

BEGGARS, from page 8

S.M.B.: The original is a work that grabs you. It's astonishing to read the original and feel the heat coming off the page as if it were just written yesterday. That aspect of it is really strong to me.

A.W.: Why does a play that satirizes everything from politics, corruption and wealth to poverty and injustice need to be told now?

S.M.B.: Because all of those things are here in abundance, everyday, in and around us all in Portland.

A.W.: So it was easy to adapt "The Beggar's Opera" to contemporary Portland.

S.M.B.: It seemed to be about this city. All of the disgusting, nasty, glorious, outrageous, ponderous, conflicting elements of this city existed in the original. I just wanted to yank it into today, and make it very markedly inspired by local celebrities and all of the wonderful, awful things that make Portland Portland. Portland is this funny little microcosm of America, isn't it? In many ways, it's not at all. In many ways, it is. We're this utopian, very much talked about desirable city with booming real estate and creativity and major business and rah, rah, rah. And yet, the state of Oregon and Portland lead the county in terms of homelessness, joblessness, and hunger. Some of these issues are much discussed and much written about, but yet nothing really changes, does it?

A.W.: It seems like the air is thick with material for your adaptation in Portland right now.

S.M.B.: Oh, yeah.

A.W.: Does that disturb you?

S.M.B.: What's going on in this city should disturb everyone living in this city. I don't mean to disparage Portland. This piece is really a celebration of Portland in its curious and weird way, but it's very easy to get caught up in all of us and day-to-day living, and the ways that we scrimp and push and kick other people to get what we need, whether it's a job or whether it's some other advancement. I lived in Boston for 8 years. That city was nothing like this city in terms of ... the seriousness of what I would call social-justice issues, especially homelessness and joblessness, etcetera that make Portland Portland, but that in one sense you can walk on by those things, and become immune to them.

A.W.: Do you think the problems you just highlighted are ones that Portlanders are aware of?

S.M.B.: Yes and no. Do I think that average Portlanders, if there is such a thing, spend their weekends or their non-working hours volunteering or doing some concerted thinking about these issues? Some do. I think people are inherently out for survival.



"I just wanted to yank it into today, and make it very markedly inspired by local celebrities and all of the wonderful, awful things that make Portland Portland," says "The Beggar's Opera" author, Stephen Marc Beaudoin, shown here at the piano rehearsing a duet with Scot Crandal and Bobby Jackson.

Especially now, as we're "recovering" from this recession, or whatever the hell it is, people are very concerned with their own survival.

A.W.: Why are homeless people at the heart of your rendition of "The Beggar's Opera"?

S.M.B.: It's the heart of the piece. There is a lyric in the show, "(There are) those in darkness and others in light, the ones in the darkness just fall from sight." I can't think of another population of people that fits "hidden in darkness" more. I can't think of another subgroup of citizens that ... in one sense, are more talked about in Portland and, at the same time, are shoved into the shadows.

A.W.: Your adaptation is a play within a play that the homeless characters decide to put on when they are at the end of their rope. Why a play within a play?

S.M.B.: It provides some context and some heat to what's at stake in the play. The frame or the context of having this be performed by those living on the streets at the end of their rope or thirsting for some way to speak to power is one way of ratcheting up to 120 degrees what's at stake within these characters' lives. It's not only

about Polly and Ma (Peachum)'s relationship, although what's at stake there is significant, it's about what the characters of those characters have at stake when performing them.

A.W.: Why do they feel like they have reached an end?

S.M.B.: That's something we're going to discover in rehearsal. I don't know that we have an answer yet. One could come up with any number of things. "We're sick of having to fight with government to get enough beds for transitional housing or shelter for people living on the streets. This is the last resort to say what we fucking want to say." "We're sick of being treated like second-class citizens and subject to the horrific beatings and violence that has been directed to the homeless community. And we're sick of that. We're doing something else to say what we want to say to prove our point."

A.W.: Do you think it's realistic to think that homeless people, once at the end of their rope, would do something like stage their own play?

S.M.B.: (Laughs.) You're so literal. The point of theater is not to suggest that what happens on stage is realistic. It's to suggest

something that could not happen anywhere else but stage.

A.W.: I'm not trying to be facetious in asking this next question, but what point does the play make? There is vast inequality in the world, so we all need to become Communists?

S.M.B.: (Laughs.) You are being facetious. The overarching point is that there are people who have means, live well, and have some form of social power. And then there are those who do not. The ones who do often become blind to their own failings and their own failures, and the ones who do not usually live very strongly with their feelings and failures and often have no way to recover from them.

A.W.: Do you expect this musical to change people's perceptions of the class divide in Portland, Portland's homeless population, its politicians, or any of the other issues the musical raises?

S.M.B.: I have no idea. I can't anticipate what people might take away from this. We're going to do our best job with an amazing group for people to tell an amazing story with music and staging. People will come to their own conclusions.



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