

THE READERS' THEATRE AT DOWNTOWN CINEMAPOLIS TO PRESENT PSYCHOLOGICAL THRILLER

The first week of March, The Readers' Theatre of Ithaca (RTI) will present a weekend of performance readings of one of **Neil LaBute's** most recent plays, an edge-of-your-seat thriller called **IN A FOREST, DARK AND DEEP**. The performance readings will take place at the theatre's new downtown location, **Cinemapolis, 120 East Green Street**. The performance readings will run one-weekend only: **Friday, March 7 and Saturday, March 8, at 8pm; and Sunday, March 9 at 6:30pm.**

The Reader's Theatre's production will star **Anne Marie Cummings**, RTI's Founder and Artistic Director, and local actor **Evan Stewart Eisenberg** (formerly in Cummings' online RTI summer play **SOUL MATES**). The production is being directed by **Cynthia Henderson**, RTI artistic board member and Ithaca College acting professor. This is Henderson's first time directing an RTI production. Music selections for the play are composed by **Hank Roberts**, RTI's music advisor and internationally well-known cello player.

IN A FOREST, DARK AND DEEP is set in a Midwestern cabin on a dark and stormy night. The play is described as "a dark comedy of sibling rivalry" that turns into a psychological thriller. It's about Betty, college professor and her middle-aged brother Bobby, a blue-collar laborer. Betty has a prim demeanor, and Bobby is a carpenter with a foul mouth and violent streak. On the night when Betty urgently needs help to empty her cabin in the woods – the cabin she's been renting to a male student – she calls on Bobby for help.

This exhilarating play of secrets and sibling rivalry had its world premiere in London's West End in 2011 at the Vaudeville Theatre with a production directed by LaBute starring **Matthew Fox** and **Olivia Williams**. Said **The Guardian**: "Highly entertaining...LaBute pulls the rug out from under our feet so often that we end up feeling breathless." **New York Magazine** wrote about the play, "The most legitimately provocative and polarizing playwright at work today unflinchingly explores the dark territory beyond, as Bobby sneeringly says, 'the lies you tell yourself to get by.'"

The **Chicago Tribune** wrote of Profile's 2012 production of the thriller: "Very much a meditation on what is and is not true...and also a further manifestation of the longstanding authorial fascination with the close link between deep intimacy and dark violence." **The New York Times** wrote: "The story itself becomes interesting, then exciting, and finally overwhelmingly tense. It is billed as being about sibling rivalry, but in fact majors on far deeper, dangerous things." The **Financial Times** wrote: "LaBute is such a skillful writer – edgy, funny, outrageous."

LaBute is an award-winning playwright, filmmaker, and screenwriter. His plays include: *bash*, *The Shape of Things*, *The Distance From Here*, *The Mercy Seat*, *Fat Pig* (Olivier Award nominated for Best Comedy), *Some Girl(s)*, and *Reasons to Be Pretty* (Tony Award nominated for Best Play). His films include *In the Company of Men* (New York Critics' Circle Award for Best First Feature and the Filmmaker Trophy at the Sundance Film Festival), *Your Friends and Neighbors*, *Nurse Betty*, and *Possession*.

LaBute stated that his reason for writing a play about siblings is because "there's no family connection quite like it. It's just plain fascinating how two people, so close in many ways can also be so different."

Cummings selected the play for the season because RTI often produces two-person plays and has established an artistic relationship with the modern playwright. "I'm drawn to inventive dialogue with clever twists and turns and controversial social issues which RTI highlights. It's exciting to perform a character that's layered and mysterious," she said. "And, LaBute does a fine job keeping the audience guessing which of the siblings is more deceptive than the other."

Said Cynthia Henderson, the plays director: "The heart of this play seems to be a modern day Hansel and Gretel getting lost in a forest of their own making. This forest has been created out of lies, evasions and shadows of secrets they've been hiding from. The plays I tend to be drawn to are plays that explore the human condition and why we do the things we do. This play explores a darker side of the human psyche and dysfunctional sibling dynamics."

Eisenberg added: "I am very excited to play Bobby. The role will enable me to explore the dark side of a sister/brother relationship, and play a character that doesn't hold back his hard line expressions of chauvinism, sexism, misogyny, and a dysfunctional family history. As dark as the play and the characters are, there are some funny, ironic and outrageous moments."

RTI's post-show discussions will explore the dark territory in the play. Following the opening night (3/7) performance reading the director and cast will answer questions from the audience. Following the 3/8 and 3/9 performance readings, **The Multicultural Resource Center** (a supporting sponsor) will present a panel of community members discussing the play with talk-backs entitled: "*Examining the Character Bobby: Race and Racism.*" **Note: Playwright Neil LaBute may be in town. RTI will know at the end of January and will send out a separate press release pertaining to this.**

Corporate sponsors for **IN A FOREST, DARK AND DEEP** are **ALTERNATIVES FEDERAL CREDIT UNION** and **JOSH AND KRISTI LOWER**. Supporting sponsors are local organizations **DREAM CATALYST**, the **MULTICULTURAL RESOURCE CENTER**, and **TOMPKINS CONNECT YOUNG PROFESSIONALS**. Tickets go on sale January 22nd and can now be purchased through RTI's website via Cinemapolis (thereaderstheatre.com). Prices for students are \$10 advance payment (student ID required at the door) and \$12 at the door. Prices for adults and seniors are \$12 advance payment and \$15 at the door (cash and credit cards). For directions and to follow the conversation on RTI's blog, visit www.thereaderstheatre.com.