

THE MESSENGER

A NEW PLAY BY JEFF TALBOTT

LOCAL DOCTOR HAS SHOCKING NEW IDEAS

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TOWN ROCKED BY CRISIS

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STOCKMAN TELLS ALL: LOCAL SECRET REVEALED

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THE MESSENGER

World Premiere

By Jeff Talbott
Directed by Wes Grantom

January 14 - 29, 2022

Runtime: 1:25 with NO intermission

SPOTLIGHT STUDY GUIDE

For Teachers and Students



Pioneer Theatre Company's Student Matinee Program is made possible through the support of Salt Lake County's Zoo, Arts and Parks Program, The Simmons Family Foundation, and The Meldrum Foundation Endowment Fund.

The Playwright:

Jeff Talbott

*Inspired by the Ibsen classic “An Enemy of the People,” Jeff Talbott’s new play *The Messenger* presents the consequences of speaking out about a public health threat.*

The Messenger tells the story of Therese Stockman, a small-town doctor in Norway in 1882 who has made a shocking discovery about the industry that gives her town its lifeblood. Her friend Kristine, the editor of one of the town newspapers, is about to take the story and run with it, but at what cost? *The Messenger* is a dramatic roller coaster ride that examines our relationships with the press and the community, challenging when and where to draw the line when public safety and economics clash.

“Henrik Ibsen is my favorite playwright,” says Talbott. “And yet... once I sat down to write, I quickly thanked him for inspiration and wrote my own thing. His spectacular play is trapped in its time, and once I freed myself to write something new, something now, this play jumped out of me. And the chance to build it, from page one, with my friend and collaborator Wes Grantom is the kind of gift you just keep pinching yourself for getting. We’re so excited to bring our brand-new play to PTC!”



About Jeff Talbott

Jeff Talbott is a writer and actor who lives in New York City. He grew up in Kimball, Nebraska, a little town in the western part of the state. He eventually moved east by way of Lincoln, NE (college), Chicago, IL (life, part 1), New Haven, CT (grad school), and finally NYC (life, part 2). He lives in Sunnyside, Queens near a very good place to get donuts! Jeff Talbott’s play *i* had its world premiere at PTC in 2018. Jeff also wrote *The Submission*. As an actor, Jeff has appeared on Broadway, off-Broadway, and in theatres across the country, as well as in film and television. He was trained at the Yale School of Drama (MFA) and the University of Nebraska/Lincoln (BFA), and has lived in NYC for almost 25 years. He has been in hundreds of plays and spent a fair

amount of time being everything from a sad crime victim to a judge on many television shows.

jefftalbott.com/about-jeff

Talbott’s production history with PTC

Actor: *Oslo* as Terje Rød-Larsen
(September 2018)

Playwright: *i* / (January 2017 reading and February 2018 production)

Actor: *The 25th Annual Putname County Spelling Bee* as Douglas Panch
(September 2014)

Playwright: *A Public Education*
(March 2014 reading)

Actor: *The Odd Couple* as Felix Ungar
(March 2013)

Actor: *Doubt* as Father Brendan Flynn
(November 2007)

ACTIVITY QUESTION:

How is the storyline in *The Messenger* similar to what is going on now in the United States with the pandemic?

The Inspiration: Henrik Ibsen



Henrik Ibsen (1828 – 1906) was a Norwegian playwright and theatre director. He wrote *An Enemy of the People* in 1882 in response to the public outcry against his play *Ghosts*, which openly discussed adultery and syphilis. That response included accusations of both *Ghosts* and its author being “scandalous,” “degenerate,” and “immoral.” In *An Enemy of the People*, a man dares to expose an unpalatable truth publicly and is punished for it. However, Ibsen took a somewhat skeptical view of his protagonist, suggesting that

he may have gone too far in his zeal to tell the truth. Ibsen wrote to his publisher: “I am still uncertain as to whether I should call [*An Enemy of the People*] a comedy or a straight drama. It may [have] many traits of comedy, but it also is based on a serious idea.”

As one of the founders of modernism in theatre, Ibsen is often referred to as “the father of realism” and one of the most influential playwrights of his time. His major works include *Brand*, *Peer Gynt*, *An Enemy of the People*, *Emperor and Galilean*, *A Doll’s House*, *Hedda Gabler*, *Ghosts*, *The Wild Duck*, *When We Dead Awaken*, *Rosmersholm*, and *The Master Builder*. Ibsen is the most frequently performed dramatist in the world after Shakespeare, and *A Doll’s House* was the world’s most performed play in 2006.

Ibsen wrote his plays in Danish (the common written language of Denmark and Norway during his lifetime) and they were published by the Danish publisher Gyldendal. Although most of his plays are set in Norway—often in places reminiscent of Skien, the port town where he grew up—Ibsen lived for 27 years in Italy and Germany, and rarely visited Norway during his most productive years. Ibsen’s dramas

were informed by his own background in the merchant elite of Skien, and he often modeled or named characters after family members. He was the father of Prime Minister Sigurd Ibsen. Ibsen’s dramas had a strong influence upon contemporary culture.

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henrik_Ibsen

Notable works by Henrik Ibsen

Peer Gynt (1867)

A Doll’s House (1879)

Ghosts (1881)

An Enemy of the People (1882)

The Wild Duck (1884)

Rosmersholm (1886)

Hedda Gabler (1890)

ACTIVITY QUESTION:

Many current TV shows, movies and current theatre productions are based on classic literature. Can you name a few?

Example: The 1999 film “10 Things I Hate

About You” is loosely based on Shakespeare’s

The Taming of the Shrew.

Timeline: Henrik, Wes & Jeff

*An annotated timeline of *The Messenger* by Director Wes Grantom and Playwright Jeff Talbott*



Barzin Akhavan, Ora Jones Mark H. Dold and Meredith Holzman



Mark H. Dold as Peter Stockman and Ora Jones as Therese Stockman.

1440-ish - The printing press is invented by Johannes Gutenberg

1609 - The first newspaper is printed

1754 - Dr. Dorothea Erxleben is the first licensed female doctor

1762 - Ann (Smith) Franklin is the first female editor and publisher of a newspaper in America

1828 - Henrik Ibsen is born in Norway

1874 - The London School of Medicine for Women is established

1882 - An Enemy of the People is published

1906 - Henrik Ibsen dies

1994 - Jeff Talbott does a scene from Ibsen's *Little Eyolf* in grad school and falls deeply in love with Henrik Ibsen

2005 - Wes Grantom sees his girlfriend (now wife) play *Nora* in *A Doll's House* in grad school

2007 - Jeff performs in *Doubt* at PTC

2014 - Jeff's play *A Public Education* is workshopped in Play-By-Play at PTC; Jeff and Wes meet.

2015 - Wes directs *Speculator Spirits* in Play-By-Play

2019 - Wes and Jeff propose an adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* to PTC Artistic Director Karen Azenberg

2020 - *The Messenger* is workshopped in Play-By-Play

2020-2022 - The actual world starts to deeply resemble our play

2022 - *The Messenger* opens at Pioneer Theatre Company in Salt Lake City, Utah

This doesn't have a ton to do with us necessarily, but it has a great deal to do with the world of this play

It took 160+ years; this play is much shorter.

Jump ahead to 1874 below to see why this is important.

If you're seeing a trend here, you're on the right track (hint: history or herstory?).

Now let's get into the play you're here to see.

Therese Stockman (the central character in our play) studied here.

Now we're rolling - our play starts with Henrik's play.

Not actually important (unless it comes up when you're playing trivia; or you're related to the Ibsens).

It really started in undergrad, with an acting class scene from *Ghosts*, but Jeff started to write plays in grad school, and Ibsen became a major touchpoint then.

Obviously, a lot of turning points happened for Wes seeing this production ...

This is where Jeff fell in love with PTC and SLC.

And where Jeff fell in love with Red Iguana. Wes didn't direct this workshop, but our friendship and collaboration started because of that workshop. It's a long story. Ask us in the lobby.

This is where Wes fell in love with PTC and SLC. And where Wes also fell in love with Red Iguana.

At this point, it stops being about Henrik, and very much about us; *The Messenger* is a brand-new play based on a very old play. We made our own thing.

This was the week of March 9-14, 2020. Yes. That week. Again, ask us in the lobby. So. Many. Stories.

We didn't change any of the facts in the play after the workshop. They were already there in the play. It's very, very weird, right? Don't worry - we think so, too.

We're so glad you're here. We're very excited to share this play with you. And we hope we've made Henrik proud, too. Enjoy the show!

Setting of *The Messenger*: Norway, 1882



Norway, officially the Kingdom of Norway, is a Nordic country in Northern Europe, the mainland territory of which comprises the western and northernmost portion of the Scandinavian Peninsula. The remote Arctic island of Jan Mayen and the archipelago of Svalbard also form part of Norway. Bouvet Island, located in the Subantarctic, is a dependency of Norway; it also lays claims to the Antarctic territories of Peter I Island and Queen Maud Land. The capital and largest city in Norway is Oslo.

Norway has two official names: Norge in Bokmål and Noreg in Nynorsk. The English name Norway comes from the Old English word *Norþweg* mentioned in 880, meaning “northern way” or “way leading to the north,” which is how the Anglo-Saxons referred to the coastline of Atlantic Norway similar to leading theory about the origin of the Norwegian language name. The Anglo-Saxons of Britain also referred to the kingdom of Norway in 880 as *Norðmanna land*.



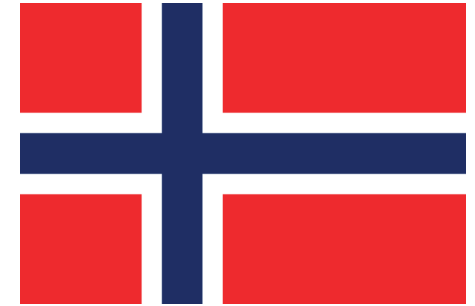
Historic Photography

Norwegian people harvesting oats in Jølster, c. 1890



Norwegian cuisine

Catching and preparing top-quality fish has always been a big part of Norwegian culture. For ages past, dried cod was the big export – now it is fresh salmon and arctic cod.



Flag

The flag of Norway is red with an indigo blue Scandinavian cross fimbriated in white that extends to the edges of the flag; the vertical part of the cross is shifted to the hoist side in the style of the Dannebrog, the flag of Denmark.



Currency

The krone is the currency of Norway and its dependent territories. The krone was introduced in 1875, replacing the Norwegian specie-daler.

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norway

Our Equity Cast



Barzin Akhavan (Henrik Abelman) Broadway: *Network*; TV: “Law and Order: Criminal Intent,” “The Blacklist,” “Chicago Med.”



Grayson DeJesus (Einar Billing) PTC: *The Lion in Winter*. Theatre: Nat. Tour of Broadway’s *War Horse*. TV: “High Maintenance,” “Sneaky Pete.”



Mark H. Dold (Peter Stockman) Broadway: 2020 Tony Award Winning, *The Inheritance*. PTC’s *Arcadia* (1997)



Meredith Holzman (Kristine) Broadway: *Death of a Salesman* TV: “Only Murders in the Building,” “Ramy,” “Chicago Fire,” “VEEP.”



Ora Jones (Therese Stockman) Steppenwolf Theatre Company; Broadway: *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, *Matilda: The Musical*.



Turna Mete (Petra Stockman) Off-Broadway: *The Parable Conference*; Television: “Small Miracles,” “Deadbeat.”

Wes Grantom
(Director) PTC:
Directed *The Lifespan of a Fact*, *The Lion in Winter*, *A Comedy of Tenors* and three Play-by-Play presentations. He is on faculty at the University of Evansville.