



NEWS RELEASE

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COMMONWEAL THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS
JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN

LANESBORO, MINN. — The Commonwealth Theatre Company is currently presenting Henrik Ibsen's *John Gabriel Borkman*, now through June 11. Call the box office at 800-657-7025 or visit the Commonwealth online at www.commonwealththeatre.org for exact performance dates and times.

Ibsen's next-to-last play is a story written over a hundred years ago that could've come from yesterday's headlines. Former Bank Director John Gabriel Borkman has secluded himself for years on the second floor of his house, following a prison term for embezzlement of investor funds. Meanwhile, a war of wills has erupted between Borkman's wife, Gunhild and her twin sister, Ella, over the future of John and Gunhild's son, Erhart. Now grown to a young man, Erhart is caught between accepting the life-long responsibility for cleansing the Borkman family name, or devoting his life to his aunt, who has raised him as if he were her own.

Risa Brainin, former Resident Director with The Guthrie Theater and current professor at the University of California at Santa Barbara, returned to Minnesota to direct this production. "My reading of the play

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happened to coincide with Bernie Madoff's arrest," Brainin remembers. "In this play, we meet the banker (Borkman) eight years after his prison sentence has ended, and he is absolutely without remorse for his crimes. What are the after-effects of such a crime on the family, the friends, the community and the perpetrator himself? Imagine sitting down with Ruth Madoff and the boys 15 years from now."

With such a context, Commonweal commissioned Minnesota playwright Jeffrey Hatcher to create a new, contemporary adaptation. Hatcher's plays are performed across the country and his Broadway and Off Broadway productions include *Three Viewings*, *Scotland Road*, *Tuesdays With Morrie*, and an adaptation of Henry James' ghost story *The Turn of the Screw* (which Commonweal will be producing later this year).

Hatcher's work with Ibsen, invigorating the renowned playwright's story with a 21st century energy, has drawn rave reviews from audiences. The opening weekend of *John Gabriel Borkman*, April 16th to the 17th, coincided as usual with Commonweal Theatre's annual Ibsen Festival. This year, more than 500 people attended Festival events - including lectures by Simon Williams (University of California at Santa Barbara) and Hank Shea (University of St Thomas), readings of new Norse myths by Dag Rossman, a concert by Dianne Jarvi, and artisan displays throughout Lanesboro celebrating Scandinavian art and culture.

The cast of *John Gabriel Borkman* features Commonweal Resident Artists Stela Burdt, Laura Depta, Sarah Kathryn Hawkins, David Hennessey, Tim Sailer, Adrienne Sweeney and Commonweal Theatre Artistic Director Hal Cropp in the title role. This show also marks the Commonweal debut for Siobhan Bremer, an associate professor of theatre at the University of Minnesota Morris.

Stan Peal serves as stage manager and designed sound elements for the show. He led the production team consisting of designers Nayna Ramey (sets), Michael Klaers (lights) and Christine Johnson (costumes). Havilah Imfeld was the assistant director.

Thanks to support from F&M Community Bank, special weekday matinee performances are available for school groups at only \$3 per person which includes a study guide and pre-show workshop with the actors. The production is underwritten by Thrivent Financial for Lutherans.

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All performances are at the Commonweal Theatre, 208 Parkway Avenue North in downtown Lanesboro. Ticket prices are \$25, with discounts available for students, and groups of ten or more. There will be a sign language interpreted performance on Sunday May 2 with half-price tickets for the hearing impaired. For ticket reservations or information about any Commonweal events or programs, call 800-657-7025 or 507-467-2905, or email tickets@commonwealtheatre.org.

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