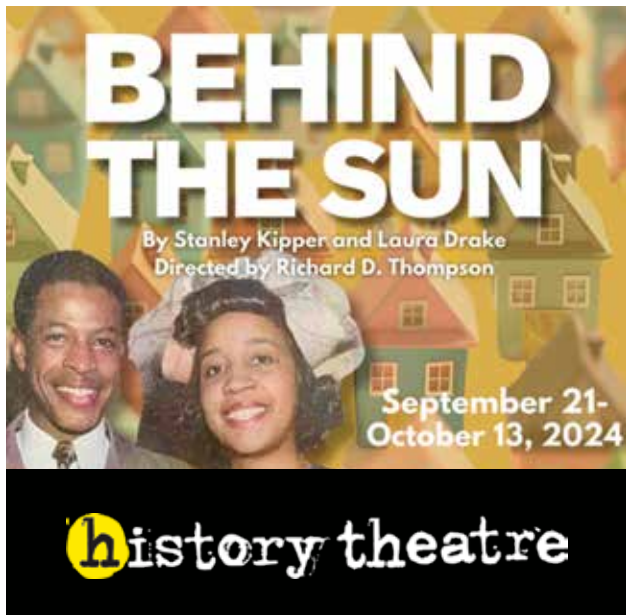


HISTORY THEATER PLAY VISITS TWIN CITIES CLASSROOMS TO DRAW LOCAL CONNECTIONS

By Kate Cieslowski



Lucas Erickson (Photos On Stage)

Kate Cieslowski grew up in Kenwood and is an avid theatergoer.

When “Behind the Sun” opens at the History Theater this fall, 17 performances of the play will be performed onstage by the professional cast.

But in 12 college and community education classrooms across the Twin Cities, a few scenes from the play’s story of redlining and racial segregation in 1950s Minneapolis will be performed by students for an audience of their peers through the local theater outreach program On Stage.

The program’s mission is to “act as a liaison between theaters, colleges, high schools, and community settings to help build connections for potential future theater-goers.”

In each classroom session, actors from the show and On Stage educators conduct one-hour sessions during which the students perform readings of key scenes, with facilitated discussion afterward.

“When we have the students read the scenes, they see their classmates embody the characters, and the students take more ownership of [the story],” says On Stage founder and Uptown resident Lucas Erickson.

As the actor/educators leading the sessions build trust with the class, students make connections among their classwork, the play and their communities, with the aim of fostering a love of theater.

Creating access to theater for student audiences is key to On Stage’s effectiveness. The classroom sessions assume no prior

knowledge of the play and often provide students with avenues for discounted tickets to see the shows they discuss in class.

The sessions are designed to get students excited about theater and connect them with immediate opportunities to see shows. In

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doing so, the program both brings new audiences to local theaters and provides students with interdisciplinary and experiential learning opportunities.

For history plays like “Behind the Sun” or the History Theater’s 2023 production of “Diesel Heart” (written by Brian Grandison in collaboration with Melvin Carter Jr.),

On Stage might visit history classes. For a play focused on the outdoors or the environment, On Stage might join environmental science classes.

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Creating long-term community audiences is critical for local theaters’ success. In 2023, the average age of a Broadway theater attendee was 40.

Erickson’s program is an avenue for theaters — particularly smaller, local theaters that may be trying to rebuild long-term audiences in a post-pandemic era — to access new attendees.

Erickson, a lifelong theater enthusiast, was inspired to create the program in 2016 while he was completing his graduate studies in Arts and Cultural Leadership at the University of Minnesota.

Through classes in which students were required to attend a show and write a paper about their experience, he had the idea to provide similar opportunities to students in non-theater-focused classes. “How creative it was and how different from all the classes I’d taken in the past really excited me,” says Erickson.

“Behind the Sun,” written by Stanley Kipper and Laura Drake and directed by Richard D. Thompson, will run at the History Theatre from Sept. 21 to Oct. 13.

The play’s cast member Jane Froiland and On Stage actor/edu-

cators Lucas Erickson, Aimee Bryant, Warren Bowles, Patrick Bailey, Valencia Proctor and Anne Hashizume will run On Stage sessions associated with the play from Sept. 23 to Oct. 4.

They will visit 12 local colleges and community classes across departments, including theater, English, communications, sociology and history at the University of Minnesota, University of St. Thomas, St. Catherine University, and more.



HISTORY THEATRE:

LOCATION:

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BOX OFFICE:

Tuesday-Friday
Noon–5 p.m. and
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boxofc@historytheatre.com.