

Rick Lombardo



THE CLEAN HOUSE

"If the Pulitzer panel had seen this production, maybe Ruhl would have gotten the gold... Not only do all five mega-talented actors turn in highlight-reel performances, but director Rick Lombardo and his design team make the space at the Arsenal Center for the Arts come alive. Some theater folk have complained that the New Rep sacrificed too much intimacy in its move from its former Newton-church home, but Lombardo uses the new stage space with a free-spirited swagger that the Newton stage could never have accommodated....If Lombardo ever gets these actors and designers together again, I want to be there." The Boston Phoenix

"Director Rick Lombardo has sweetened the pot by assembling a magnificent local cast. ... Lombardo and this wonderfully simpatico cast have created a "Clean House" to treasure. A terrific play, a beautifully designed production, and a dream cast - that's a clean sweep." The Boston Globe





A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

"It's all the more remarkable, then, that the New Repertory Theatre's Rick Lombardo has staged a "Streetcar" that feels deeply true to the spirit of Tennessee Williams and at the same time true to itself. Working on a set by Janie E. Howland that's just what a Williams set should be - dingily realistic in its details, dreamily abstract in its structure - and underscored by Haddon Kime's mournful streetcar moans and saxophone wails, Lombardo's four main actors and their supporting players draw us irresistibly into Williams's shattered, shattering world." The Boston Globe

THE LOVER & ASHES TO ASHES by Harold Pinter

"A simple suburban living room bristles with emotional undercurrents. Welcome to the world of Harold Pinter, brought to devastatingly vivid life in the New Repertory Theatre production of "A Pinter Duet: The Lover and Ashes to Ashes."

Director Rick Lombardo has mounted this pair of one-acts, which he first presented at Wellfleet Harbor Actors Theater in 2005, with the audience on either side of the stage. The effect is that viewers come even closer to these two couples, both played by Rachel Harker and Stephen Russell, so we catch every aside, every grimace, and feel even more intensely that we are voyeurs to these intimate domestic scenes.

Two luminous performances, under Lombardo's crisp direction, make this "Pinter Duet" a powerful evening of theater." The Boston Globe



SWEENEY TODD

"There's nothing like a great show done greatly. At the far end of the Green Line, tucked inside the Newton Highlands Congregational Church, lies the New Repertory Theatre, where since April 23rd—and until June 8th—a great show is being done greatly night after night. The show is Stephen Sondheim and Hugh Wheeler's gothic masterpiece, *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*. The dark tale of revenge gone out of control, of twisted sexual

romances, of the worst kind of social revolution and the best-tasting meat pies in all of London, has been enormously popular since its Broadway opening in 1979 and its more recent staged concert starring Patti LuPone and George Hearn. Both those productions, though, were directed on an elaborate scale—the former with a gargantuan set capturing the power of the industrial revolution to corrupt and drown out the individual self, the latter placed in Lincoln Center's Avery Fisher Hall and backed by nothing less than the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. At the New Repertory, however, the theater's low roof, small size, and generally cramped (though not uncomfortable) and intimate setup have the brilliant effect of making us feel as trapped in Sweeney Todd's murderous world as Toby in the bakehouse. Combine this with director Rick Lombardo's clear grasp upon his material and brilliant performances by both Todd Alan Johnson and Nancy E. Carroll as Sweeney Todd and Mrs. Lovett, the most twisted couple this side of the murderers in Hitchcock's *Rope*. As I told my friend, whose only experience with *Todd* had been an ineffective production at Harvard College last spring, "Now *that's Sweeney Todd*." — Jason Fitzgerald

"Looks like Artistic Director Rick Lombardo has another triumph on his hands. A week before giving its first performance, *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* had already sold more advance tickets than anything in the New Repertory Theatre's nearly twenty year history. Based on what happened once word got out about his production of *Waiting for Godot*, those wishing to see *Sweeney Todd* as it was always meant to be are advised to skip to the end of this piece now and order tickets.

From the prescient sounds of the organ as you enter the theatre space to the astonishing ringing of the rafters when the twenty-four member ensemble reprises "The Ballad of Sweeney Todd" some three hours later, this is an astonishing experience." TalkingBroadway

WAITING FOR GODOT

"The New Repertory Theatre in Newton Highlands celebrates the 50th anniversary of the first production of Samuel Beckett's seminal modern play *Waiting for Godot* in great style with a stunning production directed by Artistic Director Rick Lombardo.



Austin Pendleton, returning to the New Rep in the role of Vladimir, is paired with Boston based actor/playwright John Kuntz as Estragon. Together they execute a comic tramp ballet that perfectly echoes Beckett's exquisite language of human emotions and conditions." Talking Broadway



THE WILD PARTY

“But in New Rep artistic director Rick Lombardo's glamorously decadent staging, Lippa's show packs the smooth, deadly punch of a shot of absinthe.” *The Boston Globe*



THE SNOW QUEEN

“In addition, the staging, production values, and special effects are beautiful, impeccably done, combining projections with live action and moving set pieces in a fascinating kind of choreography. Erik Flatmo (scenic) and David Lee Cuthbert (lighting and projection) have outdone themselves on this one. Costumes by Frances Nelson McSherry are colorful, flexible, and often amusing, adding immensely to the enjoyment of seeing actors changing roles. In short, the overall spectacle is fabulous, with superb staging, singing and acting...” *TalkingBroadway*

GAME ON

“San Jose Repertory Theatre has mounted a stylish and entertaining world premiere of Dan Hoyle and Tony Taccone's new play about Silicon Valley wheeling and dealing, *Game On*. With local favorites Marco Barricelli and Craig Marker in the leads and terrific comic action

as well as contemporary themes, it's a surefire hit—make this one a must see on your calendar.

Production values are superb, from John Iacovelli's deliciously chic set, to David Lee Cuthbert's subtly changing light design, to Rick Lombardo's spot-on sound design. Lombardo also directs, and staging is a huge plus in bringing this piece to life, with special kudos for the brilliant way actors relate to the baseball game.

It's the first play I know of that truly captures the Silicon Valley milieu in a way that is both specific and universal. See it for the fun and fabulous performances, and enjoy it before it takes Broadway by storm.” TalkingBroadway

GOD OF CARNAGE

“The 2009 Tony Award winner for best play, Yasmina Reza's comedy of bad manners is now a hot property in regional theater, and the Southwest-premiere production by Arizona Theatre Company is one of its most satisfying displays of pure entertainment in years.

Directed by Rick Lombardo, on loan from the San Jose Rep, the four actors in this cast throw themselves into the vicious banter with glee. “ The Arizona Republic



SPRING AWAKENING

San Jose Repertory Theatre has opened their 2011-2012 season with a blockbuster of a show, raising the bar in every aspect of theater production. ***Spring Awakening***, with its provocative content, is the kind of show which should usher in a whole new generation of theater lovers, and its high level of technical and acting talent also proves that there is no need to head north to see a fantastic production when you live in the South Bay.

Book writer and lyricist **Steven Sater** was also in the audience on opening night and he looked pleased. I truly hope we did make him proud, as I know that I am certainly proud of **Director Rick Lombardo** and our local San Jose Repertory Theatre. I cannot imagine how Mr. Lombardo plans to top this show, but we have six more shows to look forward to this year. If there was ever a time to buy season tickets, this IS the year



year.

Jason Hite is Melchior Gabor in the stunning production of Spring Awakening at San Jose Repertory Theatre, with direction by Rick Lombardo and choreography by Sonya Tayeh.

The original production of *Spring Awakening*, the musical based on the 1891 play by **Frank Wedekind**, was so vivid, so powerful and so widely seen throughout the Bay Area, it's rather astonishing that **San Jose Repertory Theatre** has the cheek to produce the show's first regional production. Ah, but what cheek. Director **Rick Lombardo**, also San Jose Rep's artistic director, choreographer **Sonya Tayeh** (a guest judge and choreographer on *So You Think You Can Dance*) and musical director **Dolores Duran-Cefalu** have done such original work that they make the show their own. For fans of *Spring Awakening*, and I definitely count myself a fan, this production is a revelation if only because it allows you to see the

show afresh and fall in love with it all over again.



In San Jose, Lombardo and his team delivers a production that pulses with youthful energy and talent.

FOXFIRE

“Under Rick Lombardo’s direction, all the elements from design to performance unite in a beautifully nuanced, atmospheric elegy to a vanishing culture. The show’s thorough excellence is even more impressive because so much of it is due to student work.”

The Cleveland Plain Dealer

THE GLASS MENAGERIE

“Just as he did with last season’s production of *Death of a Salesman*...Artistic Director Rick Lombardo has taken another classic of the American Stage and given it a state-of-the-art revival. There is theatrical magic in the production, with nuances of characterization and feeling, lighting and sound that are intrinsic to the stage. Under Lombardo’s precise direction, the proceedings are richly detailed and abrim with raw emotion....it is superb.”

The Repository

JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR

“Did you ever have one of those rare experiences where everything went right and you wished you could capture it in a bottle? It happened Friday evening the opening performance of *Jesus Christ Superstar*. The production was breathtaking and the performances inspired, the best this reviewer has seen in a year on this assignment”

The Akron Beacon Journal

Stratford On Gothic

San Jose Rep's Rick Lombardo gives 'As You Like It' a high-tech urban look

By Steve Palopoli

WITH EACH passing year, the question of how to bring Shakespeare alive for modern audiences gets more and more complicated. Shakespeare Santa Cruz gets most of the credit in Northern California for bringing new approaches to the Bard's works—many of them classic, some of them weird but interesting, and others just completely random (with at least a couple of them, including the now-legendary *Merry Wives of Windsor*—in-a-trailer-park gambit, that I will never be able to make up my mind about).

But with his directorial debut for San Jose Repertory Theatre, artistic director Rick Lombardo has staked his claim to a place in a very small group of modern Shakespeare visionaries. By any standard, this production of *As You Like It* is an unqualified triumph. But the fact that it was built on one of Shakespeare's shakiest and most controversial plays only makes it all the more impressive.

The typical Shakespeare nut has seen enough mediocre stagings of *As You Like It* to be wary. Critics for centuries have argued about whether *As You Like It* is a great work, or a comedy trifle. What Lombardo's version does is reaffirm the pure entertainment value of this often misunderstood play while at the same time shoring up the argument that its thematic subtext ("civilization" vs. nature, corruption vs. love) has some fascinating substance.

To put it another way, one that Lombardo himself may or may not appreciate: this production is to Shakespeare what *The Dark Knight* was to Batman. It may sound crazy, but hear me out. The first half of the play is one of the sleekest, coolest Shakespeare stagings I've ever seen.

The vibe is urban gothic, with three huge, high-tech screens behind the stage that conjures up an epic dose of cold cosmopolitan chic. The lighting by Daniel Meeker is used to full effect for this purpose, as in an interrogation scene that features several characters huddled around one single harsh light, stage right.

But by far, the standout moment is James Carpenter's delivery of the play's famous "all the world's a stage" monologue. I've seen this play performed many times, including in the film version, and I've never seen anything that even comes close to what Carpenter does here.

To give away too many details would risk spoiling the breathtaking surprises to be experienced; suffice it to say that to say that to see Carpenter as the melancholy Jacques act this scene in a flurry of snowflakes, against a backdrop of a winter forest lit by a blue glow, is the most powerful moment of theater I can recall seeing in quite some time.

His performance is the first among many elements that combine to make this not just must-see Shakespeare, but must-see theater, pure and simple.

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The Boston Globe

In its new space, the New Rep can finally think bigger

By Ed Siegel, Globe Staff | September 11, 2005

WATERTOWN -- You couldn't find a better 46-year-old example of a kid in a candy store than Rick Lombardo as he conducts a tour of the new theater space at the Arsenal Center for the Arts.

He grins as he listens to the acoustics, he beams as he shows you the state-of-the-art equipment, and he positively exults as he basks in the spaciousness of Charles Mosesian Theater, the new 300-seat home of the New Repertory Theatre, of which he has been artistic director since 1996.

Theater is a religion to many, but New Rep was actually hosted by the Congregational Church in Newton Highlands for the past 14 years. It was a serviceable space that Lombardo and other directors learned how to use, despite the quarters being so cramped.

What audiences will experience now is literally on another level. The new building opens onto a large stairway leading up to the theater entrance. Inside, stadium-style seating flanks the stage floor, which extends out toward the audience.

New Rep has two five-year leases in the impressive-looking arts center, which also has a smaller black-box theater that will be available for rentals, as well as rehearsal rooms and studios.

Lombardo's work over the past four seasons has been among the best in the city, with productions of "Waiting for Godot," "The Threepenny Opera," "Sweeney Todd," and "Into the Woods" breaking crowd records and winning widespread acclaim. It's also been a good home for newer work. But it's time to move on.

For "Into the Woods," last year's finale in Newton, "clothes were ripping every day because inevitably someone would step on somebody else" in the crowded space, he says. Now there's plenty of room backstage, not only for actors to make more graceful exits and entrances but for dressing rooms, bathrooms, showers, and all the other amenities that aren't always easy to come by in the theater world.

When New Rep staged "King Lear" in 2000, Shawn Sturnick, the actor playing Edgar, had to walk through the streets of Newton covered in muck to get to a shower.

Lombardo picked another Shakespeare tragedy, "Romeo and Juliet," to open the Watertown space Sept. 19, with two previews the day before. Part of the reason for revisiting the Montagues and Capulets, says Lombardo, is its resonance with current events.

"There are so many regional conflicts where there are these ancient feuds," he says. "We keep offering up our young people to be slaughtered -- all the young soldiers we've sent over to Afghanistan and Iraq and all the young men strapping bombs on their back. They're expendable material in what are in many cases senseless feuds."

The other reason was more practical. "It's the kind of play we never would have been able to do in the old space, the kind of athletic production with acrobatic fighting, a big banquet scene. Also, the play requires a balcony," he says, laughing. "We could never do a second tier."

Lombardo adds that the new freedom won't change New Rep's mission. "What we now are going to be able to do is wed our commitment to a high quality of acting and text-centered work with visual design and production we weren't able to do before. We have large-scale Shakespeare and a big musical like 'Ragtime' standing right next to 'True West' or 'Frozen' " -- three other plays on the New Rep schedule this season.

Not everything has gone smoothly. The neighboring Red Sauce restaurant was going to cosponsor the season and host opening-night parties but was sold as the season was about to begin.

You get the sense, though, that Lombardo isn't too bothered by that. When you're walking on air, you can party anywhere.

Ed Siegel can be reached at siegel@globe.com. ■

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New Repertory Theatre artistic director Rick Lombardo onstage at his company's new 300-seat home, the Charles Mosesian Theater at the Arsenal Center for the Arts in

The Actor's Role in Developing New Work

Interview with Rick Lombardo, Artistic Director of San Jose Repertory Theatre

Posted on [March 10, 2010](#) |



Rick Lombardo, Artistic Director

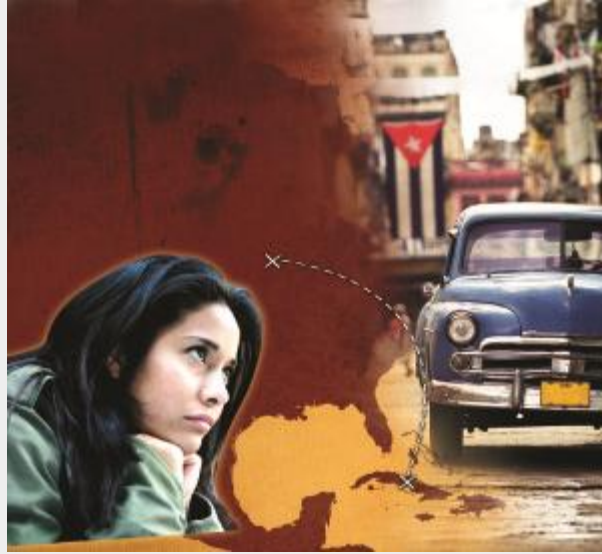
Brooke M. Haney (BMH): Why do you have a commitment to new works in your life and at San Jose Repertory?

Rick Lombardo (RL): The organizations, non-profit theatres, have a responsibility to take care of our audience and of the American Theatre. Cultivating new work is part of the job, if we fully embrace it. So, we need to make a commitment to nurturing new voices. If we don't, there won't be new voices. Theatre will become passé. Audiences won't see themselves in the plays. Classics and Modern Classics are great, but people want to see themselves in the lives that they see on stage.

One challenge we are facing is the tight budget in this recession. That is probably having an impact on play development and level of risk that theatres are willing to take on. For example, we are not producing a World Premiere this season, we did last season, and we will next season. This is not an artistic choice, but the environment that we're in necessitates it.

BMH: I did notice that you are doing the Regional Premiere of *Sonia Flew*. What is important about Regional Premieres?

RL: Unfortunately, often once the World Premiere is over, no one is doing the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th productions. Especially if a play doesn't go to Broadway and get that stamp of approval. What about the really good plays that need that second production? So, we have a commitment to those as well.



The Regional Premiere of Sonja Flew

BMH: What is the Actor's role in developing new works?

RL: In a workshop, we are not always looking for Actors who are perfect in every way for the role – type, spirit, intelligence. Type is least important and intelligence most important. Truthful acting easily and quickly is invaluable. There is never enough time with a new play, so if you can cast the workshop perfectly, if you can hang onto the same Actors from the workshop, it is very valuable. In a workshop, the Playwright needs to hear the play, not see the play. We need Actors who can speak on behalf of the character. “This moment strikes me as wrong...” Being able to talk about that in a smart way.

BMH: How do you approach a World Premiere?

RL: As a Director, it is an enormous responsibility to give the playwright their play, not my vision of their play. They might have a specific type in mind. I'll take more risks with a classic play or a tried and true modern classic. We're still saying “This moment doesn't work for me...” We never move past that until opening night. There can be a lot of people with their ideas. So, the Actor's job is to try to make every thing true. If a good Actor is struggling with that, then it is important information.

If you are lucky enough to have a Dramaturg, it changes everything. They are the ally of the playwright or at least the advocate of the play. Actor is the advocate for the character. Most often though, of financial necessity, the Director often has to function as Director and Dramaturg.

BMH: How do you set up communication in the rehearsal hall?

RL: I make it really clear that I want the writer and the Actor to talk to me. I'm perfectly happy to be the go between. Most writers don't know how to direct. Actor's don't always understand the sensitivity of the writer. I'm the ambassador. What isn't working?

BMH: Do you have any last tips or thoughts for Actors when approaching a new work?

RL: I advise new Actors: First observe. There really is an unspoken apprenticeship. See how the more experienced Actors in the room are handling communication.

The house Lombardo built - and left behind

He traded New Rep for a bigger spotlight, smaller comfort level

The Boston Globe



In 12-plus years, Rick Lombardo shepherded New Repertory Theatre into new space at the former Watertown Arsenal and guided productions such as "Sweeney Todd" (below left, with Nancy E. Carroll and Todd Alan Johnson), "The Clean House" (center, with Bobbie Steinbach and Paula Plum), and "Ragtime" (with Stephanie Umoh). (Essdras M Suarez/Globe Staff/File 2002)

By [Louise Kennedy](#)

Globe Staff / May 24, 2009

Rick Lombardo, the former producing artistic director of Watertown's New Repertory Theatre who recently left to become artistic director at San Jose Repertory Theatre, was back in town recently for a couple of gala events. And he didn't pass up a few chances to talk, and keep talking, about the state of theater today.

First came the Elliot Norton Awards, where Lombardo accepted the Norton Prize for Sustained Excellence with an extensive and wide-ranging speech. The next night, he was roasted at New Rep's end-of-season gala - where his former colleagues teasingly told him his award had been renamed the Norton Prize for Sustained Verbiage.

Earlier on the day of the Nortons, Lombardo's loquaciousness was in evidence during a conversation over lunch in Kenmore Square, where he reflected on his 12-plus years at New Rep, his hopes for San Jose, and his thoughts on the future of theater.

Aside from having roses blooming 10 months out of the year, Lombardo said, San Jose, Calif., isn't as different from Boston as you might think. With Stanford University, Google, and Apple all in the neighborhood, it has "a very highly educated audience," and yet the theater there also has to work to attract younger and more diverse audiences. The economy, too, is struggling there as it is here.

"We actually joked about that, moving smack in the middle of the biggest recession in a generation," Lombardo said of conversations with his wife, actress Rachel Harker. "But then we said, well, we'd be struggling back there, too."

One big difference, Lombardo said, "is the responsibility to be a flagship theater for the city. It's a chance to be a spokesman for the arts, a leader in the arts. That opportunity is one of the reasons I moved - I wanted to try that role. It's a really precarious time for the arts in America, I think, so it's kind of a wonderful time to be an arts leader. There's a really good fight to be had."

As for New Rep's new artistic director, Kate Warner, Lombardo said he participated in the search process until the committee had narrowed the choice to three finalists, and he "absolutely agreed" with all three of those choices. In her selections for next season, "I think there's some stuff that feels totally New Rep," he said, and some plays that may move the theater in a slightly different direction.

"I was actually hoping that New Rep would see this as an opportunity to redefine itself," Lombardo said. "The danger was that they'd look for a clone of me. I was different from [New Rep founder] Larry Lane. You need to try new things."

One of the new things that Lombardo himself tried in 1999 now stands as "a defining moment" of his New Rep tenure, he said. When he directed "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead," he recalled, "the press loved it, it won awards, we had huge single-ticket sales, there was an incredible lowering of the average audience age." But its Hamlet on roller skates, Gertrude in drag, and other shenanigans also provoked "enormous numbers of

walkouts - and of the subscribers who did not renew that year, almost every one cited 'Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.' "

He saw that reaction, he says, as a challenge: "What does New Rep want to be? Do we continue that trajectory and attract the single-ticket, younger audience, or are we going to say, ooh, this was a mistake, let's do more Alan Ayckbourn and Shaw?"

As is clear from some of his later projects - "The Pillowman," say, or others he cites as highlights, from "Sweeney Todd" to "Ragtime" to "The Clean House" - his answer was not Ayckbourn and Shaw. Beyond those specific choices, though, he said his mission at New Rep was always institutional as well as artistic.

"I wanted to go to a theater where there was really an opportunity to grow it and change it and have an impact," Lombardo said, recalling his decision to come to New Rep from Ohio's Players Guild. And at the time, he said, the Boston area needed "a midsize theater that could put on provocative, smart, literate plays. That's what was missing."

He's proud of having built New Rep into that kind of theater, even as the Lyric Stage Company was developing into a similarly strong midsize venue. He's also proud of retiring the debt he inherited and of shepherding the company's 2005 move from its cramped space in a Newton Highlands church to its new and spacious quarters, featuring a main stage and a smaller black box, at Watertown's Arsenal Center for the Arts.

Once New Rep had settled into its new home, though, he said, "I thought about my internal 'artistic director' checklist, and I thought, either institutionally or as an artist, I think I've done it. One thing I still hadn't done was to assume the responsibility of leading a flagship theater. And I wanted to be compensating artists at what they're really worth. I was paying them \$300 a week - it's crazy. And that really started to matter to me."

Moving up was a risk, he said, but one that felt necessary.

"There are points in your life where you have to make yourself not comfortable again," Lombardo said. "And I'm not comfortable again. And that's OK."