

PlayNotes SEASON: 46
ISSUE: 4

John Coriani's
**Almost,
Maine**

PORLANDSTAGE
The Theater of Maine

Discussion Series

Page to Stage discussions are presented in partnership with the Portland Public Library. These discussions, led by Portland Stage artistic staff, actors, directors, and designers answer questions, share stories and explore the challenges of bringing a particular play to the stage. Page to Stage occurs at noon on the Tuesday two weeks before a show opens at the Portland Public Library's Main Branch.

The Artistic Perspective, hosted by Artistic Director Anita Stewart, is an opportunity for audience members to delve deeper into the themes of the show through conversation with special guests. A different scholar, visiting artist, playwright, or other expert will join the discussion each time. The Artistic Perspective discussions are held after the first Sunday matinee performance.

Curtain Call discussions offer a rare opportunity for audience members to talk about the production with the performers. Through this forum, the audience and cast explore topics that range from the process of rehearsing and producing the text to character development to issues raised by the work. Curtain Call discussions are held after the second Sunday matinee performance.

*All discussions are free and open to the public. Show attendance is not required.
To subscribe to a discussion series performance, please call the Box Office at
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AROOSTOOK COUNTY, MAINE.

John Cariani's *Almost, Maine*

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Focus Questions

BY ISABELLA BREZENSKI & MADISON WORTHINGTON

1. *Almost, Maine* takes place in northern Maine where the playwright, John Cariani, grew up. If you were to write a play about the town or city you grew up in, what would it be like? How would you portray the people and location?
2. *Almost, Maine* is distinctly about northern Maine and the communities there. In fact, the playwright, John Cariani, dedicates the play to “Northern Maine and the people who live there.” When you think of northern Maine, what comes to mind? Do you have preexisting knowledge, thoughts, or opinions about the region?
3. *Almost, Maine* is a compilation of vignettes. A vignette is a short scene exploring a specific character, image, or idea that contributes to a larger body of work. Can you think of any other scripts, novels, movies, or TV shows that use vignettes? Knowing that *Almost, Maine* explores the topic of love, why do you think playwright John Cariani chose this style?
4. *Almost, Maine* deals with the complicated topic of love. It is comprised of nine vignettes that present different characters and scenarios in which love is the driving force of the action. In what ways has love affected moments, actions, or decisions in your own life?
5. While most of the characters in *Almost, Maine* appear only once in the play, many of them are referenced in other scenes. Because of this, we discover that the characters are connected to each other and gather that this is a play about a small town and community. How has your community and the people in it affected your life?

Pre-Show Activities

BY ISABELLA BREZENSKI & MADISON WORTHINGTON

1. John Cariani, the playwright of *Almost, Maine*, grew up in Maine! He is an actor and playwright who has been on Broadway multiple times. Research John Cariani to find out more about his life and career as an artist from Maine. Write down a few fun facts you learn and share them with your classmates.
2. *Almost, Maine* consists of 19 characters, but is written for four actors. This means that each actor plays multiple characters, which is called double casting. Imagine you are an actor playing multiple characters. Write a paragraph about what you could do to distinguish each of the characters you play. For more information on double casting, check out “A Behind-the-Scenes Look at Double Casting” on page 18.
3. *Almost, Maine* takes place in a fictional location in northern Maine. The playwright, John Cariani, specifies that “were it to exist, Almost would be located in the remote heart of Aroostook County, the sparsely populated, northernmost county in Maine. It would occupy unorganized territory that is officially designated as Township Thirteen, Range Seven, or T13 R7.” Look up images of this location and make a collage using clippings from what you find. You can also use drawings of your own, images from magazines, etc. For more information on the towns of northern Maine, check out “Townships and the Unorganized Territory of Northern Maine” on page 28.
4. The predominant theme in *Almost, Maine* is love. Each scene in the play is a different exploration and realization of that theme. Write your own scene on the topic of love. Helpful hint: Start with the characters. Who are the people in this scene; what is their experience with love; what is their relationship to each other; what do they want at the beginning of the scene and how do they plan to get it?
5. All of the scenes in *Almost, Maine* take place between 8:50 and 9:00pm on a Friday night in the middle of winter. The northern lights are visible at 9:00pm, when magical moments occur in each scene. The playwright, John Cariani, explains that “the northern lights and the magical moments give rise to one another.” Think of a moment in your life when your surroundings had a strong impact on you. Write about this experience: what happened, how it made you feel, and how it changed or inspired your thoughts and actions.

Thoughts from the Editors: What is Your "Small Town" Pride?



While it is not specifically in my hometown of South Windsor, one of my favorite things in the state of Connecticut is the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center. The O'Neill is home to a variety of new play festivals during the summer, and during the school year they offer semester-long intensives in areas such as playwriting, directing, acting, and musical theater in their National Theatre Institute (NTI). I attended NTI as a playwriting student in the spring of 2018, and was given one of the best theatrical experiences of my college career with mentors who helped me solidify my love for plays and creating new work. I feel lucky that the O'Neill is just a short drive away from me, and I thank it for the opportunities it has granted and the relationships I fostered through the program.

- *Lizz Mangan, Directing & Dramaturgy Intern*



I am from San Francisco, which is not a small town, but sure does have a lot of Pride. In fact, San Francisco hosts one of the largest and oldest gay pride parades and has long been known as the hub of gay rights activism. Fun facts: Life Magazine coined San Francisco as "the Gay Capital of America" in 1964; the original rainbow gay pride flag was first flown in the San Francisco Gay Freedom Day Parade in 1978; and the first same-sex marriage license issued in the US was in San Francisco in 2004. I am proud to have been raised in an extraordinarily diverse and open-minded city that attracts people from all walks of life!

- *Madison Worthington, Education Intern*



I think my small town pride has to go to the growing downtown area of Skowhegan, Maine. Growing up, my mom owned a diner downtown and my friend (whose mother owned a store next to it) and I used to walk laps around the downtown businesses to keep ourselves occupied. (Sitting in a diner all day was far less exciting when you couldn't be drinking coffee.) Now, we have a bakery called The Bankery that opened in an old bank building, a great farmer's market, and my stepmom opened up a theater studio for elementary and middle school students. My mom doesn't have the diner anymore, but there is a very yummy Thai food restaurant where it used to be!

- *Kaylee Pomelow, Directing & Dramaturgy Intern*



I am from Lexington, Kentucky, which is known as the “Horse Capital of the World.” However, the thing that defines many Lexingtonians’ “hometown pride” is the University of Kentucky men’s basketball team. Kentucky has the most all-time wins in Division I college basketball, and holds eight national titles. I have many fond childhood memories of attending games with my family in Rupp Arena and cheering on the Wildcats. During the annual NCAA tournament, I looked forward to wearing Kentucky gear to school in elementary school. In high school, I schemed with my classmates to convince our teachers to let us watch Kentucky play in the tournament’s first- and second-round games during class. Since moving away from home, I have become an even bigger fan. In college, I watched big games in the campus center with other Kentucky transplants, and now I often wear Kentucky-themed socks on game days, especially during March Madness. My dad, brother, and I text each other regularly about recruitment news and injury reports, and we have a running commentary during games. Even though I live over 1,000 miles away from Lexington, when I watch Kentucky play from the comfort of my living room, I can’t help but feel connected to my home state and to all those who bleed blue!

- Meredith G. Healy, Directing & Dramaturgy Intern



I’m from Durham, North Carolina. It’s not a small town, but not a big city either. It toes the line of small southern charm and city anonymity. Durham is located in the forested piedmont region of the state, which is the central plateau in between the Blue Ridge Mountains and the Eastern seaboard. Durham is a part of the Triangle, referring to the Research Triangle Park, a leading technology and science research park. The cities of Durham, Chapel Hill, and Raleigh act as the three points of the triangle. Each city has its own major university, Duke University in Durham, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in Chapel Hill, and North Carolina State University in Raleigh, and therefore each has city and institutional pride. Durham is known as the hippest city, but also the roughest one, something I love about my hometown. Growing up in the Duke Forest, in the heart of the city, I enjoyed beautiful nature as a child. The arts and culture scene of my hometown inspired a love of performing which I am thankful for today. The Durham Performing Arts Center is minutes from the house where I grew up and I was privileged to have enjoyed many national touring musicals, plays, and concerts at the state-of-the-art venue. The American Dance Festival takes place in on Duke University Campus and spaces around Durham annually, where I have had the pleasure of seeing many world-renowned dance companies perform, influencing my love of performing. My experiences with the African American Dance Ensemble’s community outreach programs taught me that the arts can be used for positive change, something I deeply value today. I’m proud to be from Durham, which has a lot of multi-cultural influences, economic diversity, and creativity.

- Isabella Brezenski Education Intern

About the Play

BY LIZZ MANGAN

What do a broken heart in a bag, a bar that gives free drinks to patrons if they tell their waitress they're sad, suitcases full of love (literally), and a man who shrinks in height after losing hope have in common? They are all things that can be found in the magical town of Almost, Maine.

Almost, Maine by John Cariani follows nine different couples who interact in a series of vignettes that each take place "from around 8:50 to a bit after 9pm on a cold, clear, moonless, slightly surreal Friday night in the middle of the deepest part of a Northern Maine winter." There are many things to be enchanted by within each individual story, from the residents and their many blunders in finding love to the atmosphere of the town of Almost, which presents as its own unseen character in the script. Though the play was received quite well in its initial run at Portland Stage, when it moved to New York in 2006, it received critiques like the following from Charles Isherwood of *The New York Times*: "*Almost, Maine* may leave the cloying aftertaste of an overly sweetened Sno-Kone." This kind of review, along with poor ticket sales, led the play to close after a month-long run.

The poor reception in New York suggested that the scenes were perceived as simple, fluffy depictions of love. However, *Almost, Maine*, when looked at closely, reveals itself to be a story about human connection and self-discovery. The characters' declarations of love may seem hasty and typically romantic, but they are also about recognizing the feeling of being seen by someone for the first time in a capacity previously unknown. Though romance is a prominent factor in the interactions we encounter, a broken heart in a bag is just as much about a loss of identity as it is about heartache.

Almost, Maine is also a story about perseverance. The citizens of Almost, despite the hardships they face, still find the strength to carry on and figure out what comes next. The play itself also showed this resilience. Despite the reviews it received in New York, *Almost, Maine* garnered mass appeal and success with community theaters, high schools, and colleges. According to Playbill's records, *Almost, Maine* was the most produced play in American high schools for 2017-2018, surpassing William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In general, according to Dramatists Play Service, the licensing company for the show, "there have been almost 3,000 productions of the play in the United States and Canada since 2008."

The success of *Almost, Maine* makes its return to Portland Stage all the more special, as the play premiered here in 2004. The chilly environment melts away in the face of genuine human connection, showing just how warming this feeling can be. Through love and friendship, through hardship and discovery, we see just how complex the search for love can be, and just how much one interaction can impact a life.



ALMOST, MAINE, WORLD PREMIERE, PORTLAND STAGE COMPANY, 2004.

About the Cast & Characters

BY LIZZ MANGAN



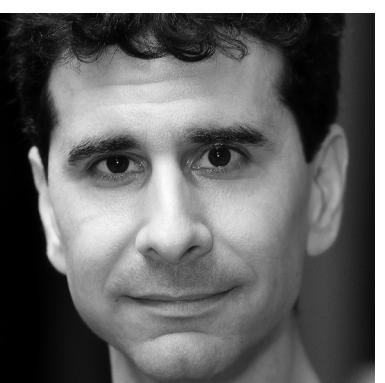
Name: Samantha Rosentrater
Characters: Glory, Waitress, Gayle, Marci, Rhonda
Glory - A hiker.
Waitress - A hard-working woman who serves at the Moose Paddy
Marci - Phil's hardworking wife.
Rhonda - A tough woman.



Name: Kathy McCafferty
Characters: Ginette, Sandrine, Marvalyn, Hope
Ginette - Has been dating Pete for a while.
Sandrine - Jimmy's ex-girlfriend.
Marvalyn - A woman who is waiting to get back on her feet.
Hope - A woman who has traveled the world.



Name: Ray Macanally
Characters: East, Steve, Chad, Phil, Man
East - A repairman.
Steve - A man who cannot feel pain.
Chad - A "country boy" whose date didn't like the way he smelled.
Phil - Marci's hardworking husband.
Man - Someone who has not done a lot of traveling.



Name: John Cariani
and Dustin Tucker (sharing the role)
Characters: Pete, Jimmy, Lendall, Randy, Dave
Pete - Has been dating Ginette for a while.
Jimmy - Sandrine's ex-boyfriend.
Lendall - Longtime boyfriend of Gayle.
Randy - A "country boy" who accidentally broke his date's face.
Dave - A not-so-tough-man who is in love with Rhonda.



Play Synopses - English, Arabic, French, Portuguese

BY TODD BRIAN BACKUS
TRANSLATED BY HOUSE OF LANGUAGES

Cast of Characters

The cast is composed of various citizens and travelers in the not-quite town of Almost, Maine ranging from mill workers to snowmobilers, and those returning after a long absence and those that have never left. Each scene features a different grouping of characters from the town that all know each other.

Synopsis

Almost, Maine is a play told in nine scenes, each of which examines what might happen if we took an English idiom literally in the not-quite town of Almost, Maine. Surrounding the whole play (through Prologue, Interlogue, and Epilogue) Pete and Ginette sit on a bench. Ginette wants to be closer, but Pete shows her that technically, equatorially, they couldn't be further apart. Ginette walks off along Pete's path, and he calls out "Closer, closer" with each step, but will she make it back to him or just leave? In the next scene a hiker named Glory is trying to figure out what to do with her broken heart, which turned to slate and shattered when her husband, Wes, left her. Glory ends up camping out in East's yard and the two find themselves suddenly drawn to one another. Afterwards Jimmy, a heating and cooling guy, runs into his ex-girlfriend, Sandrine, at her bachelorette party. Jimmy's pretty sad about it and reveals the tattoo he got when Sandrine left that says "Villian" (it turns out he couldn't even label himself a "villain" properly). Fortunately, he meets a nice waitress named Villian and things seem to be turning up. In the next scene we meet Marvalyn ironing her laundry and Steve, the guy she accidentally clocks with her ironing board. Fortunately (or maybe unfortunately), Steve doesn't feel pain. To keep himself safe he's documented all the things that could hurt him with the help of his brother. Marvalyn is concerned when she finds out Steve has walled himself from relationships in order to keep from getting hurt. Once the two kiss Steve finds himself waking up to new sensations. Afterwards Gayle comes over with bags and bags filled with all the love that Lendall "gave" her. She wants to return it all, and get back the love she "gave" him in return, since their relationship doesn't seem to be going anywhere. When Lendall returns what Gayle "gave" him, she finds it's gotten a lot smaller... and turned into a ring. At the beginning of Act Two we meet Randy and Chad, two 'County Boys' who are the best of friends, relating their relationship woes when suddenly Chad suddenly goes weak in the knees and "falls" in love with his friend. While this is initially alarming Chad realizes the feeling is actually mutual, and it couldn't be better. In the next scene Marci and her husband Phil start having a long overdue argument as they lace up their shoes after ice skating. Unfortunately Marci's missing one of her shoes. The two continue bickering until the other shoe drops from the sky. Afterwards Hope, a young woman who left the county a long time ago, has returned on a mission and finds herself on Daniel's front door. When she was younger a boy asked her to marry him on that very spot the night before she left for college, and she never came back, but she's made up her mind and finally has an answer for him. While she can't recognize him at first, Daniel was that boy, he just lost a lot of "hope" when he was younger. In the next scene Dave has a present for his longtime friend Rhonda. It's a painting he made for her, but she can't quite see what it is, just like how she can't "see" that Dave is madly in love with her. Once Rhonda figures that out she reveals she doesn't actually know what to do... next. Dave tells her he has some ideas...

شخصيات المسرحية

يتكون طاقم الممثلين من العديد من المواطنين والمسافرين في مدينة ليس تماماً *Almost* في ولاية مaine، ويعملون كعمال مطاحن و على عربات التلوج، وأولئك العائدين بعد غياب طويل وأولئك الذين لم يغادروا أبداً. يتميز كل مشهد بمجموعة مختلفة من الشخصيات من المدينة الذين يعرفون بعضهم البعض.

المالخص

Almost, Maine مسرحية يتم سردها في تسعه مشاهد، كل منها يفحص ما يمكن أن يحدث إذا أخذنا تعبيراً باللغة الإنجليزية حرفيًا في مدينة ليس تماماً *Almost, Maine*. يحيط المسرحية بأكملها (من خلال التمهيد، إضافة إلى الخاتمة) بـ "بيت" وجينيت على مقعد. جينيت ترغب في أن تكون أقرب بمحاذاة مسار "بيت"، ولكن "بيت" يبرهن لها بأنهما فنياً واستوائياً فهما لا يمكنهما أن يكون أبعد من ذلك، ثم يصرخ "أقرب"، "أقرب" مع كل خطوة يخطوها، ولكن هل ستتجه في الرجوع إليه أم سترحل؟ في المشهد التالي تحاول فتاة تنتزه تدعى غلوري أن تستكشف ما الذي ستقوم به فهي مكسورة القلب، الذي افطر عندما قام زوجها، "ويس" تركها. ولكن سرعان ما تقوم غلوري بالتخيم في الحديقة الشرقية ثم يجد الاثنان أنفسهما فجأة منجذبين لبعضهما البعض. بعد ذلك، يركض حميمياً، وهو رجل بارد ودافئ في الوقت نفسه، إلى حميمته القديمة، ساندرلين، في حفلة عزوبتها. إلا أن حميمي يغفره حزن شديد بسبب ذلك ويكشف عن الوشم الذي حصل عليه عندما تركته ساندرلين إذ يقول الوشم "Villian" (اتضح أنه لم يستطع حتى تسمية نفسه "Villian" على النحو المناسب). ولكن ولحسن حظه، يلتقي نادلة لطيفة في مطعم اسمها "Villian" بعدها تيسير أموره وتتفرج.

في المشهد التالي نلتقي مارفالين وهي تكوي ثيابها وستيف، الرجل الذي يُصاب عن طريق الخطأ بضررية منها بواسطة طاولة المكواة. لحسن الحظ (أو ربما لسوء الحظ)، لا يشعر ستيف بالألم. للحفاظ على أمانه قام بتوثيق كل الأشياء التي يمكن أن تؤذيه بمساعدة أخيه. ينتاب مارفالين الفلق عندما تعلم بأن ستيف قد بدأ يتجنب الدخول في علاقات كي لا يتأنى منها. وفي مرة عندما يقوم الاثنان بتقبيل بعضهما البعض، يجب ستيف نفسه مستيقظاً وهو يشعر بأحساس جديد. بعدها، تأتي غايل وفي يديها أكياس كثيرة ملؤة بكل الحب الذي "منها" إياها ليندل. هي تريد أن تردها كلها له، وأن تسترد الحب الذي "منحته" إياه، وهذا لأن علاقتهما لا يبدو أنها تسير على ما يرام. وعندما يرجح يرد ليندل ما منحته إياه غايل، تجد بأنها أصبحت أصغر بكثير مما كانت عليه... وتحولت إلى خاتم.

في بداية الفصل الثاني من المسرحية يلتقي راندي بشاد. "هما صبياً المقاطعة" (أو دينا وشيلي، "فتانى المقاطعة") والذين هما أفضل الأصدقاء، ثم تعانى علاقتها من محنة عندما يعاني شاد (أو شيلي) يعاني فجأة من ضعف فيقع في "حب" صديقه. ورغم أن هـ هذا يبدو ينذر بالخطر في البداية يدرك شاد (أو شيلي) بأن هذا الشعور هو متبادل، وهذا أفضل ما قد يحصل. وفي المقطع التالي تبدأ مارسي وزوجها فيل بالشجار أثناء ربط حذائهما بعد ممارسة رياضة التزلج على الجليد. لسوء الحظ لاحظت مارسي بأنه أحد حذائهما مفقود. غالباً أن الاثنان يواصلان المجادلة. حتى يسقط حذاء آخر من السماء. بعدها، تعود هووب، فتاة تركت المقاطعة لفترة طويلة، في مهمة وتجد نفسها أمام باب دانيال. فعندما كانت أصغر عمرًا سألاً صبياً أن تتزوجه في تلك العتبة تماماً وذلك في تلك الليلة قبل أن ترحل لتلتحق بالجامعة، ولكنها لم ترجع أبداً، ولكنها كانت رأيها وأصبح لها رأياً لقوله له. ورغم أنها لم تتعارف عليه في البداية، كان دانيال ذلك الصبي، فهو خسر الكثير من "الامل" عندما كان أصغر سنًا. وفي المقطع التالي لدى دايف هدية لصديقه منذ زمن طويل روندا. هي لوحه مصنوعة خصيصاً لها، ولكنها لا تستطيع أن ترى ما هي هذه الهدية، مثلاً لا تستطيع "رؤيه" أن دايف مجذون بحبها. وحالما تدرك روندا الأمر توضح بأنها لا تدري فعلاً ماذَا تفعل... تاليًا. يخبرها دايف بأن لديه بعض الأفكار.

جان كارياني ممثل ومؤلف مسرحي. ظهر على البرودواي وخارجها، في مسارح إقليمية على امتداد البلاد، وفي أفلام وبرامج تلفزيونية متعددة. تم تسميتها لجائزـة Tony Award وشارك في أفلام لروبرت دينير وكريسنفرو ووكلين، وإد أسترن. يعرفه معظم الناس من المسلسل التلفزيوني "Law & Order", حيث يلعب دور Forensics Tech Beck "cul-de-sac", والتي عُرِضت لأولى مرة على مسرح بورتلاند (ماين) Stage Company في عام 2004 وُعرضت في بروودواي في عام 2006. وأصبحت منذ ذلك الحين واحدة من المسرحيات المنتجة بصورة متكررة في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية، كما تم ترجمتها إلى عشرين لغة تقريباً. أما مسرحياته الأخرى فتتضمن LOVE/SICK (Portland Stage Company, Geva Theater Center) Last Gas (Transport Group), و (Portland Stage Company, Hartford TheaterWorks) Last Gas Almost, Maine (Portland Stage Company, Hartford TheaterWorks). تم نشر مسرحيتنا Last Gas Almost, Maine بواسطة Dramatists Play Service. جان خريج كلية Presque Isle, Maine هو من Amherst نيوينغتون. هو يعيش في مدينة نيويورك.

www.almostmaine.com

Personnages

La distribution est composée de divers citoyens et voyageurs de la ville - qui n'en est pas tout à fait une - de Almost dans le Maine, allant des travailleurs des usines et scieries aux motoneigistes, à ceux de retour après une longue absence et à ceux qui ne sont jamais partis. Chaque scène présente un regroupement différent de personnages qui se connaissent tous.

Synopsis

Almost, Maine est une pièce racontée en neuf scènes, dont chacune examine ce qui pourrait arriver si dans la ville (qui n'en est pas tout à fait une) de Almost dans le Maine nous appliquions à la lettre une expression américaine. Tout au long de la pièce, autour de l'aire du jeu de scène (durant le prologue, le déroulement des scènes, et l'épilogue) Pete et Ginette sont assis sur un banc. Ginette souhaite se rapprocher, mais Pete lui montre que techniquement, de manière équatoriale, ils ne pourraient pas être plus éloignés. Ginette s'engage sur le chemin suggéré par Pete, pendant qu'il répète « Plus proche, plus proche » à chacun de ses pas. Mais va-t-elle revenir vers lui ou simplement partir ? Dans la scène suivante une randonneuse nommée Glory essaye de savoir ce qu'elle va faire avec son cœur brisé, qui est devenu une ardoise et a volé en éclats lorsque son mari, Wes, l'a quittée. Glory fini par camper dans le jardin de East et les deux se sentent soudainement attirés l'un vers l'autre. Ensuite, Jimmy, un gars dans le chauffage et la climatisation, tombe sur son ex petite amie Sandrine, lors de sa fête d'enterrement de vie de jeune fille. Cela rend Jimmy plutôt triste et il dévoile le tatouage qu'il s'était fait faire quand Sandrine l'a quitté qui dit « Villian » (il s'avère qu'il n'avait même pas pu écrire « vilain » correctement). Heureusement, il y rencontre une gentille serveuse nommée Villian et les choses semblent prendre une tournure positive. Dans la scène suivante, nous rencontrons Marvalyn en train de repasser son linge et Steve le gars qu'elle n'arrête pas de cogner accidentellement avec sa planche à repasser. Heureusement (ou peut être malheureusement), Steve ne ressent pas la douleur. Pour assurer sa sécurité et avec l'aide de son frère, il s'est renseigné sur tout ce qui pourrait lui nuire. Marvalyn s'inquiète quand elle découvre que Steve s'est entouré d'un mur pour se protéger des relations qui pourraient le blesser. Mais une fois qu'ils s'embrassent, Steve s'éveille à de nouvelles sensations. Ensuite, Gayle arrive chargée de sacs remplis de tout l'amour que Lendall lui a « donné ». Elle veut tout lui rendre et récupérer l'amour qu'elle lui avait donné en échange, étant donné que leur relation semble aller nulle part. Lorsque Lendall rend à Gayle ce qu'elle lui avait donné, elle trouve que ceci a drôlement rétréci ... et est devenu une bague de fiançailles. Au début du deuxième acte, nous rencontrons Randy et Chad, deux garçons « du coin » qui sont les meilleurs amis/amies qui se racontent leurs problèmes de couple, quand soudainement Chad « tombe » amoureux de son ami. Alors qu'au début ceci est plutôt inquiétant, Chad s'aperçoit que le sentiment est mutuel, et que ça ne pouvait pas mieux tomber. Dans la scène suivante Marci et son mari Phil, tout en remettant leurs chaussures après avoir fait du patinage, commencent une dispute qui couvait depuis longtemps. Malheureusement Marci ne trouve pas l'une de ses chaussures. Ils continuent de se chamailler jusqu'à ce que l'autre chaussure tombe du ciel. Ensuite Hope (prénom anglais qui veut dire Espoir), une jeune femme qui avait quitté le comté depuis longtemps, est revenue avec un but précis et se retrouve à la porte de chez Daniel. Quand elle était plus jeune, un garçon lui avait demandé de l'épouser à cet endroit même le soir avant de partir pour l'université, et elle n'était jamais revenue, mais elle a réfléchi et elle a enfin une réponse à lui donner. Bien qu'au début elle ne le reconnaissait pas, Daniel avait été ce garçon là ; sauf que lorsqu'il était plus jeune, il avait perdu tout « espoir ». Dans la scène suivante, Dave a un cadeau pour son amie de toujours Rhonda. C'est un tableau qu'il a peint pour elle, mais elle ne voit pas bien ce qu'il représente, de la même façon qu'elle ne « voit » pas que Dave est fou amoureux d'elle. Lorsque Rhonda s'en rend compte, elle avoue qu'elle ne sait pas quoi faire ... ensuite. Dave lui dit qu'il a quelques idées ...

Elenco de Personagens

O elenco é composto por vários cidadãos e viajantes na quase cidade de Almost, Maine, entre operários de fábrica, motoqueiros de neve, aqueles retornando depois de uma longa ausência e aqueles que nunca partiram. Cada cena apresenta diferentes grupos de personagens oriundos da cidade onde todos se conhecem.

Sinopse

Almost, Maine é uma peça narrada em nove cenas. Cada uma delas examina o que poderia acontecer se usassem expressões idiomáticas em Inglês de forma literal na quase cidade de Almost, Maine. No entorno de toda a peça (desde o Prólogo, Interlogo e Epílogo) Pete e Ginette sentam em um banco. Ginette quer ficar mais próxima, mas Pete mostra a ela que tecnicamente, equatorialmente, eles não poderiam estar mais distantes um do outro. Ginette se afasta do caminho de Pete, e ele a chama “mais perto, mais perto” a cada passo. Ela voltará ou apenas vai embora? Na cena seguinte, uma andarilha chamada Glory está tentando descobrir o que fazer com seu coração ferido, que se tornou severo e destruído quando seu marido, Wes, a deixou. Glory acaba acampando no Jardim de East e os dois se encontram, subitamente atraídos um pelo outro. Depois de algum tempo, Jimmy, um especialista em aquecimento e climatização, vai atrás de sua ex-namorada, Sandrine, na sua festa de despedida de solteira. Jimmy está muito triste sobre isso e revela a tatuagem que fez quando Sandrine o deixou que diz “Villian” (acontece que ele não era capaz nem de se rotular de vilão propriamente). Afortunadamente, ele conhece uma gentil garçomete chamada Villian e as coisas parecem estar melhorando. Na cena seguinte, encontramos Marvalyn passando sua roupa lavada e Steve, o rapaz que ela acidentalmente atinge com sua tábua de passar. Felizmente (ou talvez infelizmente), Steve não sente dor. Para manter-se seguro, ele tem documentado todas as coisas que poderiam machucá-lo, com a ajuda do seu irmão. Marvalyn preocupa-se quando descobre que Steve evitou relacionamentos para não se machucar. Depois que os dois se beijam, Steve se viu acordando com novas sensações. Mais tarde Gayle aparece com sacolas e sacolas cheias de todo o amor que Lendall a “deu”. Ela quer devolver tudo e ter de volta o amor que ela “deu” a ele em troca, já que o relacionamento não parecia ir a lugar nenhum. Quando Lendall devolve o que Gayle “deu” a ele, ela descobre que o montante está bem menor... e se transformou em um anel.

No começo do Segundo Ato, conhecemos Randy e Chad, dois “rapazes do interior,” que são grandes amigos, relatando as mazelas de seus relacionamentos quando de repente Chad não se sente seguro e se apaixona por sua amiga. Enquanto isso é inicialmente alarmante, Chad percebe que o sentimento é na verdade mútuo e não poderia ser melhor. Na próxima cena, Marci e seu marido Phil iniciam uma longa e antiga discussão enquanto amarram os cadarços após patinar no gelo. Desafortunadamente, Marci sente falta de um dos seus patins. Os dois continuam brigando até que o outro patins cai do céu. Posteriormente, Hope (Esperança), uma jovem mulher que saiu do interior um longo tempo atrás retorna para uma missão e se encontra na porta da frente da casa de Daniel. Quando ela era mais jovem, um garoto a pediu em casamento naquele mesmo local uma noite antes de ela partir para a universidade, mas ela nunca mais voltou. Agora, ela se decidiu e finalmente tem uma resposta para ele. Enquanto ela não o reconhece no primeiro momento, Daniel era aquele garoto, ele apenas perdeu bastante “esperança” quando mais jovem. Na cena seguinte, Dave tem um presente para a sua amiga de longa data Rhonda. É uma pintura que ele fez pra ela, mas ela não consegue entender o que é, da mesma forma que ela não consegue ver que Dave está loucamente apaixonado por ela. Quando Rhonda descobre o que está acontecendo ela revela que na verdade não sabe o que fazer...em seguida. Dave diz a ela que ele tem algumas ideias.

An Interview with the Director: Sally Wood

EDITED FOR LENGTH AND CLARITY BY LIZZ MANGAN

During rehearsals for *Almost, Maine*, *PlayNotes* sat down with director Sally Wood to talk about the play, which received its world premiere at Portland Stage in 2004.



SALLY WOOD.

Lizz Mangan (LM): *What has your journey as both a director and actor been like?*

Sally Wood (SW): Interesting. I have always wanted to act, ever since I was little, and that's what I really, really, really was desperate to do. I still do it, sometimes. I fell into directing kind of by mistake. There was this thing at my college called Junior Seminar where the whole faculty would sit down and critique each student, and the chair of my department told me I would never be a professional actor, and that I didn't have what it took. However, he said he thought I might be a good director, and I remember thinking: "Over my dead body will I ever direct." So, I didn't for about fifteen years. I was so angry about that statement. Even though I've always been drawn to directing, I wouldn't do it just because I wanted to prove him wrong. And then, around 2007, I finally had to direct something at the theater I was working for, and it was so easy for me to do.

For whatever reason, I think that way. I've always thought that way. I'm good at moving people around and mixing the whole story. I did it, and I thought, "Oh my God, this is so easy, but I can't do it because I'm an actor." But friends and people whose opinions I really care about were like, "Your direction is so interesting." Directing is where I got all the praise and everything else. But, I didn't want it. I wanted to be praised for something else, so it took me a long time to get comfortable in that skin.

LM: *What do you value most in a rehearsal process as a director?*

SW: Flexibility! For this one, certainly it's flexibility. It's the ability to create with what you have in the room, and that means bodies, and that means furniture, and that means stage management and everybody else. It's just whatever raw material you have there is what you use, and I find that really freeing and super powerful. That's the part I love the best.

LM: *You've worked with John previously on his plays *Last Gas* and *LOVE/SICK*. What is it like working with him as an actor this time?*

SW: I don't even know how to describe it because it's so bizarre. At first I was really nervous because you're directing someone who has written the play, and that can always be tricky. I also have an amazing relationship with John, and I didn't want to blow it by directing him in his own show, you know? So, there was a slight hesitation. But then I was like, "Whatever! You just have to try it!" What I notice is that Sally the actor is watching John the actor, because the way he works is not like anyone else that I know. He builds time in the room for himself. He'll be feeling something and he'll be like, "Hold on. I just have to feel what this feels like, and then I'm going to go forward." And he's only asking for ten seconds. I see him scanning his body for how he feels. Then, he drops it and says, "Okay, now we can move onto the next moment." He doesn't let himself be rushed, which I think is really great. He's figuring out ways to make it make sense to him, like he's really trying to discover something in a play that

he wrote. I thought he would know everything, but he doesn't, and that's glorious.

LM: *What is it like working on such an established play such as Almost, Maine? Is there any pressure to be particularly inventive with any aspect of the production?*

SW: I'm certainly feeling that way. Right now, Sally is feeling the need to see if there's a new scene, a new take on this, a new take on that. Right now I'm having to ask myself the reason why I want something. Is it because it's different? Do I want it because it's best for the show? What is motivating me? That is a pretty uncomfortable conversation to have with yourself. The one thing that this process really gives you is honesty. You just have to follow the path where it leads and really do what I ask a lot of people to do, which is "kill your darlings," which is the concept of, "I built this whole play around this idea, but now I can't do that idea." Then I have to throw it out and see what's left. That's a really scary feeling, but sometimes you have to release your claws on an idea and let it go.

LM: *What excites you most about this play?*

SW: The fact that it's the bicentennial is pretty cool. The fact that John demands that we look at

this place that is often overlooked and to realize that there is great beauty there. There's stuff that we "city dwellers" can't even begin to understand about what it is to live in this kind of rural place and whether or not we would have the strength to sustain that lifestyle. I really like these people, meaning the characters in this play. They're really interesting people and that's fun too.

LM: *Do you have any advice for young theatermakers?*

SW: Do as much as you can. And not just do, but see as much as you can. I think that the best way to do theater is to be around theater, and if that means you have to usher to come in and see things, then do that. You're only going to get better and have more for your file cabinet of things to pull from. In theater, it's cool to steal. It's not cool to copy, but it is cool to steal. Steal like an artist. The more you have in that file cabinet, the better off you are. I still pull things from a show I saw ten years ago. In my brain, there's a huge reference book of things I want to use at the right moment. It's all about finding the right moment, and letting things go that aren't right. It might be cool, but it's not right. But, mainly, see theater, and see a lot of it!



SALLY WOOD AND JOHN CARIANI IN REHEARSAL FOR *LOVE/SICK*, 2012

An Interview with the Playwright: John Cariani

EDITED FOR LENGTH AND CLARITY BY LIZZ MANGAN

During Rehearsals for *Almost, Maine*, *PlayNotes* sat down with playwright John Cariani to talk about his career as an actor and playwright and his experiences with the play since its premiere at Portland Stage in 2004. Since then, the play has become one of the most produced plays for high schools, beating out Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for the past four years.



JOHN CARIANI AT PORTLAND STAGE COMPANY.

Lizz Mangan (LM): *What has your journey as both a playwright and actor been like?*

John Cariani (JC): I started out as an actor, and then I recognized that - and this is true for everybody - you're kind of limited to what you look like as an actor. So, all the good roles you get to play are in class, and all the roles you get cast in professionally are all kind of similar, so I don't know that you always grow as an artist when you're doing that kind of work. I started writing because I had a lot of downtime. I think if you're a creative person you don't really rest. I remember I

had this nighttime temp job where I could finish all my work in four hours, and then I started writing. I didn't know I was passionate about that, but that's what you do when you have time: you go to your passion even if you don't know what it is. I don't think it's surprising to be an actor and playwright. I think most people in theater are hyphenates. I think most people in life are hyphenates. In terms of the journey, it's just my life! It's just my job! Every time you make a new play it's hard. Obstacles are normal. It's been super rewarding and super disappointing. Heartbreaking and heart filling, you know? All the things that life is.

LM: *Two of your plays, Almost, Maine and Last Gas, take place in Maine. What is it about the area that inspires you?*

JC: The night sky really inspires me, because you can't help but wonder when you see it when you're up there. Winter is real up in Northern Maine in a way that's it's just not real even here in Portland. When it gets dark up there at night, it's dark. I'm also inspired by the fact that Maine kind of sits off all is not forgotten so much as not thought about. I also didn't realize that the people I know and grew up with can do so many things that the people I live with now can't do, like grow and fix and build things. As I was researching Maine for my plays I loved all the facts and figures about Maine. It's the only one-syllable state, the only state that's attached to only one other state. There's a lot of unincorporated landmass and unorganized townships. There's a lot of cool things about Maine! It's the place, I think. And the people! But the place in particular. It does something to people.

LM: *What has your experience been with the growth of Almost, Maine from its first production here in 2004 to now?*

JC: People at Portland Stage didn't see this version of the play. One of the scenes in the play was rewritten and introduced in the Off-Broadway production a couple years later.

LM: Which Scene?

JC: Sad and Glad, the Jimmy and Sandrine scene in the bar. So, people who only saw it at Portland Stage will see that brand new. All the scenes have been rewritten considerably since the premiere in 2004. No one knew what the play was in 2004, and now people know what the play is. I don't think anyone ever thought what happened with the play what happened. In terms of the growth, it didn't explode or anything, it just very slowly caught on. One of the things that I learned from the play is that a lot of people like the fact that it's rural people. I've just never seen rural people in a play before that aren't idiots or part of a scheme that the city people have to deal with. It's interesting to set the record straight about these people. They're not L.L. Bean or Patagonia wearing people. Their lives aren't easy and money isn't plentiful and everything's a challenge, you know? They're their own people dealing with their own things. It can be a warm, fuzzy play, but all the people in this play are dealing with the things that rural America is dealing with.

LM: What are you most excited about for this production?

JC: I'm excited to do it with such a mature cast. It feels like when you reach the middle of your life, you realize that your time on Earth is limited and you have a limited chance to live the life you want or to find/have love or to just figure out what you want out of life. There's always obstacles and there's always joy. In terms of what I'm excited about for this production, I'm excited to work with Anita. I think she's a tremendous talent and mind. I'm excited to bring the play back now that it's "bona fide," because a lot of people thought that it was sweet for Maine, but it would never play anywhere else. There's a lot of local humor and local color in it, but that doesn't mean that it's alienating at all. I also love working with Sally Wood. She helped me with *Last Gas* and *Love/SICK*, and this is the first time she's directed *Almost, Maine*. It's nice to revisit the play with her. She wanted me to rewrite one of the scenes just to see if we could try something new, and it led me to a brand new play, so I'm really grateful for that. The lesson there is to always try, even if you don't think it's right! With the cast, I've always wanted to work with Ray. I've always wanted to

work professionally with Kathy. I worked with her once in 2007 and not since. I've also seen Sam around and have always loved her work. It's fun to get some people who I know, who are my friends, in the room. I've been in this play once before, and this will be my last time being in it. We'll see what happens!

LM: Do you have any advice for young theatermakers?

JC: Expect obstacles. Obstacles are normal! Don't think they're unusual, because they're very much a part of everyday existence. Don't think you're different from everybody else in the world. That's a big problem. We want people to like our plays. I want my brother and my dad to like my plays. I want people who play sports to like my plays. One of my proudest moments was when some basketball players saw my play *Love/SICK* and came up to me and said, "That was a really good play! That was the best play I've ever seen!" When I asked them what they liked about it, they said, "I just understood it." I'm really interested in theater for people who don't think they like theater. The sad thing about theater is that you have to get up and go and pay. It's an event, and if you don't like it, you think you don't like theater. But then, anybody who watches a Netflix show that they don't like doesn't then say they don't think they like television. I also think it's important not to get wrapped up in the idea of "I want to challenge my audiences." Just tell stories that you're actually interested in.

Just because you're in the theater doesn't mean you're smarter than everything else, or that you are smart, or that you're culturally superior. You shouldn't live culturally above the fray, and I feel like we all do that too much and I don't like it at all. Know that good theater happens everywhere, know that Broadway is not the "gold standard." Make it relevant, make it valuable, make it important. Remember it's about community, which is what we're lacking right now, and why this is so vital. We can bring people together to experience something in a way that movie and television doesn't. And also just figure out how to make it accessible and affordable.

A Behind-the-Scenes Look at Double Casting

BY MADISON WORTHINGTON

Almost, Maine uses double casting, meaning each actor portrays multiple characters. The show is written for only four actors, but has a whopping nineteen characters. What will it be like for the creative team to make this theatrical challenge a success? Portland Stage Education Intern Madison Worthington asked director Sally Wood, actor Dustin Tucker, and Portland Stage's Costume Shop Manager, Susan Thomas, about their experiences with double casting and how it will affect their work on *Almost, Maine*.



SALLY WOOD IN REHEARSAL FOR PAPERMAKER, 2015.

A director working on a play with double casting must find actors who can portray multiple roles. When asked what is it like to cast this type of show, director Sally Wood said, "I usually try to find a reason why someone might be double cast because I think audiences will try to find meaning as to why someone's been reincarnated." When asked about what she enjoys about directing shows that utilize double

casting, Wood responded, "I actually love plays that call for double casting because it really allows actors to actually act. This may sound silly, but I think that actors are often cast very strongly to type and if you have someone that has to play several different roles, they won't be perfect for any of them. And I think that's really wonderful." Directing actors to play multiple characters also comes with challenges. Wood says, "The one trap I do find myself getting into, both as an actor and as a director, is feeling the need to make the actor unrecognizable between characters. And sometimes that forces us into making broader choices just because we're trying to differentiate between two people." To prevent this pitfall of developing more broad or stereotypical characters, Wood says, "I try to think about how I would ask the character to be played if it were the only [role] the actor was doing...because audiences are smart, and no matter how good the costume change might be, they still know it's you." The audience will catch on to the fact that the actors are double cast, so it is important to embrace it and develop each character fully and with authenticity.

Once cast, an actor must develop the multiple characters they portray. Dustin Tucker, who will be stepping in for John Cariani for the final week of *Almost, Maine*, spoke about his experiences with this process. Tucker has been in several shows at Portland Stage in which he played multiple characters, including *Hound of the Baskervilles*, *A Christmas Carol*, and most recently *It's A Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play*. Tucker said, "I enjoy playing multiple characters as it gives me a chance to explore various opinions, histories, and behaviors in one show. We get to do that all the time as actors, but for character actors (like myself) in shows that call for one actor to play multiple parts, the exciting part is exploring human differences and how we all connect." Tucker said his process for *Almost, Maine* will be "a bit of a different approach when developing the characters because I am stepping into a role in a production already running. Not



DUSTIN TUCKER IN THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES, 2016.

to mention replacing the man who created the play. My job will be to observe what has already been created and try to seamlessly replace John Cariani (while bringing my own self to the piece) and support the other actors as best I can.” On the production side, costumes are a large component in helping the audience and actors distinguish between characters.

Portland Stage’s Costume Shop Manager, Susan Thomas, shared her experience with costuming shows that utilize double casting. “One of the trickier shows we’ve ever done at Portland Stage was *The Mystery of Irma Vep*, where two actors play all of the parts and there are just insane quick changes....A person leans out one side of a door with a wig and hat and then leans out the other side of the door as an entire other character with a different wig and hat.” In regard to the costume changes in *Almost, Maine*, Thomas said, “It will be mostly a matter of quick-rigging and making sure everyone can get in and out of things fast enough.” What does ‘rigging a costume’ mean? Thomas explains, “Say an actor has seven or ten buttons down a shirt front. They don’t necessarily have time to do all of those, so often times we change them to snaps, or zippers, or Velcro.” When asked what she is excited about for costuming *Almost, Maine*, Thomas said, “I love the snowmobile scene

where the two actors are coming on from just having gone snowmobiling...and end up taking off layer after layer after layer of winter wear, which is hilarious and fun to do. It will be fun to see how many layers we can manage to get on in a quick change so that they can then take them off in a sensible order.”

Double casting comes with challenges; it requires a full team of theater-makers (including the director, actors, and costumer) to be on the same page about each character and what distinguishes them. But, when done successfully, double casting offers an experience that is exciting, intriguing, and rewarding for the theatre-makers and audiences alike. Casting one actor to portray multiple characters within a play provides a unique opportunity for creative talent to flourish, and for deeper meaning, comedy, and drama to be discovered.



SUSAN THOMAS PINNING A COSTUME.

From the Archives: Materials from the World Premiere of *Almost, Maine*

COLLECTED BY MEREDITH G. HEALY

John Cariani's *Almost, Maine* premiered at Portland Stage in 2004. *PlayNotes* compiled some materials from this production for our 2019 audience to have an opportunity to see how the show was originally received and what the production looked like fifteen years ago.

Maine Sunday Telegram / Sunday, October 31, 2004 **E5**

AUDIENCE

Nothing almost about 'Almost'

By MARY SNELL

Opening night of the world premiere production of John Cariani's "Almost, Maine," was a love fest, a celebration, a homecoming. The sold-out audience applauded, cheered. I laughed. I cried. (Really.)

Portland Stage Company, in collaboration with Bulldog Theatrical of New York and director Gabriel Barre, have a big hit in this funny, warm and oh-so-human romantic comedy set in a mythical northern Maine town. Maine theatergoers will be particularly vulnerable to the local jokes and references, but the strength of the play is its universality.

The mood is understated, driven by the snappy dialogue. But the gift of the writing is in the creative flights into metaphors that are realized in this world – a heart is really broken into pieces; love that has been given is bagable, returnable; and the northern lights ARE a soul's guiding lanterns.

Cariani, who grew up in Presque Isle, has crafted a series of vignettes that take place the same night in the same small town of Almost in the middle of winter. But there's some strange love thing going on.

Men and women are falling in

REVIEW

"ALMOST, MAINE"

WHERE: Portland Stage Company
25A Forest Ave.
WHEN: Through Nov. 21
CALL: 774-0465

and out of love in the most unexpected and sudden ways. There are also new diseases in this town – obsessive-impulsive disorder, and feeling no pain.

Set designer James Youmans has created a winter world with multiple levels, piles of "snow," and an inventive cutout of a forest clearing rimming a star-spangled night sky.

Lighting designer Tim Hunter keeps the feel of a dark night without any loss of visibility through the scenes.

It looks like wise costume designer Pamela Scofield worked closely with costume sponsor L.L. Bean as she dressed the men and women in just-right practical Maine clothes, funny hats, outdoor wear.

Composer Julian Fleisher's original music helps retain the emotion from scene to scene.

And, oh, the acting. Four outstanding actors play the multiple characters who populate Almost. These characters are original but

familiar, plain but quirky. That is due in part to the well-crafted script and partly to the perfectly nuanced performances by Justin Hagan, Ibi Janko, Lawrence Nathanson and Wendy Rich Stetson. They all are masters of the long silent reaction, of impeccable timing. But they also give these characters real heart.

The only reservation I felt comes from the repetition of situations and types of characters. It worked, but also it didn't.

It's interesting to see how different actors handle similar situations (a man encounters an unexpected, high-strung woman outside his house late at night; a couple falls in love at first sight). You get set up for similar endings but that doesn't happen. Good.

But there is a danger that these similarities can lose impact the second time around. The vignettes are pulled together when a character in one is mentioned in the other. You are reminded they all live in the same small town.

If you are lucky enough to get a ticket, do it. This is a show they'll be talking about for some time. It moves to an off-Broadway run next.

Mary Snell is a theater critic who lives in Gorham.

REVIEW OF *ALMOST, MAINE* BY MARY SNELL PUBLISHED IN THE MAINE SUNDAY TELEGRAM, 2004.

PORTLAND, MAINE

Portland Exposure

IT'S BECOME TRADITIONAL FOR NEW England playwrights to write about the repressed lives of New Englanders, whether it's Eugene O'Neill setting *The Oresteia* in Massachusetts, or Thornton Wilder observing the dead wryly lamenting the blindness of the living in New Hampshire. But for John Cariani, whose romantic comedy *Almost, Maine* opens Oct. 26 at **Portland Stage Company** (then moves Off-Broadway in early 2005), New Englanders aren't repressed. They're just cold.

"I don't think that society is so puritanical up there," he says. "I just think it's the weather! It's so cold that you wear a lot of clothes, but people still have burning passions underneath. They still ache—and the ache is what really interests me."

That ache takes solid form in *Almost, Maine*. The play is set during a winter night, as the people in an isolated Maine town interact with unexpressed yearning, holding their emotions so tightly under layers of clothing that the sentiments spill out in an unexpected way: in a cascade of magic realism, where the lines between the literal and the figurative blur. Characters "fall" in love—literally fall to the ground, unable to stand—or watch as "the other shoe" drops out of the sky. The citizens of *Almost, Maine*, don't put their hearts on their sleeves—they carry them around in bags.

Cariani, who won acclaim this season playing Motel in the Broadway revival of *Fiddler on the Roof*, based *Almost,*



John Cariani

Maine on his own childhood in "potato country," as Mainers call the state's northern tip. As Portland Stage's managing director Tamera Ramaker says, "All you have to do is look at a map to get a sense of it...there's only one highway to get you there. There are places where there's no road accessibility at all. That's Maine."

"My friends always said they understood Chekhov, because we're from a place that's so cold and so hard to get out of," says Cariani. "Here in New York, you're busy all the time. When you're in a place with a big sky, you're more aware of how small you are as a human being. The sky is so much bigger than the world." —Peter Royston

10 AMERICAN THEATRE

OCTOBER 2004

ARTICLE ABOUT JOHN CARIANI AND *ALMOST, MAINE* IN AMERICAN THEATRE MAGAZINE, 2004.



WENDY STETSON AND LARRY NATHANSON IN "STORY OF HOPE," DIRECTED BY GABE BARRE, PORTLAND STAGE COMPANY, 2004.
PHOTO BY DARREN SETLOW.

From Presque Isle to Broadway and Back:

MAINER'S PLAY PREMIERES AT PORTLAND STAGE

By Nancy Heiser

Portland, Maine is just about the geographic midpoint between Presque Isle and the Big Apple. Both take six or seven hours, more or less, going one way on a bus. For John Cariani, professional actor, star of film and television, and playwright from Presque Isle, a bus trip to Portland as a teenager changed his life and set him on the road to an arts career in New York City and beyond.

"John had his first live theatre experience at Portland Stage," explained Carole Harris, Portland Stage Company's marketing director. When he was a junior, his high school raised funds and brought a group of students to a PSC performance of *The Cherry Orchard*, by Anton Chekov. Cariani was "so captivated by the experience that he tells the story he decided he had to be part of that world," she said.

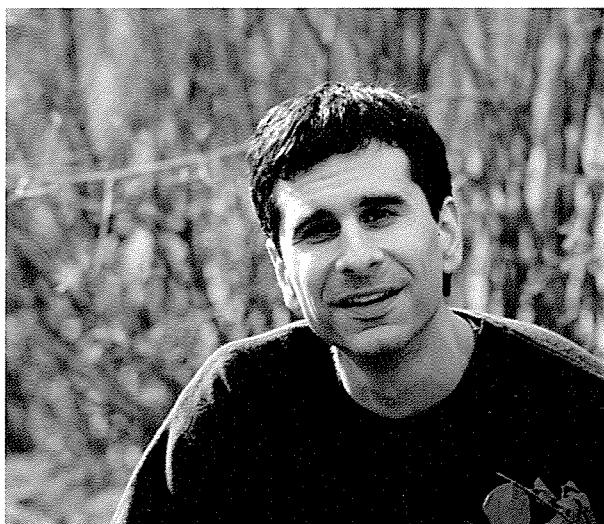
Now Cariani has written

a play entitled *Almost, Maine*, which, in a gratifying circle of events, premieres October 26 at Portland Stage and runs until November 21. After that, the play is expected to open off-Broadway in New York City in March. "He very much wanted his world premiere to be at the place where he had this experience," said Harris. "He is mega-excited."

Cariani, 34 and an Amherst College graduate, currently performs as Motel in *The Fiddler on the Roof* on Broadway, a role that won him an Outer Critics Circle Award and a nomination for a Tony Award for Best Featured Actor in a Musical. He's also had a recurring role on television's *Law and Order* and appeared in a handful of films. His successes are "all over the front page of

the newspaper in Presque Isle," Harris said.

The seven vignettes that make up *Almost, Maine* deal with "varying levels of romantic love," the actor explained in a telephone interview from New York City, where he lives. All the action takes place on a Friday night in a small Maine town in



PROFILE OF JOHN CARIANI IN PORT CITY LIFE, NOVEMBER/ DECEMBER 2004.

Aroostock County. "The sky is so big, so broad, with the potato and the broccoli fields. You really feel humble there," he said. Gabriel Barre directs the play.

A New York producer called his a play of "magical realism," like the novels of Garcia Marquez, said Cariani. "Some things in the play couldn't really happen," the actor explained. "You think you're watching something quite normal, and then you realize you're not."

Coming from a small, remote town has significantly influenced Cariani's outlook and writing. "One of the things I discovered when I left Presque Isle is that there's a misconception that people who live in small towns are less sophisticated than people in big cities. All the people in the play are very smart, but not cynical," he said about the message he wanted to convey to audiences. "It's got a true Maine-ness," observed Harris.

Cariani's foray into playwriting started with an urge to do more as an actor. "I'm a character actor. Parts are very limited. I started writing plays ... so that as an actor I could do something that gave me the arc of a story." He tried readings of the play with friends who are also actors. They told him his work was good and encouraged him to continue.

Almost, Maine, sporting its longer title, *Almost, Maine and the Things That Happen There in the Night*, enjoyed a staged reading at PSC's Little Festival of the Unexpected last spring. The festival, usually held in the theatre's studio space, presents works under development either with staged readings or presentations with minimal props and effects.

"It swept audiences away. People just loved it," said Harris. "There is such sincerity and innocence and heart in John's writ-

ing style. It's absolutely lovely."

Cariani has been very involved with the play's production, visiting Maine for a week in October when his *Fiddler* schedule allowed. He planned to stage at least one preview performance at which he would ask questions of the audience and possibly make additional changes.

"The cast and directors work in such an isolated capacity. They are so close to the play, that putting it in front of people who are fresh to it and then getting audience feedback is incredibly important to them," said Harris.

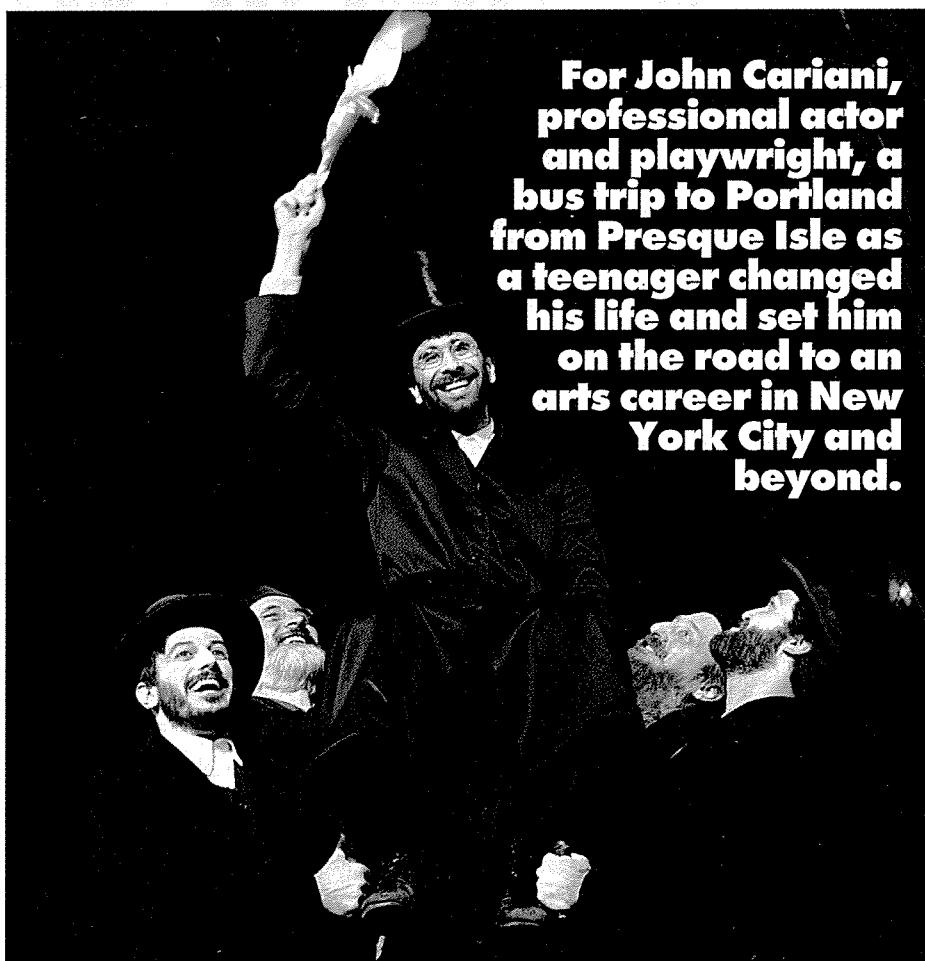
The cast for *Almost, Maine* includes male and female leads who play multiple roles in the vignettes. L.L. Bean is providing costuming and set support. "It's likely what we have here is what will go to New York, in terms of actors, lighting designers, cus-

tomizing, and a lot of the production team," Harris added.

The playwright is not the only principal pleased about the PSC premiere. "We're thrilled," Harris said. "This whole aspect of the show starting here and going to New York is new for us. It's very exciting."

When he isn't writing in his free time, Cariani plays on a softball team and participates in a bowling league with Broadway colleagues, sometimes playing into in the early morning hours at the Port Authority lanes.

As for his future, after his run on Broadway Cariani expects he'll write more and go back to his television part on *Law and Order*. "From there, who knows?" he said. "You never know in this job. Next year I might have to live off the happiness of this year." *



From the PlayNotes Archives: There's No Place Like Home, Setting As Character

The following article was published in the PlayNotes published for the World Premiere of Almost, Maine in 2004.



AROOSTOOK COUNTY, MAINE.

When most people think of characters in a play, they imagine actors onstage reciting lines from script. But many other elements in theater influence the action onstage. A period drama involving royalty may require the use of elaborate costumes to create the atmosphere of regal formality. The lighting design of a thriller might create additional suspense. Even setting can affect the action and people so much that it takes on a role of its own. Think of the TV series *Nowhere Exposure* or the film *Fargo* and how much the locale determines a character's behavior and ultimately what happens in the story. John Cariani's fictional town of Almost, Maine functions in the same way: the setting itself is a character, with traits and features that shape the decisions and emotions of the people who live there. The town of Almost is cut off

from the rest of the world, and it is that isolation that brings the characters into sharper focus. In this way the play works like a snow globe: we get to peer into that world, see it shaken up and watch as the flakes fall. The characters are forced to reveal themselves to each other and to us as an audience.

Almost is described by the playwright as a town so far north it is nearly not in Maine – a place deeply removed from any kind of bustling metropolis. Characters dine at places like The Moose Paddy Lodge and Snowmobile Club. They have serious conversations in the middle of potato fields and beside frozen lakes. The nearest emergency room is 38 miles away, and the airport is a 183-mile taxi ride. As one character says upon returning home, “Yeah, this place is a little farther away from things than I remember.”

Cariani conjures Almost, Maine as a small town, one that carries with it stereotyped images of locals and locales, which may or may not have any truth to them. In “Story of Hope,” one character asks a man if he knows an old friend of hers and then laments, “I know that’s a horrible question to ask a person who lives in a small town, as if everybody in a small town knows everybody else...cause, you know, people in small towns really don’t know each other any better than in big towns...you know who you know and you don’t know who you don’t know, just like anywhere else.” But we soon learn that these characters do know each other, and as the play unfolds, the effect each character has on the others is subtly intertwined with each person’s story.

The combination of its smallness and remoteness make Almost the only place where this particular group of characters can exist. Essentially cutting his setting off from the rest of the world, Cariani creates a distinct

community. The characters are not trapped in this distant world; in fact many have left and returned. They choose to remain removed, and this decision makes the characters who they are, influencing all aspects of their lives. Their isolation creates a close knit and interdependent culture, where kindness and support are the impetus for many of their actions, and in all likelihood, one character's decisions will affect the lives of many other people in town.

The irony of *Almost, Maine* is that all of northern Maine's wide-open spaces offer no hiding places for its residents. In actuality, privacy is limited by the town's intimacy. Chad and Randy have to go to a potato field to have a private conversation in "They Fell." In "Seeing The Thing," Rhonda is devastated to learn that people in town have been talking about her personal life, even though she is well informed about theirs. Trying to hide, physically or emotionally, in *Almost* is a futile effort. The characters reap the benefits of their friends' proximity, yet the cost is that the small town familiarity lays the character bare, whether they want to be or not.

Not only did the playwright set his play in this small isolated northern town, but we join the

characters mid-winter, where Cariani has surrounded them with snow, ice and cold. The cold weather works in contrast to the warmth of the characters. But this frozen environment is not merely a backdrop to the action; it serves as a catalyst to the emotional stories being told. The characters – forced into even closer contact – cannot keep their emotional revelations under control. The harsh climate even becomes a device to further the plot. A snowball becomes the Earth or a weapon when words no longer suffice. Snow causes roofs to collapse and lives to change. Even the necessary layers upon layers of heavy winter clothes become a metaphor for protecting oneself emotionally. Though there are only two people on stage at any given time, each vignette really has three characters – two actors and the setting of the play. The people of *Almost, Maine* are so affected by their environment that they interact with it in much the same way they would another person. The play theorizes that a large part of who we are as individuals may be a result of where we come from. After the events of one Friday night, we can imagine that both the characters and the town will never be the same.



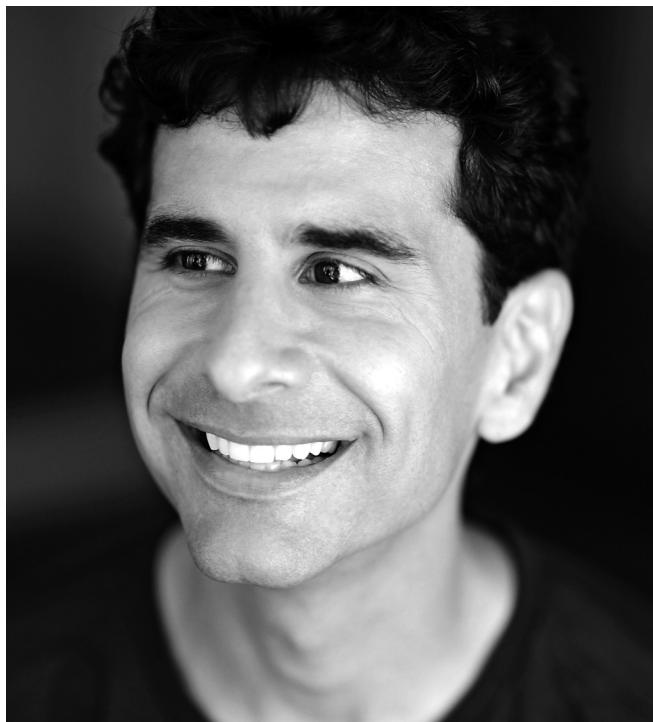
ALMOST, MAINE, *WORLD PREMIERE, PORTLAND STAGE COMPANY, 2004.*

Rural Representation in *Almost, Maine*

BY KAYLEE POMELOW

John Cariani's *Almost, Maine* follows the residents of a rural town in northern Maine. Rural Maine is known for their generous people and tight-knit communities; their pulp, paper, and lumber industry; and crops like blueberries, potatoes, and maple syrup. While speaking about his inspiration for *Almost, Maine*, Cariani told *The Portland Phoenix* in 2004 that "everything that [he] sees in New York as far as theater goes seems to be about well-to-do people and what I and a lot of my friends from Maine call 'made-up problems.'" Unhappy with the types of stories he was seeing in New York, Cariani, who grew up in Presque Isle, Maine, wanted to create "a community where we get some truth, and *Almost, Maine* is that place." Sparked by his desire to better represent his geographic identity on the stage, John Cariani's *Almost, Maine* depicts rural living in an honest way, creates complex characters with genuine challenges, and fights harmful stereotypes.

Geographic location is just one of many factors that can contribute to a person's identity, but it can have a significant impact on how people are able to live their lives.



JOHN CARIANI.



A CABIN IN AROOSTOKE COUNTY, MAINE.

A rural area is a region with a low population density, fewer houses and commercial buildings, and less infrastructure. People living in rural areas are more likely to work in agriculture or a primary industry, like mining or forestry, than people living in urban areas. An urban area is the region surrounding a city that has a high population density. These areas also have a high density of houses, commercial buildings, roads, bridges, and railways. Typically, most people in urban areas have nonagricultural jobs. The dominant migration pattern is from rural areas to urban areas because of new technology that decreases the need for many agricultural jobs. New jobs are also more likely to be created in urban areas.

Issues for people living in the city can feel less relevant for people living in rural areas and vice versa; this does not mean that the challenges associated with either geographical location are necessarily more or less valid or important than the other. For example, Michele Tine's study titled *Growing up in Rural vs. Urban Poverty: Contextual, Academic, and Cognitive Differences* looked at low-income individuals from both rural and urban areas and found that they experienced very different challenges even though they

shared a similar economic background. Tine found that people in urban neighborhoods were more likely to experience crowded housing, high crime rates, divorce, and psychological disorders more frequently than those in rural areas, while people in rural areas were more likely to experience higher infant mortality, lower quality housing, lower quality healthcare, higher rates of unemployment, and social and technological isolation. Cariani's statement to *The Portland Phoenix* about the kind of theater he sees in the city not only suggests a difference in geographical location between Maine and New York, but his use of the term "well-to-do" also suggests differences in economic background.

In his 2004 interview with *The Portland Phoenix*, Cariani also said that "one of the things I discovered when I left Presque Isle is that there's a misconception that people who live in small towns are less sophisticated than people in big cities. All the people in *[Almost, Maine]* are very smart, but not cynical."

It is important to fight against the depiction of any harmful stereotypes, even though it is sometimes well-intentioned people who perpetuate them. Cariani wrote this note in the beginning of *Almost, Maine* to try to warn against depicting rural stereotypes in his play:

The people of Almost, Maine, are rural Americans. They're not hicks. They're not

quaint, quirky eccentrics. They don't wear funny clothes and funny hats. They don't have funny Maine accents. They are not "Downeasters." They are not fishermen or lobster men. They don't wear galoshes and rain hats. They don't say, "Ayuh." The people of Almost, Maine, are not cuddly and cute. They're hard-working, ordinary people. They're dignified. They're honest and true. They're not cynical. They're not sarcastic. They're not glib. But this does not mean that they're dumb. They're very smart. They just take time to wonder about things. They speak simply, honestly, truly, and from the heart. They are not precious about what they say or do. The people of Almost, Maine, are dealing with a lot of the things that people who live in rural America deal with: poverty, unemployment, limited opportunity, addiction. So, there's a distinct sadness underlying the hope and joy in this play.

Given the details included in Cariani's note, we understand just how important it is for the actors of *Almost, Maine* to avoid portraying rural stereotypes. *Almost, Maine* is one of the most popular shows (especially among high schools and smaller theaters) that depicts rural living in an honest way, creating complex characters with genuine challenges, all without making rural Americans the butt of a joke.



THE CAST OF ALMOST, MAINE, PORTLAND STAGE COMPANY, 2020. PHOTO BY MICAL HUTSON.

Townships and the Unorganized Territory of Northern Maine

BY MEREDITH G. HEALY

In the first scene of *Almost, Maine*, we are introduced to Glory, a hiker hoping to view the aurora borealis, and East, the man whose yard is Glory's preferred camping spot. Glory pulls out her map during their conversation and notes that she was unable to find their current location on her map. East explains that he resides in the Unorganized Territory (UT) of northern Maine.

EAST. You're in unorganized territory. Township Thirteen, Range Seven. It's not gonna be on your map, 'cause it's not an actual town, technically.

GLORY. What do you mean—

EAST. See, to be a town, you gotta get organized. And we never got around to gettin' organized, so...we're just Almost.

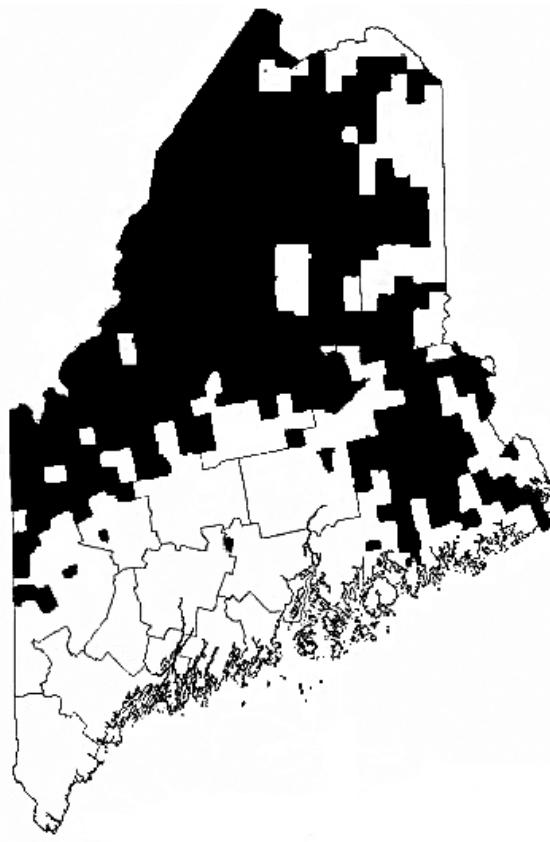
GLORY. Oh...

The state of Maine is comprised of cities, towns, plantations, and townships of varying sizes. Maine currently has 23 incorporated cities, 431 towns, 34 plantations, and 429 townships. The differences between a city, town, plantation, and township in Maine lie in how they are governed.

Cities and towns in Maine have municipal, or local, governments. The way in which these governments function differentiate cities from towns. Cities in Maine have a representative government, in the form of a city council that works with the mayor, and is voted on by residents during local elections. Towns in Maine generally elect board members to oversee the annual meetings during which the residents vote on local issues. Maine, Vermont, and Rhode Island are unique in that there are no population minimums required for cities. Rather, Maine Legislature is responsible for incorporating cities and towns through a special act.

Plantations are typically found in rural areas and have low populations. The major difference between a town and a plantation in Maine is that plantations don't go through the state Legislature to become incorporated. For a plantation to be officially formed all that the residents need to do is pass a vote on the issue.

A township is unique because it has no organized local government. The people in townships pay taxes to the state, which is also responsible for providing education and public health services. The county is responsible for providing services like road maintenance, garbage collection and disposal, policing, and firefighting. Children generally attend schools in nearby districts. Townships make up the vast area of northern Maine that is known as the Unorganized Territory (UT).



THE UNORGANIZED TERRITORY OF NORTHERN MAINE.



ALMOST, MAINE, WORLD PREMIERE, PORTLAND STAGE COMPANY, 2004.

Covering over nine million acres, the UT encompasses over 50% of Maine's area and has a population of over 9,000. Maine is one of nine US states that has a UT. Townships may have names, such as Misery Gore or Upper Enchanted, but many are known instead by township and range identifications. Townships are first designated by the letter "T," standing for township, followed by a number 1-19 moving from south to north. There are some unnamed townships which have an additional letter following the "T" instead of a number. The next part of the name is an "R" for range, followed by a number to indicate the range. These numbers move from east to west. The abbreviation found at the end of a township's name indicates other identifiers that relate to additional information regarding location or historic information. For example, WELS stands for West of the Easterly Line of the State and BKP stands for Bingham's Kennebec Purchase. So, an example of a township's name is T3 R4 WELS.

To become a township and join the UT, a town must go through a process known as deorganization, or disincorporation. In recent years a growing number of towns have considered deorganizing. One of the most recent additions to the UT is Cary Township, which officially became a township on July 1, 2019 after a seven-year process. The motivation to become part of the UT is often financial. Towns with low populations view joining the UT as an opportunity to lower taxes and eliminate the need to hire and pay for town jobs. In a 2016

article for the New York Times, Marcia McInnis, a former fiscal administrator for the UT, gave a possible explanation for the trend: "I attribute the recent increase in interest in deorganizing as a direct result of the economic Great Recession and in the loss of jobs in the logging industry."

To initiate the deorganization, a petition must be signed by at least 50% of the voters from the town who voted in the last gubernatorial election. After the signatures are collected the current governing body of the town calls a town meeting, and, at this meeting, those in attendance vote to form a deorganization committee. If the vote passes, a five-member deorganization committee comprised of one municipal officer, one member of the local school board, and three voters residing in the town is formed. The committee notifies the Legislature and the UT's fiscal administrator of the town's intent to deorganize. The town then has another meeting and, if the vote holds, the state Legislature votes. If the Legislature also votes in favor of deorganization, the town holds a referendum on this single question. If two-thirds of the voters are in favor of the referendum, then the deorganization commences. The township must then pay off any debts to the state and county. The whole process is quite lengthy often takes two years to complete.

In *Almost, Maine*, Glory finds herself in the UT to view the northern lights. The play introduces audiences to the people who call the UT home, and in doing so shows us the spirit, camaraderie, and community that exist in the townships of northern Maine.



RIVER DRIVERS AT WORK ON THE MACHIAS RIVER, 1971.

Rural Recreation

BY KAYLEE POMELOW

Hunting, fishing, ice fishing, snowmobiling, and ATVing have long been an exciting part of rural Maine culture, both for practical use and pleasure. As one of the most forested parts of the country, Maine has acres upon acres of relatively untouched forest, bogs, and meadows, making it ideal for outdoor recreation and relaxation. Mainers across the state are never too far from nature, but in more rural parts of the state (which have a lower population density and generally have less reliable cell phone service), residents tend to partake in these outdoor activities more than their urban counterparts. Check out some of the top recreational activities for rural Maine below!

Hunting is the practice of capturing or killing wild animals to provide food, to participate in sport, or to work against overpopulation of some wildlife species, typically with a gun or bow and arrow. Maine's large areas of quiet forest, marshes, and lakes create an ideal environment for animals like moose, whitetail deer, bears, turkeys, coyotes, rabbits, and ducks, all of which are popular to hunt. Hunting is frequently an intergenerational practice and is allowed on public lands and several state parks with a valid hunting license.



Fishing is a sport that many Mainers of all ages have enjoyed. Maine is home to thousands of miles of rivers, streams, and lakes, as well as a vast Atlantic coastline, ideal for many different species of aquatic life. People set out to catch fish like brook trout, rainbow trout, brown trout, lake trout, landlocked salmon, smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, pike, and musky in freshwater, as well as striped bass or bluefish in saltwater. A fishing license is required for any Maine resident over the age of sixteen.



Ice fishing is one of the only ways to fish in the cold Maine winters. After drilling a hole into a frozen lake or pond using an ice saw or auger, a person can use a hook and line mechanism with bait like worms or small minnows to lure and catch fish. Many people spend time in ice shacks, portable sheds people can place onto frozen lakes, to keep warm during their time ice fishing.



Snowmobiling is an exciting form of transportation during the winters in Maine. A snowmobile is a motorized vehicle designed to be driven in snowy weather. There are over 14,000 miles of snowmobile trails throughout Maine that are maintained for the benefit and safety of the riders. Snowmobile trails often connect with each other, so snowmobilers can cruise across much of the state as well as internationally into Canada. The network of trails is still growing, largely due to the collaboration of snowmobile clubs, municipalities, private landowners, and the Bureau of Parks and Lands.

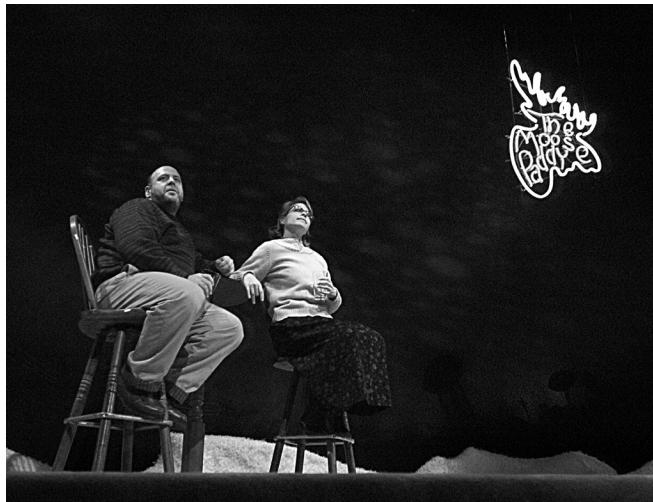


Off-roading on an all-terrain vehicle (ATV) allows riders to drive on a variety of terrains, such as dirt, grass, and mud. Like snowmobiling, Maine also has a large network of ATV trails, many of which include scenic and wildlife areas. Many of them are paths, called rail trails, were originally created as railway corridors used by trains. These rail trails are multi-use and are open to hikers, bikers, and horseback riders during the spring, summer, and fall, and snowmobilers and cross-country skiers in the winter. ATVs offer an adventurous travel alternative that can transport someone easily from place to place in rural areas.



Journey and Legacy of *Almost, Maine*

BY KAYLEE POMELOW



ALMOST, MAINE, WORLD PREMIERE, PORTLAND STAGE COMPANY, 2004.

When *Almost, Maine* by John Cariani had its world premiere at Portland Stage in 2004, the show had a sold-out run, breaking box office records and becoming a smash hit. In the October 31st, 2004, publication of *Maine Sunday Telegram* titled “Nothing almost about *Almost*,” critic Mary Snell stated that *Almost, Maine* was “a celebration, a homecoming” and that the “funny, warm and oh-so-human romantic comedy set in a mythical Maine town” gifts the audience with “creative flights into metaphors.” *The Forecaster* called the show “simply dazzling in its comic and emotional impact.” With the support of local audiences, Portland Stage’s production of *Almost, Maine* continued to gain critical acclaim, being named one of the outstanding new plays of 2004-2005 by the new American National Theatre and one of the ten must-see shows for the 2004-2005 regional theater season.

With the success of the Portland Stage production well underway, the artistic team prepared for an off-Broadway transfer produced by Jack Thomas/Bulldog Theatrical and Bruce Payne. Over a year after the record-breaking success of the Portland Stage production, *Almost, Maine* opened at the Daryl Roth Theatre on January 12, 2006. Unexpectedly, the production was met with less-than-stellar reviews. In Charles Isherwood’s review in *The New York Times* titled “Down East, So Much Love, Exciting and

New,” he compared the production to an “overly sweetened Sno-Kone,” stating that the show “will evoke either awww’s or ick’s, depending on your affection for its whimsical approach to the joys and perils of romance” and that some of the vignettes had the “patience-straining effect of overextended acting exercises.” *Entertainment Weekly* selected it as one of the worst shows of 2006. Being significantly less well-received than the world premiere, the 2006 off-Broadway production of *Almost, Maine* closed on February 12, 2006, just a month after opening.

Despite a rocky run off Broadway, the popularity of *Almost, Maine* continued to gain momentum, being produced in more and more regional and community theaters in the US and worldwide in places like Australia, Dubai, South Korea, and Mexico. North American high schools began producing *Almost, Maine* at a particularly impressive rate. In fact, according to an annual survey conducted by the Educational Theatre Association, *Almost, Maine* is currently the most produced full-length play in high school across America and has been since 2014, consistently ranking above canonical classics such as *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* by William Shakespeare, *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder, and *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller. In a *New York Times* article titled “New York Flop Became a Hit Everywhere Else,” Cara Joy David suggests that the vignette structure and flexible casting contributed to the play’s success. Jack Thomas, the original off-Broadway producer, added that *Almost, Maine* has “a certain sweetness, an absolute lack of guile” that attracts theaters.

From a record-breaking world premiere to a brief stint off-Broadway to becoming the most produced show in North American high schools, *Almost, Maine*’s unexpected journey parallels the uniqueness of the script: filled with grit, charm, and a little bit of magic. One cannot help but smile at Craig Pospisil’s (of Dramatists Play Services) description of *Almost, Maine*’s remarkable journey as “a real Cinderella story.” Twice I have had the privilege of directing *Almost, Maine* in a high school program. Why? Because it is special. It is compelling. It is important. Indeed, it is magical.

Almost, Maine in High Schools

BY MAURA SMITH
EDITED BY KAYLEE POMELOW

*Directing and Dramaturgy intern Kaylee Pomelow asked English teacher and theater director Maura Smith about why she chose to produce *Almost, Maine* with her students at Skowhegan Area High School in both 2011 and 2017. Her response follows :*



SKOWHEGAN, MAINE.

Twice I have had the privilege of directing *Almost, Maine* in a high school program. Why? Because it is special. It is compelling. It is important. Indeed, it is magical.

Some high school directors might choose the play because its modern setting makes the show economical to produce—minimally, you need a few pieces of furniture, a couple of platforms, and some winter clothes. Furthermore, because high school theater students often participate in many other school activities, the play's vignette structure allows directors to call small groups of students to rehearse; if you have ever worked with teenagers, you know it is virtually impossible to get them in the same place at the same time. And for small schools with a limited number of students involved in theater, the play allows double or triple casting.

While these pragmatic reasons might make the play appealing to high schools, there is much more that makes *Almost, Maine* the most produced play—worldwide—among high schools.

My program lacks neither money nor students; however, if those considerations did apply, there are any number of other plays we could do. The appeal of *Almost, Maine* is John Cariani's masterful way with language. Not only does Cariani have a keen ear for how people talk to one another, but also he understands how to take an abstract, over-sentimentalized concept—love—and present it concretely, decisively, unsentimentally. Few adolescents can relate to Romeo and Juliet's perfectly expressed, all-or-nothing passion or to Benedick and Beatrice's mature, sexy, verbal sparring; however, more teens than not have been in Dave's shoes, trying to explain to a friend about wanting to be more than just hangout buddies. Plenty of us have found ourselves non-communicating in clipped sound bites, like Jimmy, desperate to get a word in with Sandrine even though he doesn't know the first thing to say to her. Teenage girls see themselves in Gayle, twisting fitfully to articulate to Lendall what—damn it!—he already should understand. A student of mine once commented, with perfect, naïve, puzzlement, "People talk like this when they love each other?" Well, yes. They do. Absolutely. Oddly, the greater the love, the worse it usually is. Cariani captures the words of love in a way that is as real and as accessible as it gets for adolescents.

As well with using words with arresting and unexpected precision, Cariani addresses one of the greatest challenges of working with adolescents: listening. Young performers naturally want to speak—that is why they audition. However, few students understand the importance of listening—to the words, to other actors, to the messages. Cariani embeds Chekhovian pauses into his script, highlighting what is not said, which in some instances is more vital than what is said. These moments make us wait, anticipate, and listen rather than hear. *Almost, Maine* allows students to explore the art of listening.

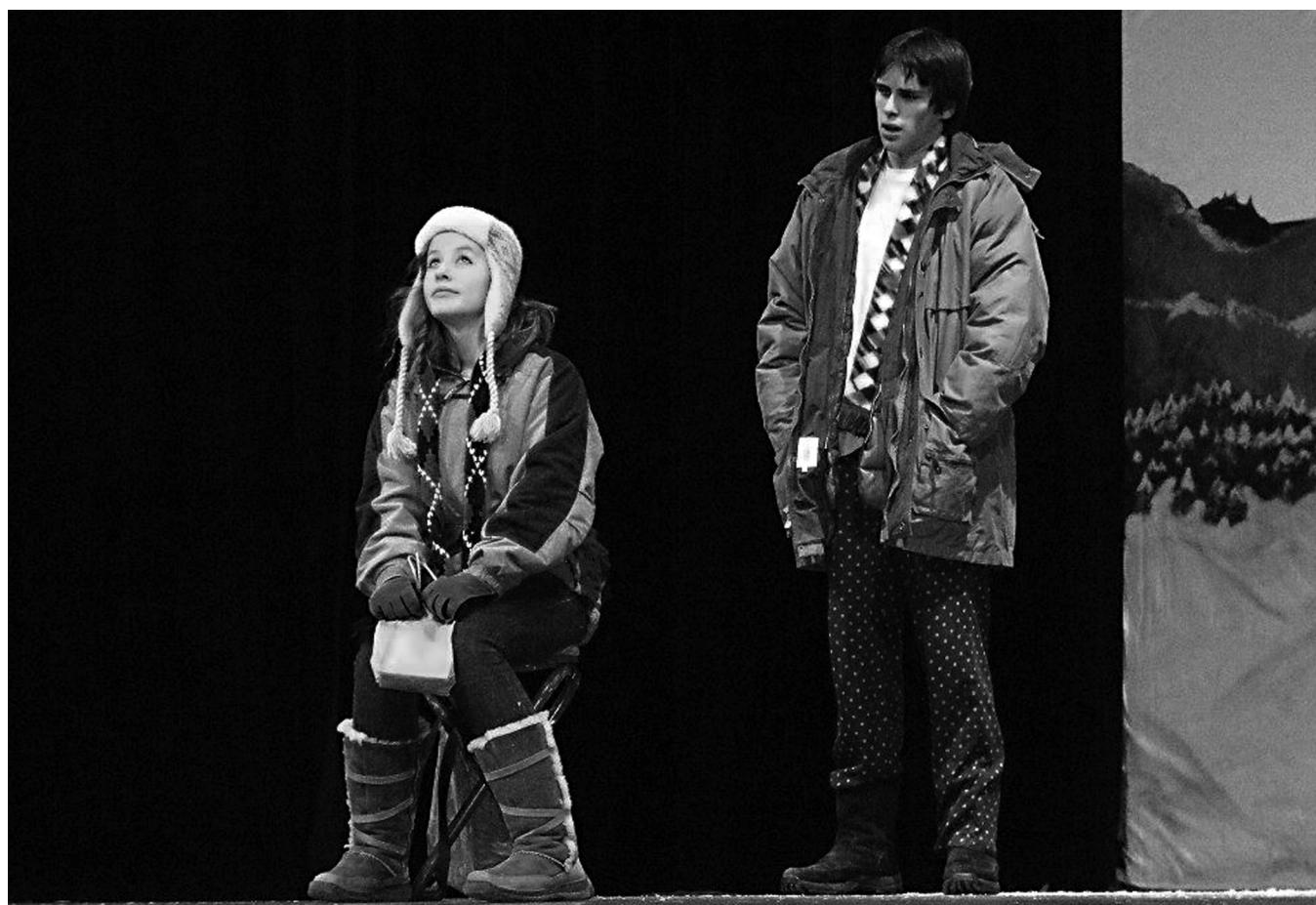
Another universal draw is the play's setting. In a town named Almost, there is a hint that anything can happen—and it does. Cariani uses magical realism to reveal events occurring all on the same night, under the seemingly supernatural wonderment of the northern lights. Each scene is so unbelievable that it is somehow

ALMOST, MAINE DIGGING DEEPER

very believable. Ordinary townsfolk experience extraordinary yet pedestrian moments of love, for good and for bad. Chad and Randy (or Shelly and Deena) may or may not be experiencing romantic love, but the unexpected shift in their relationship underscores the simultaneous attraction and revulsion that torment us when we feel any sort of love for another. Phil and Marcy may think their marriage has insidiously grown past hope, but divine intervention of sorts signals that anything is possible if we would just lighten up. Through the character Hope, Cariani personifies the spirit of possibility, which doesn't die until we let it. Cariani uses the mundane to which we all can relate to show that how we feel and what we experience is unique and important no matter who we are, and that experiencing love is not so much bells and rockets as it is missed chances, lost connections, words poorly expressed, and plans gone wrong. But for teenagers, this is right on; what Cariani's characters experience is the stuff of teen life: fumbling through each day, trying to find one's

place in the world, and hoping that someone likes you. In the end, whatever we feel and whatever we experience are in their own ways special, important, magical. Through Cariani's words, we see that the complex, universally desired state of being—that of loving and of being loved—deserves our attention and our respect. As any teenager can tell you, love is not so much heart-pounding ecstasy and crushing heartbreak as it is people just trying to understand how terribly difficult it is when feelings for others invade us.

Love is ethereal, so John Cariani makes it concrete. Love is so far out of reach that it is attainable. It is there—or Almost there—for each of us. This is why I hope to direct *Almost, Maine*, again, and why every teenager just trying to get by should see it, read it, or take part in its production. This play tells kids it is okay to be messy and uncomfortable as we take our respective spins around the earth. This is, in some strange way, satisfying and enriching.



DIRECTING AND DRAMATURGY INTERN KAYLEE POMELOW AND SAMUEL WHEELER
IN SKOWHEGAN AREA HIGH SCHOOL'S PRODUCTION OF *ALMOST, MAINE*, 2011.

Maine in Popular Culture

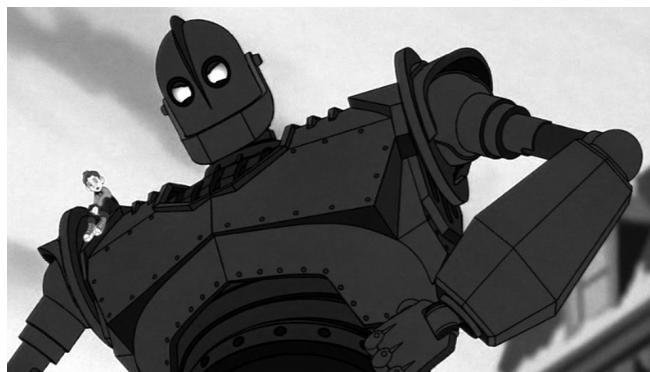
BY MEREDITH G. HEALY

Maine is the setting of many popular television shows, movies, and books, as well as the home of some famous faces. Read on below to find out about other pieces of fiction that are set in Maine, and to learn about some artists that call Maine home.

ON THE SCREEN



Dark Shadows was a television show that aired from 1966-1971. The show contained both elements of classic gothic horror and daytime soap operas. Originally, however, the television show had no plans to include anything supernatural. The series began as a story about a young woman working as a governess for a boy growing up in an old gothic mansion in Collinsport, Maine. Creator Dan Curtis took a chance when the show faced cancellation after the first season, and began to add some supernatural elements. One of these elements was the addition of vampire Barnabas Collins, who became a fan favorite. The show is still regarded as a cult classic, and in 2015 Warner Brothers made a feature film based on the series starring Johnny Depp as Barnabas.

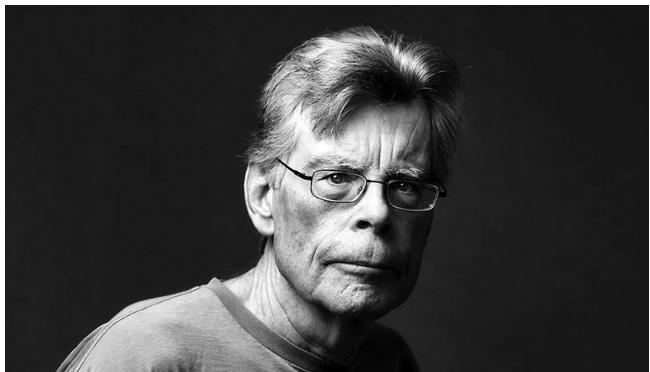


The Iron Giant is a 1999 animated film, based on a 1968 children's story, *The Iron Man*, by Ted Hughes. The original story was set in England, but the film changed the setting to Rockwell, Maine. The film tells the story of Hogarth, a young boy, who discovers and befriends the Iron Giant, a massive 50-foot-tall robot. The two go on adventures together, and Hogarth tries to protect his new friend from being destroyed by a government agent. The Giant learns about love and loss, and sacrifices himself to save Hogarth and the town.

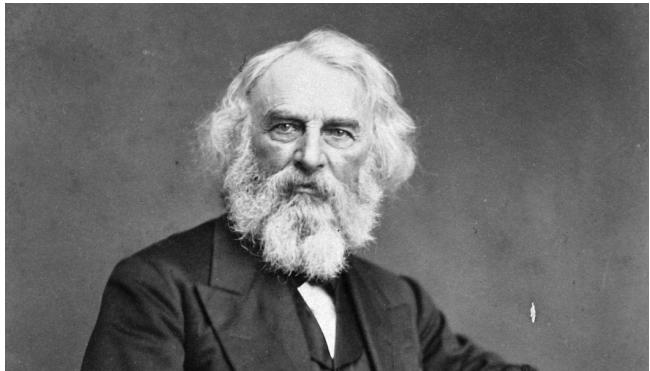


Once Upon a Time was a television series that aired from 2011-2018. The show is set primarily in the fictional town of Storybrooke, Maine. The series features characters from beloved fairy tales, amongst them Snow White, the Evil Queen, Prince Charming, Rumpelstiltskin, and Captain Hook, navigating life in the real world after a curse banished them to the small coastal town. The characters were left with no memories of their fairy tale lives, and key parts of their backstories are revealed in flashbacks during the episodes.

ON THE PAGE



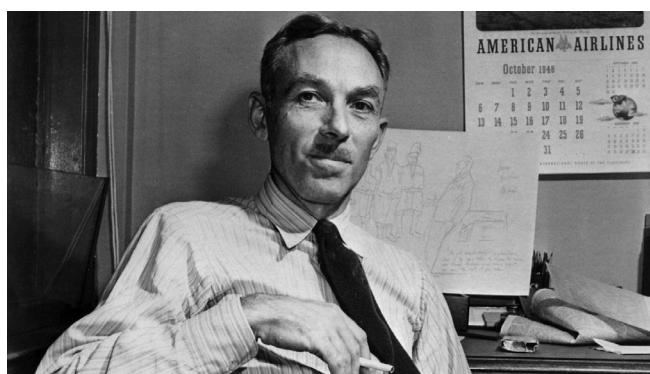
Stephen King is an author who was born in Portland, Maine, and currently resides in Bangor, Maine. King is best known for writing novels featuring the supernatural and horror. Many of King's novels are set in Maine, including one of his first big successes, *Carrie*. Maine is also the setting of *It*, *Pet Sematary*, and *The Body* (which was adapted into the film *Stand by Me*). King graduated from the University of Maine, Orono, and taught creative writing there in the late 1970s.



Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was a poet who was born in Portland, MA. (Portland, MA became Portland, ME when Maine became a state in 1820.) He lived from 1807-1882. Longfellow graduated from Bowdoin College in 1825. He is best known for his works *Hiawatha* and "Paul Revere's Ride." In 1884, he was the first American honored with a memorial bust in Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey in London. Longfellow's fame helped make poetry a more popular form of writing across the United States.



Edna St. Vincent Millay was a poet and playwright who was born in Rockland, Maine. She lived from 1892-1950. She was an early feminist, and often wrote about women's issues and politics. Millay is best known for her poetry, and won the Pulitzer Prize in 1923 for her book *The Ballad of Harp Weaver*. It was in this book that she coined the phrase "My candle burns at both ends." She was also commissioned to write plays and operas; her most popular was *The King's Henchman*, which she wrote with Deems Taylor for the Metropolitan Opera House.



E.B. White was an author who lived from 1899-1985 best known for writing children's novels. In the 1930s, White and his family began to spend most of their time at their farmhouse in Brooklin, Maine. He was inspired to write *Charlotte's Web* after an early morning encounter with a spider at this farm. White's other popular children's novels include *Stuart Little* and *The Trumpet of the Swan*. He was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1963 and received a Pulitzer Prize special citation in 1978.

ON THE STAGE



Anna Kendrick is an actor who was born in Portland, Maine. Kendrick is best known for her roles on the big screen (*Twilight*, *Pitch Perfect*, *Into the Woods*), but she got her start on the stage. She began acting in community theater productions when she was growing up in Maine, and appeared in several shows with the Lyric Music Theater in South Portland and in Portland Stage's Little Festival of the Unexpected. In 1998, Kendrick landed a role in *High Society* on Broadway and was nominated for a Tony Award for her portrayal of Dinah in the musical.



Callie Kimball is a playwright based in Portland, Maine. She has developed shows across the country at a variety of regional theaters including the Lark Play Development Center, the Kennedy Center, and Portland Stage, where she is currently an Affiliate Artist. In 2018, Kimball was commissioned by Portland Stage to write a new play about women's suffrage to celebrate the suffrage centennial. The play is called *Perseverance* and had a staged reading at Portland Stage in November.



Andrea Martin is an actor who was born in Portland, Maine. Martin is known for both her work onstage and onscreen. She is a two-time Tony Award winner, winning most recently for her turn as Berthe in the 2013 Broadway revival of *Pippin*. Martin was nominated for an Emmy Award for her work on the television show *SCTV* (a popular sketch comedy series which aired from 1976-1984). She is also recognized for her role of Aunt Voula in the film *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* and its sequel.



Monica Wood is an author and playwright who was born in Mexico, Maine. Wood currently resides in Portland, Maine. She is best known for her novels, including *When We Were the Kennedys: A Memoir from Mexico, Maine*; *Any Bitter Thing*; and *The One-in-a-Million Boy*. In 2015, Wood's first play, *Papermaker*, had its world premiere at Portland Stage, where Wood is now an Affiliate Artist. Her most recent play, *The Half-Light*, premiered as part of Portland Stage's Mainstage Season last February.

Aurora Borealis: Scientific and Spiritual

BY MEREDITH G. HEALY

John Cariani's *Almost, Maine* contains many magical moments set against the backdrop of the northern lights. In the author's note, Cariani describes how each of the scenes contain elements of magic, and states that "[t]he northern lights and the magical moments give rise to one another." What exactly are the northern lights and how do these natural phenomena come to exist?



EARLY CAVE PAINTING DEPICTING AN AURORA.

The northern and southern lights have been viewed by people for many centuries. The lights were depicted by cavemen in cave paintings that are likely over 30,000 years old in France. The lights are also mentioned in ancient Greek and Chinese texts, and have existed in the Scandinavian and Eskimo oral tradition since 700 C.E. The 17th century French philosopher and scientist, Pierre Gassendi, is credited for giving the lights their other name, the aurora. "Aurora" is the name of both the Greek and Roman goddesses of dawn. The northern lights are known as "aurora borealis" meaning "dawn of the north," whereas the southern lights are known as "aurora australis" or "dawn of the south." Borealis and australis are derived from the Latin words for north and south.

The lights are caused by charged particles from the sun making their way into the Earth's atmosphere. Protons and electrons can become charged when they collide on the surface of the sun, and this allows them to leave the sun's atmosphere. Some of the particles get caught up in solar winds and begin a 40-hour journey to Earth. Most of these particles are unable to make it into Earth's atmosphere due to the magnetic field. However, the magnetic field is weaker at the north and south poles and this results in a higher likelihood for the particles to be able to break through. When this happens, the charged protons and electrons collide with gas particles, such as oxygen and nitrogen, in Earth's atmosphere and the result is an aurora.

An aurora is able to take on many different visual forms. The lights can spiral or arc, or can appear to be a curtain stretching across the night sky. The form that an aurora takes is caused by lines of force which indicate the direction of the magnetic field. Solar winds are responsible for causing the display to ripple, fade, brighten, and dance. Auroras can feature many different colors, which are dictated by the type of gas with which the sun's charged particles collide. The pale yellow color is caused by low-altitude oxygen, and the bright red color comes from oxygen found at a higher altitude. Nitrogen particles lead to violet and blue auroras, and a combination of oxygen and nitrogen results in the color green. Scientists mark the brightness of auroras on a scale from zero (faint) to four (very bright).

Tracking the features of an aurora, including the brightness, location, colors, and date, help scientists continue to learn about Earth's magnetic field. Auroras are not limited to Earth; similar displays have been observed on Jupiter and Saturn. Both planets also have powerful magnetic fields and atmospheric gases, which are the crucial elements that create the lights.



NORTHERN LIGHTS VIEWED FROM AROOSTOOK COUNTY, MAINE.

The aurora borealis is one of the Seven Wonders of the Natural World. People travel great distances in the hopes of witnessing the lights. Auroral activity occurs in eleven-year cycles, with peaks lasting three to four years. These peaks are followed by a two-year transitional period which is then followed by the solar minimum which also lasts three to four years. According to scientists, the best season to catch an aurora is in the late autumn or early spring.

In the first scene of *Almost, Maine*, Glory tells East why she wants to view the aurora borealis:

GLORY. ... And, see, the northern lights—did you know this?—the northern lights are really the torches that the recently departed carry with them so they can find their way home, to heaven, and, see, it takes a soul three days to make its way home, to heaven, and this is Friday, this is the third day, so, you see, I will see them, because they're him: He'll be carrying one of the torches.

Different cultures have found different meanings in the lights. The ancient Greeks believed that the northern lights were the goddess Aurora racing in her chariot to alert her sisters, the goddesses Helios (the sun) and Selene (the moon) of the

new day. In Finland, people said that the lights were sparks generated from a firefox's tail as he darted across the snow. In northern China, the lights were thought to be a good and an evil dragon fighting in the sky. Indigenous tribes in North America also have different beliefs regarding the lights. The Cree in northern Canada believe that the lights represent spirits who have left this Earth and are trying to communicate with those they left behind. Many Inuit tribes hold that the lights are the spirits of dead humans playing a game with a walrus skull serving as a ball. The people residing on the Nunavik Island reverse this belief, and instead think the lights are a group of walruses playing ball with a human skull.

Anthropologist Ernest Hawkes wrote about the lights playing a similar role to the one that Glory describes to East. In his book, *The Labrador Eskimo*, Hawkes states that “[t]he sky is a great dome of hard material arched over the Earth. There is a hole in it through which the spirits pass to the true heavens... The spirits who live there light torches to guide the feet of new arrivals. This is the light of the aurora.” Regardless of the meaning that one finds in the northern lights, their beauty is undeniable.

How Grief Impacts the Body

By LIZZ MANGAN

We've all probably come across the term "heartbroken" being used to describe someone's emotional state after some kind of personal loss. *The Atlantic* article "Understanding How Grief Weakens the Body" comments on this very phrasing by saying, "English terms for emotional distress are often wrapped up in the language of physical maladies: Being heartsick, sick with grief, heartbroken." But being heartbroken doesn't mean your heart is literally broken, right? Just because you're sad doesn't mean you can actually experience any physical repercussions...can you?

In a town like Almost, Maine, the answer to this question may be "yes." Almost is a town influenced by "magical realism," which is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "a literary or artistic genre in which realistic narrative and naturalistic technique are combined with surreal elements of dream or fantasy." This means that grief can, and does, impact the residents of Almost in ways that aren't exclusive to reality. The character Daniel becomes shorter because he loses hope in "A Story of Hope." The character Randy, who begins his scene not able to feel physical pain due to a medical condition, is able to feel pain by the end after experiencing heartache for the first time. And, yes, even Glory experiences a literal broken heart, carrying around the shattered pieces of it in a bag.

Although grief's effect in *Almost, Maine* is exaggerated by magical realism, it comes from a place of reality. Some people may not recognize that grief can physically affect the body because of the fact that grief, in the most basic definition, is an emotion. However, when looked at on a more detailed level, we can recognize that emotions all occur in the brain, and each location of the brain is responsible for symptoms that can be influenced by these emotions. This means that if we are feeling stressed, for example, we may experience a headache as a result of this emotion.

It is important to understand how the brain creates and processes emotions. The brain



contains a structure called the limbic system, which is the primary source for behavioral and emotional responses. The major parts of the brain that comprise the limbic system are the hypothalamus, hippocampus, amygdala, and limbic cortex. Each one of these sections is responsible for different functions within the brain, as well as different emotions. Because we are focusing on grief, it is best to take a closer look at the amygdala and hippocampus, which are where sadness and grief primarily occur.

The amygdala, according to Healthline, "helps coordinate responses to things in your environment, especially those that trigger an emotional response." The hippocampus "helps preserve and retrieve memories." What sadness specifically looks like in the brain is still being investigated, though Jon Hamilton of NPR also notes that a study at the University of California San Francisco found that, from a study of 21 people, "feeling down was associated with greater communication between brain areas involved in emotion and memory." These areas are, as stated before, the amygdala and hippocampus. The leader of the study, Vikaas Sohal, hypothesized that, "Maybe you're feeling down and so you start remembering times in your life when bad things have happened, or

you are starting to remember those experiences and that is what is making you feel down.” While this was not definitively proven, it is still a clue as to what the brain may be experiencing when processing sadness.

If this is what sadness looks like in the brain, what does grief look like in the body? As we said before, experiencing stress can cause us to feel a headache. When grief is experienced, it can cause the following symptoms: digestive problems, energy loss, illness due to a lowered immune system, nervousness, pain/discomfort, irregular sleeping patterns, fluctuating weight, and temperature discomfort. An important distinction between these symptoms being associated with grief versus depression is the length of time during which they are experienced. If you feel any of these for more than two weeks, consult a medical professional.

With all this in mind, let’s revisit the question from before: Can your heart actually break as a result of feeling an emotion such as grief? In short, yes, though the way a heart may break for us is slightly different than the heart of someone like Glory in *Almost, Maine*. Though our own heart may not literally break, we can experience what is called “broken heart syndrome.”

The Johns Hopkins Heart and Vascular Institute defines broken heart syndrome as “a condition in which intense emotional or physical stress can cause rapid and severe heart muscle weakness (cardiomyopathy).” This weakening of the muscles can lead to heart failure, low blood pressure, shock, and heart rhythm abnormalities. While these symptoms are also commonly associated with heart attacks, Gregor Dehmer, MD, a professor at Texas A&M College of Medicine says, “People with ‘broken heart syndrome’ typically won’t have severe blockages in their coronary arteries like heart attack patients.” While broken heart syndrome can result in death, Dehmer assures that it is a very rare occurrence and that it is “a reversible, treatable condition and the majority of people recover fully.”

If heartbreak is real, what about shrinking? Can our emotions affect how tall we are? The answer to this is a little more complicated. To start off, it is possible to lose your height. We lose height every day from the minute we wake up to the second

we go to sleep. According to the Huffington Post, “That’s because water in the discs that are in the spine get more and more compressed throughout the day, causing people to be just a smidgen shorter at the end of the day than they were at the beginning of the day.” We can also lose height as we get older due to our bones, which, according to Mayo Clinic, “tend to shrink in size and density, weakening them and making them more susceptible to fracture.”

In terms of height and its association with your emotions, however, it is not likely that grief *can* cause height loss, making Daniel’s condition a result of the magic in *Almost*. Though your emotions may not affect your height, your height can affect your emotions. This is most likely because of societal views surrounding height in association with power. *Science Direct* states that, “taller people are more likely to have achieved higher educational attainment, hold jobs of higher status, have higher social esteem, earn more, and report higher levels of well-being.”

Almost is a town where anything can happen. It is also a town where many residents experience grief that, as a result of their surroundings, impacts them far more than the average person. While Cariani uses these ideas to create a fictionalized version of how we deal with love and loss, there’s more to it than a couple of cute jokes. When we lose someone meaningful to us, whether it is through events such as the end of a relationship or death, it is not typically something we can get over immediately. It takes time to pick up the pieces (in Glory’s case, literally). What can help this process is identifying *why* we are feeling the way we are, and figure out what the best next steps are for us.



Post Show Activities

BY ISABELLA BREZENSKI & MADISON WORTHINGTON

1. Take a look at the article “*Almost, Maine* Family Tree” on page 43, which shows the connections between all the characters in the small community of Almost, Maine. There are several characters in *Almost, Maine* who are connected to each other but do not have a scene together. Looking at “*Almost, Maine* Family Tree,” pick two characters that do not already have a scene together in the play and write a scene between these two characters.
2. *Almost, Maine* can be categorized under the term “magical realism.” Magical realism is a genre that incorporates magical and mysterious elements that are accepted by characters as normal occurrences in their world. How is magical realism used in *Almost, Maine*? Think about a moment in the play that includes magical realism. Write a paragraph on how these magical elements contribute to the scene.
3. *Almost, Maine* takes place in the fictional township of Almost, in northern Maine. How did Portland Stage’s set support the northern Maine setting? Draw your own set that incorporates the many different scenes and settings in this play.
4. *Almost, Maine* calls for double casting of four actors. How did costumes help you differentiate between characters? Read “A Behind-the-Scenes Look at Double Casting” on page 18. Design your own costumes for one actor playing four or five characters, making clear distinctions between the characters!
5. As a person who lives in Maine, how did you relate to this play? Did any of the characters, moments, or scenes resonate with you? Does *Almost, Maine* remind you of any place you have been before? Discuss your thoughts and reflections with your classmates.

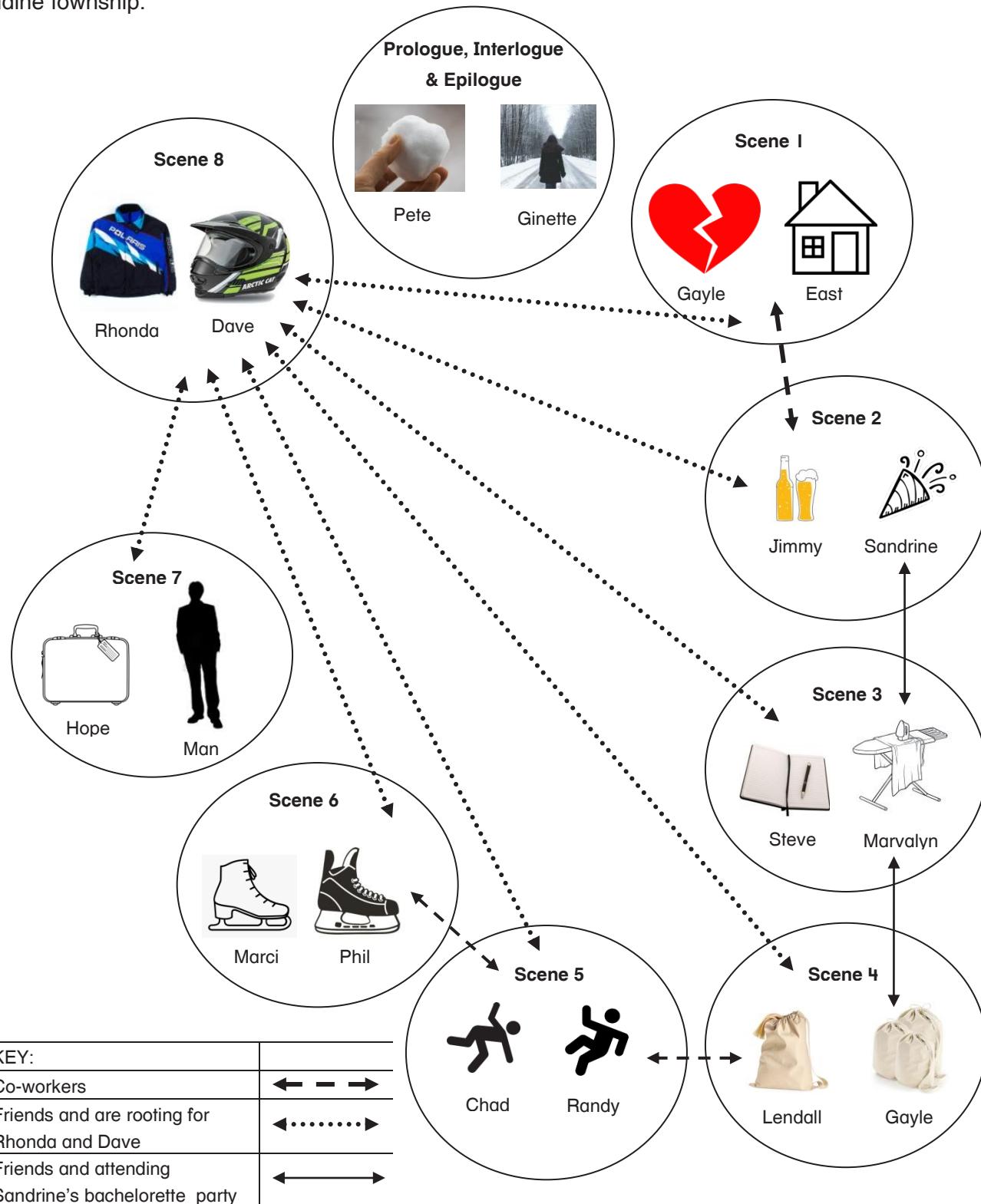


WINTER IN AROOSTOK COUNTY, MAINE.

Almost, Maine Family Tree

BY ISABELLA BREZENSKI

The small supportive community of *Almost, Maine* is interconnected with friendships, romantic relationships, and co-workers. There are times when a character is referenced within a scene they are not physically in. This visual map is to help show the web of community built in this small northern Maine township.



Glossary

BY LIZZ MANGAN

Arctic Cat - A popular brand of snowmobile.



AN ARCTIC CAT SNOWMOBILE.

Bachelorette party - A party given for a woman who is about to get married, typically attended by women only.

Deficiencies - Failings or shortcomings.

“Got canned” - In this context, when Jimmy says his brother and sister “got canned,” he means they were fired from a job.

Latitude - The angular distance of a place north or south of the earth's equator.

Northern lights - Also known as the “aurora borealis,” the northern lights are the result of collisions between gaseous particles in the Earth's atmosphere and charged particles released from the sun's atmosphere. Variations in color are due to the type of gas particles that are colliding.



THE NORTHERN LIGHTS.

Polaris - A popular brand of snowmobile, and a competitor of Arctic Cat. Pronounced “pull-AIR-iss.”

Scandinavia - A region in northern Europe that consists of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark.

Slate - A fine-grained gray, green, or bluish-purple metamorphic rock easily split into smooth, flat plates.



SLATE.

Wallop - To strike or hit very hard.

Winterized - Adapted or prepared something, especially a house, for use in cold weather.



A MAN WINTERIZES HIS HOUSE BY PUTTING PLASTIC WRAP OVER HIS WINDOWS TO PREVENT DRAFTS

Instant Resources

BY ISABELLA BREZENSKI & MADISON WORTHINGTON

Links to the following resources can be found on our site at portlandstage.org/playnotes.

- **An Interview with John Cariani about his play *Almost, Maine***

◦ **Description:** An interview with John about *Almost, Maine* while the play was in production at Syracuse Stage in 2010. He mentions the difficult theme of love – the joy and the heartache. Having grown up in northern Maine himself, John wanted to tell the stories of people who grew up in a place like he did.

◦ **Source:** ScenePartner on YouTube.

- **An interview with John Cariani about his play *Last Gas***

◦ **Description:** An interview with John about his play *Last Gas* which premiered at Portland Stage in 2010. John also discusses attending his first non-musical performance at Portland Stage where his first play, *Almost, Maine*, premiered years later.

◦ **Source:** Portland Stage on YouTube.

- **1820-1850: A New State and Prosperity**

◦ **Description:** An article on the history of Maine's development as a state, covering information about its creation, increase in population, agrarian society, natural landscape, and industries including shipbuilding, granite and lumber production, and seaborne commerce.

◦ **Source:** Maine Memory Network.

- **My Maine Stories**

◦ **Description:** A storytelling forum for Mainers to share their personal stories about family, ancestors, towns, work, and historical events in Maine.

◦ **Source:** Maine Memory Network.



MOIRA DRISCOLL AND KATHY McCAFFERTY IN PORTLAND STAGE COMPANY'S WORLD PREMIERE OF *LAST GAS*, 2010.

Recommended Resources

BY THE EDITORS

Films

Fried Green Tomatoes
Love Actually
The Iron Giant
Valentine's Day

TV Shows

Muder She Wrote
Once Upon a Time

Plays

Last Gas by John Cariani
LOVE/SICK by John Cariani
The Dining Room by A.R. Gurney
Our Town by Thornton Wilder
Papemaker by Monica Wood
The Half-Light by Monica Wood

Books

Blueberries for Sal by Robert McCloskey
Charlotte's Web by E.B. White
Lost on a Mountain in Maine by Donn Fendler
The Maine Woods by Henry David Thoreau
Nine Mile Bridge by Helen Hamlin

Podcasts

Modern Love
This American Life



LOVE ACTUALLY, 2003.

Portland Stage Company

Education and Outreach

Join Portland Stage as we discuss, debate, and explore the plays on our stage and in the classroom! Portland Stage is dedicated to bringing exciting theater, inspiring conversation, interactive experiences, and thought-provoking literature to a wide audience of youth and adult learners. Whether you take part in a discussion, subscribe to PlayNotes, take a class in our Theater for Kids space, or bring a group of students to see a performance, there is something here for everyone. How would you like to participate?

Student Matinee Series

The Portland Stage Student Matinee Program annually provides more than 7,000 middle and high school students from Maine and New Hampshire with discounted tickets for student matinees. Following Student Matinee performances, students participate in discussions with members of the cast and crew, actively and energetically exploring all elements of the production and the issues raised in the play.

Play Me a Story

Experience the Fun & Magic of Theater on Saturday Mornings at 10:30am with Play Me a Story! Ages 4-10 are welcome to enjoy a performance of children's stories, then participate in an acting workshop with professional theater artists. Build literacy, encourage creativity and spark dramatic dreams! Walk-ins are welcome, but pre-registration is encouraged!

After School Classes

After school classes at Portland Stage produce a safe environment for young people to find a higher sense of play, stretch their imaginations, and gain valuable social skills such as listening, risk taking, ensemble building, public speaking, and leadership through storytelling. These classes are wildly fun, creative, spontaneous, and begin to build skills for the young actor or non-actor's voice, body, and imagination. Visit our website for this year's offerings!

Vacation and Summer Camps

Our theater camps are fun, challenging and enriching. We use stories of all kinds to fuel these active, educational and lively, process-based week-long school vacation and summer programs for youth. Theater for Kids works with professional actors, directors, artisans and composers. Students are invited to think, speak, and act, and even sing imaginatively, critically, and creatively in an environment of inclusivity and safe play.

Classroom Workshop Program

The Classroom Workshop Program partners Portland Stage with regional middle and high schools to enhance the experience of students who participate in the Early Show Program by complementing their visits with pre- and post-show workshops in their own classrooms. Workshops are led by professional Teaching Artists who engage students in the creative process through writing, acting, directing and discussion.

The Intern Company

The Portland Stage Intern Program is committed to training future generations of theater professionals. Applicants should be highly motivated individuals who have acquired basic training in the theater arts and are looking to explore their field further through meaningful hands-on experience. Portland Stage interns can expect to be challenged by a creative process that relies on both ingenuity and collaboration. Interns at Portland Stage work with leading designers, directors, administrators, and our professional production team throughout the season. They leave with a greater knowledge of the theatrical process and the satisfaction of being part of a dedicated theater company where exceptional quality is the end goal.

Portland Stage Company

2019-2020 Staff

Anita Stewart *Executive & Artistic Director*

Artistic & Production Staff

Meg Anderson *Props Master*

Todd Brian Backus *Literary Manager*

Daniel Brodhead *Production Manager, Lighting & Sound Supervisor*

Hannah Cordes *Education Director*

Megan Doane *General Manager*

Ted Gallant *Technical Director*

Nathaniel Genrich *Scenic Carpenter*

Myles C. Hatch *Stage Manager*

Julianne Shea *Education Administrator*

Susan Thomas *Costume Shop Manager*

Shane Van Vliet *Stage Manager*

Affiliate Artists

Ron Botting

Daniel Noel

Peter Brown

Ed Reichert

Daniel Burson

Hans Indigo Spencer

Maureen Butler

Dustin Tucker

Ian Carlsen

Bess Welden

Moira Driscoll

Monica Wood

Abigail Killeen

Sally Wood

Callie Kimball

Administrative Staff

Paul Ainsworth *Business Manager*

Chris DeFilipp *House Manager*

Nolan Ellsworth *Front of House Associate*

Marjorie Gallant *Graphic Design Associate*

Beth Given *Development Director*

Mical Hutson *Marketing Director*

Jennifer London *Company Manager*

Martin Lodish *Finance Director*

Renee Myhaver *Assistant Box Office Manager*

Donald Smith *Audience Services Manager*

Madeline St. Germain *Front of House Associate*

Lauren Stockless *Development Assistant*

Nathan Sylvester *Front of House Associate*

Adam Thibodeau *House Manager*

Shannon Wade *Front of House Associate*

Intern Company

Angela Armstrong *Electrics*

Isabella Brezenski *Education*

Jacob Coombs *Sets & Carpentry*

Emma Covert *Stage Management*

Savanna Genskow *Costumes*

Meredith G. Healy *Directing & Dramaturgy*

Zoë Lewis *Company Management*

Lizz Mangan *Directing & Dramaturgy*

Kaylee Pomelow *Directing & Dramaturgy*

Emma Scott *Costumes*

Olivia Tellier *Stage Management*

Madison Worthington *Education*