

WHAT'S NEXT

THE NEWSLETTER OF NEXT ACT THEATRE

VOLUME 35, ISSUE 2
NOV 2024



EXTRAORDINARY THINGS

JOHN CARIANI ON 20 YEARS OF *ALMOST, MAINE*



Playwright
John Cariani is the mind behind the wildly popular ALMOST, MAINE, which appears on the Next Act stage this November and December.

We sat down with him to get his thoughts on how the play has evolved in the 20 years since its world premiere.

What has driven you to continue working on the play since to first production and publication?

I don't think any of my plays will ever be finished. They can always be clearer. And shorter, for sure! Because all plays can be shorter!

But... I think I've continued to work on *ALMOST, MAINE* because I want it to be... ageless, timeless. [That's why it's set in a mythical place in the distant or not-too-distant past.] And now that it's twenty years old, well... sometimes it shows its age. And when it shows its age, I have to adapt. And actors and theatre artists and audiences are really good at letting me know when it's time to adapt. I have seen so many productions of *ALMOST, MAINE*—

professional productions, high school productions, college productions, community theatre productions—and after just about every production I've seen, I've met with the artists involved and I've engaged with audiences. And I've asked everybody what they think of the play—what they love about it, what they don't love about it. And learning what they don't love about it—well, it's helped me understand that I will always have work to do on *ALMOST, MAINE*. And doing that work helps me keep it alive and relevant.

To be clear—*ALMOST, MAINE* hasn't ever been rewritten wholesale. It's the same play it's been since its world premiere twenty years ago. But I've tweaked it and adjusted it gently over the years. And Next Act audiences will be seeing the latest and greatest version of the script!

What is different about the play when produced by a professional company like Next Act versus a high school or college?

ALMOST, MAINE is the most popular play in North American high schools over the last decade. Which has surprised me! How could a play for adults be

so embraced by young people?!? Many teachers have told me it's because the characters in *ALMOST, MAINE* are hopeful and haven't lost their innocence—much like high school and college students; and it's because high

school and college students have just started to experience love and loss, so they can tap into just enough of the sadness that runs through the play to give the play some depth... but they aren't yet so jaded that they can't access genuine hope and joy and innocence. And the joy and genuine innocence that young people bring to the play is beautiful.

But... when adults do the play, there's a world-weariness and a deep sadness and a quiet desperation that creeps in and gently imposes itself on the play and I live for that! *ALMOST, MAINE* is funny, for sure—but it's very sad. As much as it's about finding love and connection, it's also about loneliness and loss. And adult actors just understand the loneliness and loss better than young people do. So I get excited when adults—especially professional ones!—tackle the play. Because there's so much more at stake—so much more desperation!

What would you say about the play to an audience member who is hoping to dive deeper into the themes?

I don't think anyone watching the play has to dive deeper into the themes of the play. I think if Next Act does the play well—and I have tremendous confidence that you will—I have heard such terrific things about the company and the work you all do!—but... if Next Act does the play well, the themes will be clear. And the themes in *ALMOST, MAINE* are... that love can happen. To anyone. When you least expect it.

And that... love is tenuous. And must be tended to.



John Cariani and Kelly McAndrew in *ALMOST, MAINE* Off-Broadway, produced by Transport Group, 2014. Photo courtesy Carol Rosegg.

Continued on page 3.

ALMOST, MAINE is sponsored by Patty Compton, Donna Martynski, and Christine Symchych and Jim McNulty.

**COMING UP
AT NEXT ACT:**

LOVE/SICK

BY JOHN CARIANI
DIRECTED BY LAURA GORDON

**AN EXCLUSIVE,
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STAGED READING
FROM THE AUTHOR
OF ALMOST, MAINE**

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EXTRAORDINARY THINGS continued

And that hope and joy exist in hardscrabble places—like Northern Maine.

I want people to leave *ALMOST, MAINE* thinking about rural America differently. I want them to see rural Americans as joyful, competent, complicated people instead of as the simpletons and addicts contemporary American art and culture portray them as.

I also want people to realize that *ALMOST, MAINE* is a romantic comedy, not a sentimental comedy. F. Scott Fitzgerald said that “the sentimental person thinks things will last—the romantic person has a desperate confidence that they won’t.” The people in *ALMOST, MAINE* are romantics, not sentimentalists.

And—I want people to think about how, in today’s world, the wealthy and the famous and the beautiful and the powerful—the extraordinary people—seem to try to own “extraordinary.” And nobody owns “extraordinary.” Extraordinary things happen to ordinary people all the time. In *ALMOST, MAINE*, ordinary people find love—spectacular love!—and lose love. And—when anyone finds love—or loses it!—that’s extraordinary.

How much of the writing of this play do you feel is Maine-specific, and how much do you feel is more broadly universal, or at least regional?

There are some wonderful Maine-isms that only Mainers can fully enjoy. There used to be many, many more of them! But—I learned early on in the development of *ALMOST, MAINE* that I had too many inside jokes. I was alienating the non-Mainers in the audience. So I removed the bulk of the jokes that only Mainers would get. And that made the play specific enough to appeal to Mainers—and universal enough to appeal to non-Mainers. And now, the play is pretty universal. As evidenced by its popularity, I guess! I mean, right now, the play is playing in Korea [where it’s very extremely popular], Romania, Belgium, UAE, and... there’s a big production opening in Mexico City soon. All this to say, *ALMOST, MAINE* has been performed all over the world and has been translated into nearly a dozen languages, I think. So... it seems to be pretty universal!

And I grew up in far Northern Maine, in a farm town, where potatoes are the main crop. My mom was teacher and my dad worked for the power company. And I had friends who were from farm families. So I grew up with the people who inhabit *ALMOST, MAINE*. Every character in the play is a composite of people from my hometown.

It’s funny—I was taught I had to leave Northern Maine if I wanted to be successful. So I left. And when I went away to college I was so homesick! I think that’s why I write about that part of the world. It’s still “home” to me. It’s the place that made me.

What is it like to perform in your own play?

I’ve only performed in *ALMOST, MAINE* three times—and it was hard! It’s a hard play to learn! I was the last person to learn my lines in each production I was in!

But I’ve loved acting in it. I’m a character actor and character actors don’t often get to star in love stories. Character actors usually help some hot person get the guy or get the girl or achieve their dreams. But in *ALMOST, MAINE*, every actor gets a chance to get the girl or the guy or have the dream come true [or lose the girl or lose hope or lose out on the dream]. And—for this character actor—that’s a dream come true!

What lessons have you taken away from 20+ years of ALMOST, MAINE?

I think the popularity of *ALMOST, MAINE* has given me confidence that hope and joy are valid components of drama—that plays can traffic in hope and joy.

Musicals are allowed to be hopeful and joyful. Musicals are actually expected to be hopeful and joyful. But plays aren’t. Plays are supposed to be important and issue-driven and political in order to be taken seriously. And I think that’s really too bad. I think playwriting as an art form has suffered tremendously because of this kind of thinking.

Have the ways you see the play and its message(s) changed over time?

The message hasn’t changed. But maybe the way the play is received has? Maybe because this is a good time for *ALMOST, MAINE*? The world feels like a rough place right now. We’re all told all the time that we don’t get along, that we all hate each other. Maybe *ALMOST, MAINE* helps people remember that love is all around and that most people are interested in getting along with each other?

Typing that last sentence just reminded me that a company in Whitefish, Montana was doing the play recently and I got an email from the director of their production telling me how wonderful it’s been for him to see his community embrace the play. He said an audience member approached him after the show one night and told him how nice—and interesting—it was to see a show about people getting along or trying to get along.

Getting along is hard. And we’re not working very hard at it at all right now.

I like that *ALMOST, MAINE* maybe makes people want to work harder at getting along?

ALMOST, MAINE
by John Cariani
runs November 20
- December 15 at
Next Act Theatre.
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nextact.org or call
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5,000 VISITS TO ALMOST

THE JOURNEY OF ONE OF THE MOST-PRODUCED PLAYS OF THE LAST TWO DECADES
By A.J. Magoon, Marketing Director

It's been 20 years since *ALMOST, MAINE* had its world premiere at the Portland Stage Company. Since then, the play has received more than 5,000 productions, including more than 100 professional productions and more than 100 international productions. Join us on a trip into the history of this widely-beloved play, coming to the Next Act stage November-December 2024:

2002

ALMOST, MAINE is developed at the Cape Cod Theatre Project under the leadership of Artistic Director Andy Polk.

Wendy Stetson and Larry Nathanson in *ALMOST, MAINE* at Portland Stage Company, 2004. Photo courtesy Darren Setlow.



2004

October 29 - the world premiere of *ALMOST, MAINE* takes place at Portland Stage Company in Portland, Maine under the leadership of Artistic Director Anita Stewart and Managing Director Tami Ramaker.

The American National Theatre names *ALMOST, MAINE* one of the outstanding new plays of 2004.

The Wall Street Journal features *ALMOST, MAINE* in a roundup of must-see regional theatre.

2006

January 12 - *ALMOST, MAINE* opens off-Broadway at the Daryl Roth Theatre, produced by Jack Thomas/Bulldog Theatrical and Bruce Payne.



Justin Hagan and Miriam Shor in *ALMOST, MAINE* at the Daryl Roth Theatre, New York City, 2006. Photo courtesy Joan Marcus.

2010

January 13 - *ALMOST, MAINE* receives its professional debut in Milwaukee at the Milwaukee Rep. It is directed by Laura Gordon (11-time actor and three-time director at Next Act who most recently directed last season's *SCARECROW*) and featured Gerard Neugent, Elizabeth Ledo, Steve Haggard and Deborah Staples (who appeared in five Next Act shows and directed one).

ALMOST, MAINE is the most-produced play in American high schools, beating out Shakespeare's *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*, according to *Dramatics Magazine*. It will be given this distinction eight more times up to the present day.

2014

January 21 - a revival of *ALMOST, MAINE* opens off-Broadway at the Gym at Judson, produced by Transport Group under the leadership of Artistic Director Jack Cummings III and Executive Director Lori Fineman. The production is critically acclaimed by New York reviewers and extends its run before opening night. Playwright John Cariani appears in the cast. The production is recorded for the Lincoln Center archives.

2016

ALMOST, MAINE is selected as the definitive play representing *Dramatists Play Service's* eighth decade, 2006-2016.

2021

ALMOST, MAINE is the most-streamed non-musical play produced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2024

November 22 - 20 years after its world premiere and 14 years after its most recent professional production in Milwaukee, *ALMOST, MAINE* will open at Next Act Theatre.

WHY SPONSOR A SHOW AT NEXT ACT?

By Tawnie Thompson, Development Manager

You've probably noticed that each show here at Next Act Theatre is sponsored by amazing members of our community who are passionate about the arts. Ticket revenue alone cannot support the important work that we do to share ideas and perspectives and to bring important stories to our stage. The support we receive from our generous sponsors is the first step to making each play at Next Act a reality.

Sponsorship is not without its perks! Next Act has three levels of sponsorship that each come with benefits. Sponsors receive:

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- At the \$10,000 level: 8 complimentary tickets to use throughout the run of the show

A Next Act play simply wouldn't be possible without the generous donations of our show sponsors. If you have an interest in sponsoring one of our productions, please reach out to Tawnie Thompson, Development Manager at tawnie@nextact.org or via phone at (414) 278-7780, ext. 7.

Show sponsors David Paris, DDS and Derin Bjugstad. Photo by Mark Frohna.



COMING BACK A STAR

Rudy Galvan returns to Next Act for *ALMOST, MAINE*

this holiday season after appearing as Christopher Wren in *THE MOUSETRAP* last season, but he's been keeping busy in the meantime! You may have seen him on your TV or even the big screen - Rudy recently appeared in the movie *HIS THREE DAUGHTERS*, directed by Azazel Jacobs, which premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in September 2023 before recently appearing in select theatres and on Netflix in September 2024. The film stars Elizabeth Olson, Natasha Lyonne and Carrie Coon, the latter of whom appeared in several productions with our friends at Renaissance Theaterworks, as well as American Players Theatre. Give yourself the gift of a Rudy Galvan double feature this holiday season: stream *HIS THREE DAUGHTERS* on Netflix, then join us for *ALMOST, MAINE* to see him in action on the Next Act stage once again!



Rudy Galvan, Carrie Coon and Elizabeth Olson in *HIS THREE DAUGHTERS*.

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LEARNING AS YOU GO

Next Act Theatre welcomed two interns this fall as part of our Inclusion, Equity and Opportunity (IEO) Internship program. Interns **Leslie Lopez** (properties, *THE ELABORATE ENTRANCE OF CHAD DEITY*) and **Ellie Mungo** (administrative) learned valuable job skills and helped develop Next Act productions alongside professionals in the field. We sat down with them to learn more about how the internship impacted them!

LESLIE LOPEZ

PROPERTIES INTERN, *THE ELABORATE ENTRANCE OF CHAD DEITY*



1. What drew you to the arts?

I first took a class in digital design my freshman year of high school. I have been designing ever since. I found it challenging but in a really gratifying way. Then, my sophomore year of high school, one of my photography pieces was chosen to be in a gallery in Chicago with other fellow high school artists. Seeing the work that other people my age were creating was so eye opening. And seeing my own work in a gallery space for the first time was quite surreal and made me realize that art could be a career for me.

2. How did you find out about Next Act's internship program? What interested you about Next Act?

I originally found out about the internship program through one of my mentors at school. I was intrigued because I am looking to get into graphic design for the film industry. After research with other theaters in the area, I decided that Next Act seemed like the best fit! As a young woman of color, diversity is really important to me, and seeing that they had a program for underrepresented people such as myself was reassuring. I also prefer to work in smaller organizations because the people in those organizations tend to be much closer and allow for a better work environment, which is definitely the case at Next Act!

3. What were you hoping to get out of the program? What did you get out of the program?

I was mainly hoping to get more real world experience and also allow myself to explore storytelling through props. I think that working with Next Act has allowed me to understand more of what the process and collaboration is like in terms of a big project such as a play. A great prop has very fine attention to detail and should also mesh well with the environment it is supposed to be a part of. I also really enjoyed shadowing [Properties Designer Jim Guy] who has been in the industry for a long time and is very knowledgeable about his craft. Overall, I think what I learned most at a smaller organization like Next Act is that the connections you make in this small industry are incredibly valuable.

4. What's next for you?

As of right now, I've been focusing on school. I am currently a junior at the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design, so I still have a little over a year left. I am still hoping to get into the film industry, specifically graphic design for films. So, I am hoping that my dream becomes a reality in the future!

ELLIE MUNGO

ADMINISTRATIVE INTERN



1. What drew you to the arts?

I started in high school. A lot of the people I was close with, they really started getting into theatre, and my first musical was HAIRSPRAY. It was one that I grew up on, the [movie] version with Amanda Bynes and Zac Efron. That was my thing growing up, so the fact that they were doing it, it was like, "I have to do it, I have to do it." That's where I got the theatre bug. And from there, I went to school for theatre, and I'm here now!

2. How did you find out about Next Act's internship program? What interested you about Next Act?

I found the internship independently, but I was in class [at UWM] with Marcy Kearns, and she was talking about all of the work that she does here and with First Stage, and that's what steered me here.

3. What were you hoping to get out of the program? What did you get out of the program?

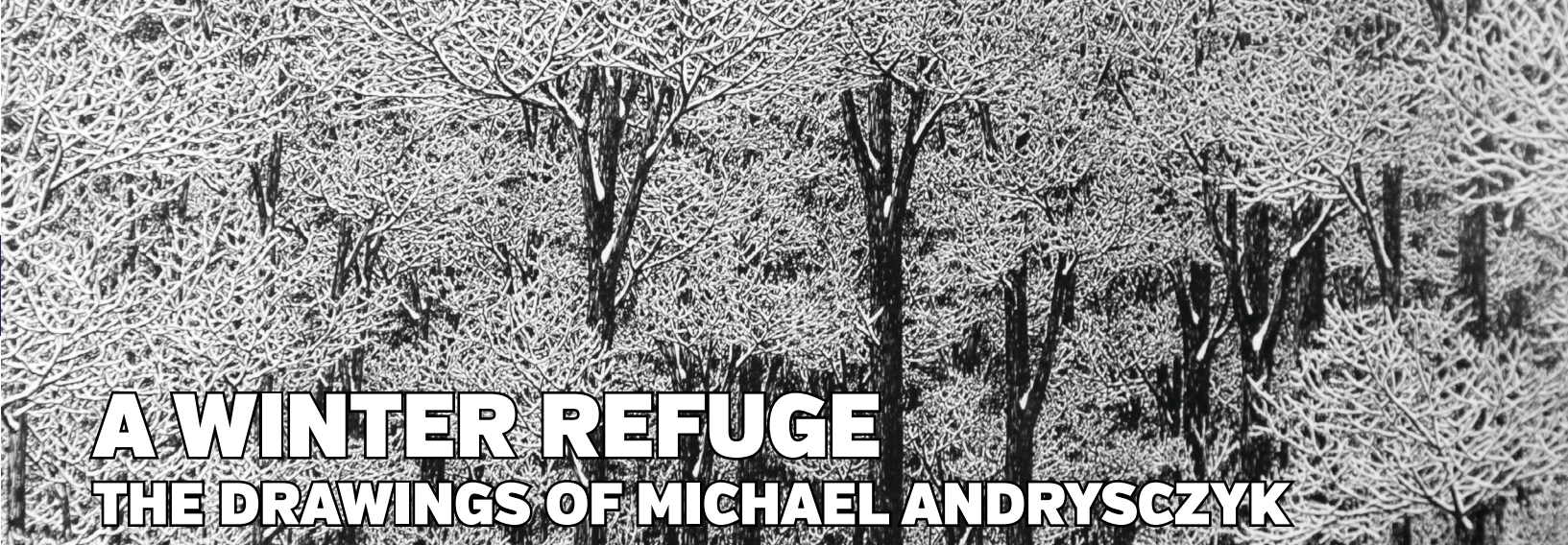
Going to school for musical theatre, I didn't get to see a lot of the back end of things, and I feel like that is where all the important work happens. You're thinking of shows a year ahead of when they actually perform. I feel like as the performer, I only see the little tiny bit of it. Later in life, I want to start actually producing musicals, so I really want to start seeing, basically, everything that I can see about the back end of stuff.

There's a lot that I feel like I didn't even think about, all the little details. As an actor, the casting process... *laughs* I don't know how it works. I just kind of throw my stuff in there and I pray. It's interesting to see how all of the puzzle comes together in the end, and what matters, and what doesn't.

4. What's next for you?

I just finished college, and it was already a weird situation in college because of COVID. There was a point where I was like, "can I even do that? What is this gonna look like?" So I feel like I'm trying to take things one step at a time and kind of just look at everything in theatre that I can, so I can find my niche, and I can find what I want to draw people into.

Interested in being part of our IEO internship? Contact us at info@nextact.org or (414) 278-7780!



A WINTER REFUGE THE DRAWINGS OF MICHAEL ANDRYSCZYK

Clevedon Road by Michael Andrysczyk

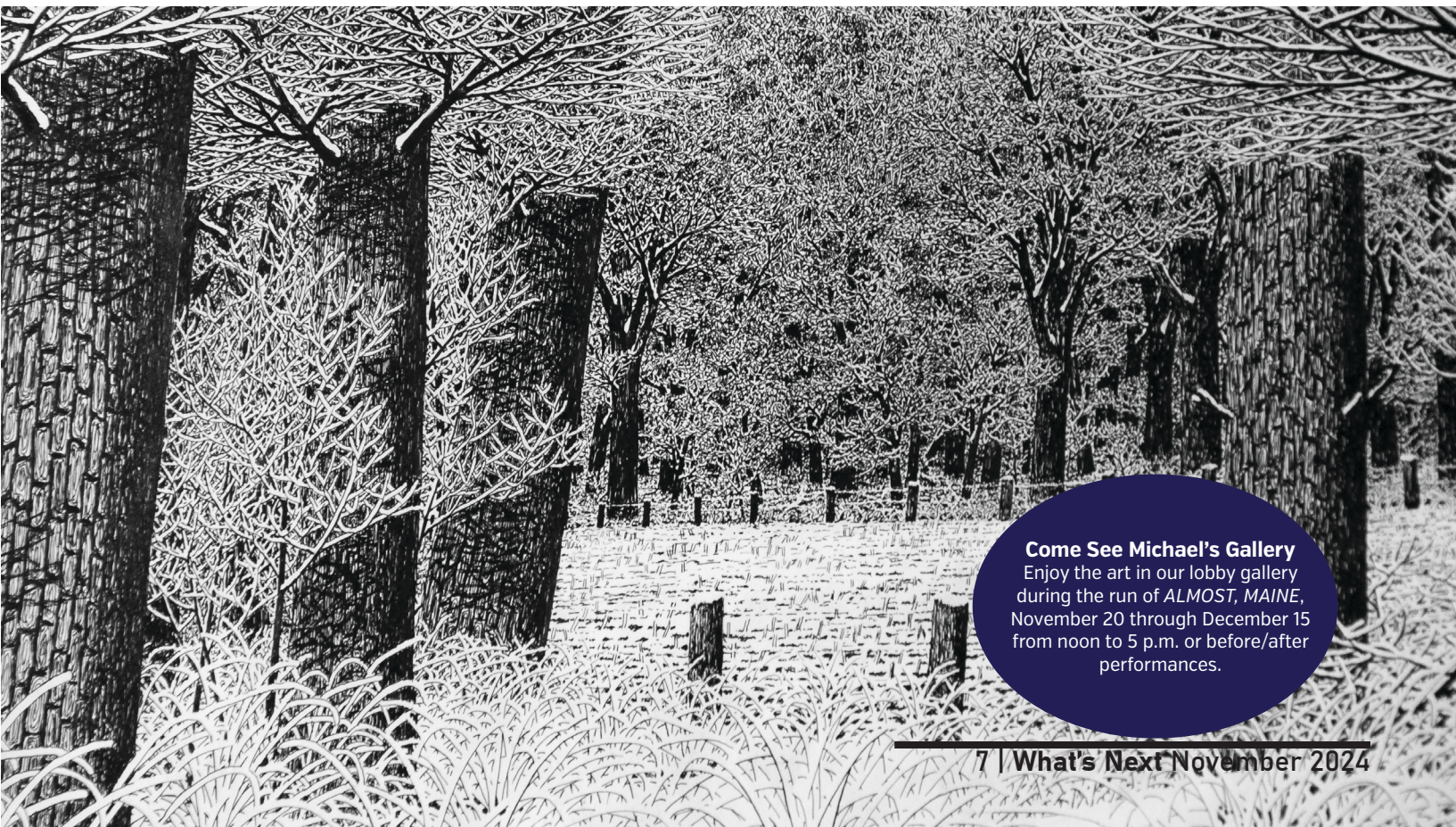
By James Toth, Curator

ALMOST, MAINE is a play featuring characters far away from the hustle and bustle of our over-crowded, impersonal urban centers. Being placed in the far north, it strips away all of the distractions and added complexities of city life, allowing it to focus on intimate relationships in a heightened way. However, a dynamic not explored in the play is the power of this remote environment to provide a refuge from the storms that are often a part of these relationships; the power of the forest.

This is the world that Milwaukee artist, Michael Andrysczyk, has spent a lifetime exploring. His meticulous drawings capture a solitude unique to a snow covered forest where sound is dampened and normally harsh bare branches are softened by layers of fluff. A world where we are invited to pause and reconnect with nature. A world where we can suspend our often petty problems for a time and experience being a small part of a much larger whole, to be both humbled and uplifted. A world I hope to visit again and again in person.

Michael Andrysczyk began drawing as a print shop operator who needed to create advertising art for his customers. His inspiration comes from his many years spent in the woods hunting, studying the geology of Wisconsin and educating the public as a geologist and member of the Kettle Moraine Geologic Society. Mike's passion and skills have led to his becoming an award-winning member of the Rogues Artists Group.

The Back Forty Michael Andrysczyk



Come See Michael's Gallery
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"Mega-hit Almost, Maine lands somewhere between Norman Rockwell and Our Town... the show offers a sweetness and decency that's become rare at the theater."
-The New York Post

Nov 20 - Dec 15, 2024

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			NOV 20 Preview 7:30	21 Preview 7:30	22 Opening 7:30	23 4:00 P
24 2:00 T		26 7:30 T	27 1:30 7:30	Thanks-giving	29 7:30	30 4:00
DEC 1 2:00 P/T			4 1:30 7:30	5 7:30 T	6 7:30	7 4:00
8 2:00 P/T	9 PWYC 7:30		11 1:30 7:30	12 7:30 T	13 7:30	14 4:00
15 Closing 2:00	P - Personal Preview T - Talkback PWYC - Pay What You Can					

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ALMOST, MAINE is sponsored by Patty Compton, Donna Martynski, and Christine Symchych and Jim McNulty.