrights wrote characters for specific actors, their works speak clearly to the human heart.

Also, the process of developing a new play, with the playwright in the rehearsal room, does give our company the unique opportunity to participate in the development of individual characters. This demands the highest degree of craft an actor can bring to the table, asking questions of motivations, habits, characteristics which, when applied to classical dramatic literature, yields deeper, more richly textured performances.

Finally, developing new plays honors the tradition that Henrik Ibsen, our patron saint (so to speak) engendered. Not for nothing is he known as the Father of Modern Drama. The trail he blazed in bringing the modern sensibility to the stage can be trod by all the new playwrights we engage, allowing his legacy to burn even brighter.

WHY YOU SHOULD SEE A NEW PLAY

Many theatergoers look forward to seeing certain plays by certain playwrights, the way they look forward to a new book by a favorite author, or the next episode of a favorite television series. So why would anyone want to watch a new play that they've never heard of by someone they don't know?

After the playwright and the artists at the Commonweal have worked with a script, there comes a time when a crucial ingredient is needed in the mix — an audience. Betsy Holbrook of Lanesboro has been to most new play readings at

About *Ice Maidens*

Lisa, a young woman estranged from her family, is traveling through her Minnesota hometown accompanied by her boyfriend, Wes on their way to California. Their arrival is a surprise to her parents - Ron and Joanne - and her younger sister, Mandy. Tensions in the house run high and Ron explains to Wes that almost twenty years ago, Lisa was crossing a lake with her middle sister, Stefanie, when the ice gave way and Stefanie drowned. A shadow of guilt and blame has lain over the family, eventually driving Lisa away. Now, as the family is compelled to face its past, they will find one last chance to come together or break apart forever.



Director Scott Dixon and actors Kimberly Maas, Hal Cropp and David Harmann rehearse a scene from *Ice Maidens*.
(photo: Jason Underferth)

the Commonweal, including the one for *Ice Maidens*. "I love the discussions," she says, referring to the talkbacks held with cast and playwright. "Listening to how the playwrights come up with their ideas and seeing how it all comes together. I mean, where else can a playwright have an opportunity like this to work with a cast and hear what an audience has to say about their script?"

The presence of an audience helps the playwright see their work objectively. Even so, it's a risk to share with the public something you've been working on in private. Yet for some, that's exactly the reason they want to come. "We've seen the classics," adds Jackie Rehm, also of Lanesboro. "It's exciting to see something new, something current spreading its wings and taking off – without the safety net of how it might have been done before."

TICKET INFORMATION



ICE MAIDENS

by Stan Peal

Previews Oct. 30 & 31; Opens Nov. 1 — Closes Nov. 16
ALL SHOWS feature a talk-back with the cast and playwright.
Opening night features a post-show celebration open to all!

**LIMITED RUN — 12 SHOWS ONLY
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