

Creating Connection Through Comedy

An Interview with Director Kurt Naebig on *The Outsider*

Join us for an engaging conversation with Kurt Naebig, renowned director and Ensemble Member of the Buffalo Theater Ensemble, as he discusses his latest project, *The Outsider* by Paul Slade Smith. In this interview, Interim Associate Artistic Director, Daniel Millhouse, sits down with Kurt to discuss his vision for the play, emphasizing the importance of humor and human connection in today's divided world. Kurt explores the challenges of directing a comedy that balances authenticity with exaggeration and highlights the collaborative spirit of theatre.

Kurt's passion for theater shines through as he reflects on the unique, ephemeral nature of live performance and its power to create memorable experiences for audiences. Discover what makes *The Outsider* a standout production and why it is a must-see this season!

DANIEL MILLHOUSE: Let's dive right in—what initially drew you to direct *The Outsider* for Buffalo Theatre Ensemble?

KURT NAEBIG: In these challenging times, where stress and division seem to dominate, I felt it was crucial to bring some laughter and joy into people's lives. *The Outsider* is a play that offers a comedic escape from the chaos of our world. It's nonpartisan and allows audiences to come together, to laugh, and to forget their worries for a while. I recently read that when people are in the theater together, their breaths and heartbeats start to synchronize, and that thought makes me feel hopeful.

DANIEL: Was there a particular moment in the play that made you think, "Yes, this is exactly what we need right now"?

KURT: Absolutely! There are some scenes that are so wildly funny, they will have the audience laughing uncontrollably. There is one interview scene that is so outlandish, it defies belief.

DANIEL: I felt a deep connection with how the play reflects our contemporary media landscape. It is almost like someone else understood and was able to articulate my own thoughts on our news today.

KURT: I love that about this play. It resonates with many people's unspoken thoughts. It's designed to entertain without offending, bringing humor to various perspectives.

DANIEL: The play features a flamboyant political consultant team. How will you balance humor with authenticity in portraying these characters?

KURT: We're steering clear of TV caricatures. We want these characters to feel real and relatable, even in their exaggerated moments. Each character has to be grounded in reality, with their own motivations and humanity. They have challenging jobs, and while their methods might seem extreme, they're driven by genuine concerns.



Director - Kurt Naebig

DANIEL: How do you approach this style of comedy in a play? Is it about grounding the humor or making it over-the-top?

KURT: I don't finalize the style until I'm in the rehearsal room with the cast. The dynamic of the group influences the comedic approach. I prioritize making the characters relatable and grounded, ensuring that the humor stems from real human experiences rather than just gimmicks.

DANIEL: You work closely with a talented ensemble. What excites you about working with this particular group for this show?

KURT: I'm excited about the unique qualities each BTE Ensemble member brings to the table. For example, Robert Jordan Bailey is a skilled comic actor, Norm Woodel has a larger-than-life personality, Lisa Dawn has a huge heart perfect for her role, Laura Leonardo Ownby brings a zany fun, and Christopher Kriz has an exceptional ear for sound. Each of them will contribute something special to this production. On top of our Ensemble members, fresh energy and new perspectives can significantly enhance a production. We have three actors in this show who are new to performing with Buffalo Theatre Ensemble: Sara Mountjoy-Pepka, Joe Bushell, and Zach Kunde. Their unique energy will undoubtedly bring something new to the table. It's about finding that perfect fit for each role and ensuring a dynamic and engaging performance.

DANIEL: What makes the experience of attending a Buffalo Theatre Ensemble production unique?

KURT: Theater offers a unique experience because it captures a moment in time that can never be replicated. Unlike film, where moments are preserved, theater is about sharing a live, unrepeatable experience. Every performance is distinct, and that spontaneity makes it special. You might even encounter unexpected moments that become memorable highlights. I'm just really looking forward to bringing this play to life and sharing it with our audience. I hope everyone leaves with a smile and a sense of joy!

Don't miss the chance to experience *The Outsider* at Buffalo Theater Ensemble, where laughter meets insight in a uniquely engaging production. Under the direction of Kurt Naebig, this play promises a refreshing escape from the everyday, blending sharp humor with genuine human connection. Whether you're a longtime theatergoer or new to the stage, *The Outsider* offers a memorable evening of comedy and camaraderie that will leave you talking and laughing long after the final curtain. Join us and be part of an unforgettable theatrical experience that celebrates the joy of shared laughter and the magic of live performance.

The Outsider

Sep. 5 – Oct. 6 | Thur. - Sat. 7:30p, Sun. 3p

Thoroughly non-partisan laugh fest is just what you need.

by Paul Slade Smith

Directed by Kurt Naebig

Buffalo Theatre Ensemble in Residence at the MAC at College of DuPage

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