

Prime Stage Theater

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PRIME STAGE THEATRE PRESENTS "THE WESTING GAME," CONNECTS MANY DOTS

It's not every day that an award-winning author dedicates a book to your daughters.

Amy Kellman, the Former Coordinator of Youth Services at the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, found just that when writer friend Ellen Raskin, author of the Newbery-Medal winning book *THE WESTING GAME*, published her book and wrote the following dedication on the front page, for the world to see:

"For Jenny:
who wanted a puzzle book.
And for Susan K"

THE WESTING GAME's twists and turns feels like Sherlock Holmes meets Choose-Your-Own-Adventure. A story of dangerous, and even murderous, intrigue that ultimately unites and heals the characters, *THE WESTING GAME* was chosen by Prime Stage Theatre of Pittsburgh to be performed as the crowning new-work show for their 2008-2009 season.

The search for an adaptation was quite a journey that took Artistic Director, Wayne Brinda, to the Pacific Northwest. Here, Darien Lindle had only had a few readings of her adaptation of *THE WESTING GAME*. Lindle, a Seattle resident, had several companies interested in producing her play, but she was keeping her work close to her chest. Too many people wanted to change too many things, and she wasn't about to "sell out" one of the most famous American puzzle mystery stories for young readers.

When Brinda pitched the idea of commissioning Lindle to work on her adaptation for a world premiere production here in Pittsburgh, Lindle's main condition was that it be as true to the story as possible. Being that Prime Stage's mission is to produce works of literature in a dramatic medium that is loyal to the book, it was a deal.

The plot thickened when Brinda sought out director Terry Brino-Dean, a professor at Seton Hill University to direct. Brino-Dean accepted the honor of directing a brand new work, and when Brinda relayed the director's information to the playwright, and the playwright's information to the director, he was met with surprised responses from both: each had been trying to get in touch with the other for years! As fortune would have it, Lindle and Brino-Dean knew and worked with each other as students at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and now found themselves re-united by a

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story that was dedicated to Pittsburgh-natives, for a first time production that will take place in Pittsburgh.

Lindle and Brino-Dean felt an immediate connection with the book, and felt compelled to direct it as a play. “When I first read THE WESTING GAME, I identified with the book and its characters immediately,” says Brino-Dean. “Of course the story was fun and engaging, the characters were unique and interesting, the mystery was complex and unpredictable, and the setting (a city in Wisconsin) hit close to home. But more than anything else, it was the vision of family put forth in the book that drew me in and made the story particularly meaningful... [presenting] an intentionally diverse community of individual characters whose familial relationships are reconceived as Sam Westing forms them into unlikely pairs that flourish far beyond the confines of his ‘game.’” Lindle was also drawn to the character’s and their journey of healing as they tried to solve and win the Westing Game. “I had just moved to a new school in a new town across the country from all my friends, but when I read about Turtle Wexler I didn't feel so alone,” she recalls about the first time she read THE WESTING GAME. Maintaining that it was adapting this story that “awakened the playwright” within her, she elaborates, “The mystery was great but what intrigued me was the dynamics between this diverse group of people and how, just by being paired with one another, they changed into better people, better versions of themselves.”

Puzzles are most fun when all the pieces are put together. And it would seem, that when it comes to THE WESTING GAME, all rivers flow to Pittsburgh. Now, all Pittsburgh connections are involved: Pittsburgh director, Pittsburgh dedication, Pittsburgh-educated playwright, Pittsburgh theatre company. The circumstances that have come full circle are now leading to a production process that is in full swing. THE WESTING GAME will premiere at The New Hazlett Theatre on the North Side, from May 2-May10th. Tickets are on sale now through ProArts by calling 412-394-3353.

[American Eagle Outfitters is a generous sponsor of THE WESTING GAME.]