

## **“Peer Gynt: A Masterpiece”**

From my point of view, Henrik Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt* is one of the masterpieces of the dramatic form.

I have, at various times, called it my “desert island play.” That is, if I were stranded on a desert island, this is the play (a dramatic poem, actually) that I would like to have with me as I hunted for tubers and plucked berries off of shrubbery.

The play was written during the early phase of Ibsen’s career, a period dominated by plays about the history and folkloric tradition of Norway. Later, Ibsen would return to the social problem plays for which he has become more famous in this country – plays like *A Doll’s House*, *Hedda Gabler*, *An Enemy of the People*, and *The Wild Duck*.

Ibsen wrote *Peer Gynt* mostly in Italy, but intended it as an evocation – an indictment – of the Norwegian national character. The play brings together much of what I love about theatre – stories of mythic dimension that penetrate beneath consciousness and evoke the deep longings of what it means to be human.

The play is full of great characters, marvelous language, fantastic and sometimes harrowing situations, wild humor, deep dread, and some of the most moving writing I have encountered in the theatre. I refer to last scene in the third act, where Peer talks his mother into heaven – one of the most beautiful scenes ever written. *Peer Gynt* is also one of the most potent examinations of the nature of the Self that western drama has created.

I staged the play once before, in 1995. The script was drastically edited, and all roles played by six actors: one actor played Peer, and five other actors performed all the other roles.

Our new production is conceived of as the near antithesis of the previous one. It is epic in scope, and expansive in palette.

This new *Peer Gynt* is a co-production, and uses faculty, students, and alumni from Westmont, as well as artists from the Lit Moon Theatre Company. It features three *Peer Gynts*, two different spaces for Parts 1 and 2, two different scenic and lighting designers, and puppets. It features a large company, and the play is staged in two separate, stand-alone parts. It is possible to see the entire show all in one day, though there are performances on subsequent weekday evenings.

We are in store for many fascinating conversations, challenging notions, and a rip-roaring good time in the theatre. – *John Blondell, Artistic Director, Lit Moon*