FORWARD THEATER COMPANY
presents
The 2017 Wisconsin Wrights New Play Festival

Production Stage Manager
Laura Karavitis*

Playwrights
Eric Appleton
Erica Berman
Michael Proft

Directors
Dana Pellebon
Jake Penner
Samuel D. White

Dramaturg
Jen Plants

*Member of Actors' Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers.

The Wisconsin Wrights Play Festival is generously sponsored by:
The Wisconsin Wrights New Play Festival is supported by the Marcia Légère Binns Distinguished Playwright Residency. As a UW-Madison student in the early 1940s, Marcia Légère won the inaugural Wisconsin Playwrights Contest with a piece that her professor submitted secretly. Légère graduated from the university with a degree in Comparative Literature, going on to a successful career as a writer for documentary films and television. Légère decided that she wanted to give back to the university that had provided her with one of her first great accomplishments as a writer. Saddened to hear that the Wisconsin Playwrights Contest was no longer in existence, she worked with the University of Wisconsin Foundation to bring the competition back to life, to support local playwrights, and to strengthen the relationship between the two. Today, Légère’s generous contributions continue to give students and local professional playwrights an opportunity to produce original theatre.

In March 2018, the Wisconsin Union Theater and Wisconsin Union Directorate Performing Arts Committee will host the 27th annual Marcia Légère Student Play Festival. More information about free performances is available here: https://union.wisc.edu/events-and-activities/event-calendar/event/marcia-legere-student-play-festival-2/. UW-Madison students who wish to get involved with the festival can find more information here: https://union.wisc.edu/visit/wisconsin-union-theater/students/marcia-legere-student-play-festival/

THANKS TO THE FRIENDS OF FORWARD THEATER COMPANY

The following individuals and organizations helped make the 2017 Wisconsin Wrights New Play Festival a success, and Forward Theater would like to offer them our sincerest thanks.

**First Round WI Wrights Script Readers**
- Heather Good
- Marcella Kearns
- Sarah Marty
- Milwaukee Chamber Theatre

Forward Theater Company would also like to thank Sam D. White for his generous assistance with the housing needs of the cast and crew of the 2017 Wisconsin Wrights New Play Festival.
**The Plays**

**Hamm in Love and War**
by Eric Appleton (Madison, WI)
**Thursday, September 21st**

Director: Samuel D. White
Stage Manager: Elliott Puckette

Benton Hamm .................................................................Lee Waldhart
August Lichtmann............................................................Jason Compton
Arden Tusk .................................................................Karen Moeller
Miles Turner ...............................................................Paul Milisch
Demetrius/Soldier ........................................................Francisco Torres
Natalya Rubilovsky .......................................................Samara Frame*
Constantine Gravas ....................................................Michael Herold*
Sheila Anderson/Soldier ...............................................Elizabeth Cassarino

*Performer appears courtesy of Actors’ Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers in the United States.

**Dionysus on the Down Low**
by Michael Proft (Cedarburg, WI)
**Friday, September 22nd**

Director: Dana Pellebon
Stage Manager: Jo Chaloub

Matthew Teitman ..........................................................David Durbin
David Okello ..............................................................Sherrick Robinson
Naome Ssempa ............................................................Martha White
Ina Teitman .................................................................Marcy Weiland

**No Wake**
by Erica Berman (Madison, WI)
**Saturday, September 23rd**

Director: Jake Penner
Stage Manager: Jo Chaloub

Peter Michaels ..............................................................Jim Buske
Sarah .................................................................Jordan Watson
Last winter, Forward Theater Company asked Wisconsin-based playwrights to submit their works for an opportunity to participate in the Wisconsin Wrights New Play Festival. Forward Theater Company accepted stewardship of the Wisconsin Wrights program from the UW-Madison Division of Continuing Studies in the summer of 2015, merging it with our existing New Play Development Series.

Wisconsin Wrights is a three-day celebration of new plays and Wisconsin playwrights. It gives Forward Theater the chance to invest in local writing talent, it gives playwrights the rare opportunity to develop their plays with professional actors and directors, and it gives audiences a peek behind the scenes of the playwriting process.

Plays are, by nature, the result of a collaboration between a writer, the actors, directors and designers who work on their plays, and – most importantly – the audience. A staged reading festival like this one allows playwrights the chance to see where and how audiences respond to and connect with their plays in order to continue to hone and improve their writing.

Thank you for supporting the works of these talented Wisconsin playwrights, and for participating in the creative process!

**FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR...JENNIFER UPHOFF GRAY**

Eric Appleton – *Hamm in Love and War*

*Hamm in Love and War* is about fifteen years old now.

This play started as an exercise in learning how to put together an old-fashioned one-room, door-slamming comedy. I needed practice constructing a play that was less talk and more action, or at least better at doing talk in service to action. Through the years, every time I read it I found I still liked it – I’d tinker, send it out, hear nothing, put it back in the drawer. It has been read out loud by voices not my own only one and a half times (until now).

*Hamm* also was a reaction to a slew of creaky genre plays I worked on as the lighting designer for several Pride series at a theatre in Chicago. Everything seemed to be either an excuse for nudity or about ending up as a street hustler. Writing *Hamm* meant thinking about what constituted a ‘gay play’. What are the dangers of comic gay characters – are we laughing at what the gay characters are doing, or laughing at them being ‘gay’? Do they do everything they do because they’re gay? Do straight characters do everything they do because they’re straight?

My goal is that *Hamm* should be a play that is at home on a dinner theatre stage in a place like Peoria, or Dubuque, or Tulsa, and that anyone who enjoys a good romp of a sex-comedy will enjoy this one. I would like it to be a good sex-comedy. I would like the audience to laugh and the actors to have fun provoking that laughter. This means that hearing an audience’s reactions in real-time to the events occurring on the stage is essential to understanding what works, what sort of works, and what doesn’t work.

I look forward to watching and listening to you throughout this evening’s reading. Thanks for coming.
Michael Proft – *Dionysus on the Down Low*

Conversations about LGBTQ rights, race, intersectionality, white privilege and queer identity politics are rampant these days, especially on social media. As a gay man, I wanted to explore these issues, but in the context of a love story. *Dionysus on the Down Low* is the result. The play is inspired by recent events in Uganda and the character of David is based, very loosely, on Ugandan LGBT activist, David Kato.

I would like to thank Forward Theater and Wisconsin Wrights (once again) for this amazing opportunity. Special thanks to Jen Uphoff Gray, Karen Moeller, Jen Plants, Jo Chalhoub and a wonderful cast led by our dynamic director, Dana Pellebon.

**Historic Background for *Dionysus on the Down Low***:
The Uganda Anti-Homosexuality Act (called the “Kill the Gays” bill in the western mainstream media) was introduced in 2009 by Ugandan parliament member (MP) David Bahati and proposed the criminalization of same-sex relations in Uganda. Inspired and supported by U.S. Christian evangelists proselytizing in Uganda, the bill defined “the offense of homosexuality” on different levels with corresponding punishments ranging from life imprisonment to the death penalty. Not reporting known homosexuals or supporting LGBT causes could result in up to seven years imprisonment. Those contracting same sex marriages could be imprisoned for life. The bill drew widespread criticism from Western nations, including threats to cut off financial aid to Uganda.

Erica Berman – *No Wake*

The smell of the trees, sound of the loons, and sight of the sun glistening on the water are what comes to mind when I think of Lake Winnipesaukee. To me, this special place represents reconnecting with family, with self, and with nature. Thank you for joining me on a journey to the lake tonight.

This play (which was inspired by a real person who yelled No Wake into a bullhorn) has given me the opportunity to explore lake culture in depth. I am fascinated by the dichotomy of wealthy city folks who descend on small lake towns in the summer and the locals who rely on (but often resent) them. The characters Peter and Sarah embody this tension. They find themselves in the same ecosystem for the summer, facing both external threats from climate change and internal threats from their own grief and limited worldview. I hope their journey inspires a reconnection with self, with family, and with nature.

My sincerest gratitude to the following for making this reading possible: Forward Theater and Wisconsin Wrights for this incredible opportunity and for your commitment to supporting playwrights & showcasing new work. Jake, Jordan, Jim and Jo for the unique talents you have brought to this process. Gwen Rice and Jen Plants for your insight and encouragement. To my partner in all things, my wonderful husband Henry. And lastly, to Henry’s great-great Uncle Bob, who in 1908 had the foresight to build a humble “camp” on the most beautiful spot on Lake Winnipesaukee before there were even roads to lead him there.
I AND YOU
by lauren gunderson

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