

and 2001. The play explores the evolution of progressive gay tolerance, juxtaposed by the decay of the environment in which the play unfolds.

What is ultimately taboo and frightening in the scenes set in the post-World War II Midwest appears not entirely so in the scenes set in the beginning of the 21st century. The farmhouse, as metaphor for the old way of thinking, is crumbling, while at least the bond between these two aging men endures.

As part of Profile's unique theater mission, each season focuses on a single playwright. The cumulative result connects the work of the author to the product seen onstage, which provides the audience a peek into the process from the writer's viewpoint. Blessing made the trek to Portland from the East Coast, where he heads up the graduate playwriting program at Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University, to consult on and participate in rehearsals and audience talkbacks. Aside from sitting in on a few *Thief River* rehearsals and answering questions from the cast and crew, Blessing was previously present for productions of his plays *When We Go Upon the Sea* and *A View of the Mountains*.

"Lee's accessibility to the actors and director made for a richer understanding of the text and an even greater appreciation of this unique opportunity to bring such a singular play to life," continues Unger.

"On a couple of occasions, [Blessing] said to us that we had gone past what he had envisioned for a moment—that we had found some other

colors in it that were intriguing to him," says director Pat Patton. "I've done a lot of Shakespeare and you don't get to talk to him much. If you want to cut something, you just cut it. Here, you've got the man sitting there in the house with you."

In experiencing *Thief River*, the compelling quotient isn't necessarily found in the sum of its parts. A tangible resolution is tough to grasp, and the sad void of reconciliation between Gil and Ray is anticlimactic in the best way possible. Closer to the point, *Thief* is more acutely the weighing in on a slice of time—politically, sexually—that, though seemingly distant, continues to proffer activism and understanding in equal measure.

"I'd like audiences to leave with a sense of how exceptional and precious a lifetime of devotion is between any two people," says Blessing. "I'd also like them to be able to use the play to reflect on how extraordinary a time it has been through which we've all just lived. When I was young, it could be worth your job, even your life, simply to say you were gay. The fight goes on, of course, and will have to. But our progress—everyone's, the whole society's—has been impressive." **J**

THIEF RIVER previews Fri., Feb. 4 at 7:30 p.m., then opens Sat., Feb. 5 at 7:30 p.m. A Matinee Talkback will be held Sun., Feb. 6 at 2 p.m. Stagings continue Feb. 9-27, Wed.-Sat. at 7:30 p.m. and Sun. at 2 p.m. at Theater! Theatre! (3430 SE Belmont St.). Preview tickets are \$12-\$16, regular tickets are \$15-\$28. Call 503-242-0080 or visit profiletheatre.org.



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