

“The Red Badge of Courage” Presents Stephen Crane’s Classic Novel in Rare Theater Production

October 27, 2018

by Pat Rogers

“Red Badge of Courage” by Stephen Crane is receiving a rare theater treatment. The literature classic is currently being performed on stage at the Southampton Cultural Center in Southampton Village, NY. Presented by boots on the ground theater, the classic tale unfolding during the Civil War receives an extra dollop of realism through stagecraft and costuming that is true to the period for its New York premiere.

An exhibition of Civil War objects combined with local stories is on display in the Southampton Cultural Center’s gallery. It is curated by Stephen Gould in collaboration with the Southampton History Museum.

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A scene from “The Red Badge of Courage” performed at the Southampton Cultural Center and presented by boots on the ground theater. Photo by Mary Godfrey. Courtesy Southampton Cultural Center.

Staying true to historical accuracy—down to thehardtack consumed on stage by the actors and shoes made in keeping with the craft of the time—provides realism and helps to bring the Civil War tale come alive for its audience. Authentic uniforms, costumes (including shoes) and objects on stage were tracked down to portray an accurate depiction of the time period, representing hundreds of hours of research that led producer Bonnie Grice around the country in online investigations for the sake of the play.

“Historical accuracy is important to me,” said Bonnie Grice, the founder of boots on the ground theater who also appears in the play. “I want to present the Civil War history as accurately as I can, so people have a chance to experience that history.”

“The Red Badge of Courage” will be performed October 19 to November 4, 2018 on Fridays and

Saturdays at 7 p.m. and on Sundays at 2:30 p.m. On November 4, 2018, a special free encore performance for veterans and their families will be presented at 6 p.m. for those who reserve in advance.



A scene from "The Red Badge of Courage" performed at the Southampton Cultural Center and presented by boots on the ground theater. Photo by Mary Godfrey. Courtesy Southampton Cultural Center.

The Red Badge of Courage centers on Henry Fleming, a young Union soldier who battles his inner demons as he runs from and eventually faces his greatest fears. Published in 1895, the Red Badge of Courage is considered one of the first great war novels and has never gone out of print.

Rarely performed, Grice thought the story springing from literature was the perfect follow up to her company's first production in April 2018. Also pulling from literature that is a staple of many school English classes, boots on the ground theater opened its program with Helen Keller's story portrayed in "The Miracle Worker" for six performances only at the Southampton Cultural Center.



Thomas Schiavoni as Henry Fleming in “The Red Badge of Courage” performed at the Southampton Cultural Center and presented by boots on the ground theater. Photo by Mary Godfrey. Courtesy Southampton Cultural Center.

Grice’s interest in forming a company sprung from the joy she experienced in bringing history to life in site-specific theatrical re-enactments of Victorian Mourning rituals for the Southampton History Museum in 2016 and 2017. As an actress, she has appeared on the Southampton Cultural Theater stage under the direction of Michael Disher.

“The Red Badge of Courage” is the first full-run production presented by the new theater company and offers three weeks of weekend performances.



A scene from "The Red Badge of Courage" performed at the Southampton Cultural Center and presented by boots on the ground theater. Photo by Mary Godfrey. Courtesy Southampton Cultural Center.

The novel was the play was adapted for stage by playwright Catherine Bush. Directed by Josephine Teresi-Wallace, the cast includes experienced actors, high school thespians and veteran of Iraq and a Wounded Warrior. The production tapped into the expertise of Vietnam veteran Captain Joseph Bilardello, a Commander of the 67th NYC Civil War Reenactors, as consultant. He will give a talk after each student school productions, held during the day, Grice said.

The cast features Thomas Schiavoni, as the lead Henry Fleming, along with Ethan Sur, Bonnie Grice, Richard Adler, Robert Nelson, Mitch Selden, Deyo Trowbridge and Christopher Levi.



A scene from "The Red Badge of Courage" performed at the Southampton Cultural Center and presented by boots on the ground theater. Photo by Mary Godfrey. Courtesy Southampton Cultural Center.

Grice's love of history can also be found just outside of the theater where an exhibition of Civil War artifacts is displayed and accompanied by wall text panels. Wanting to ground Crane's story for a Hamptons audience, Grice and her husband, Steve Gould, traced a local connection to Alonzo Foster, who lived in Hampton Bays in the mid-1800s and enlisted in the war, Grice said.

One story that Foster passed down was how his Forage Cap took a bullet that was meant for him, passing so close that it removed hair from his head, Grice said, relaying a passage from Foster's writing found during their research. In a coincidence, the same type of Forage Cap that Foster would have worn was found in the collection of the Southampton History Museum. A single hole is evident in the cloth where a bullet blazed through.

"We can't say this is definitely Alonzo Foster's hat, but it seems as if it could be," Grice said.

Objects from Foster's life are part of the Southampton History Museum's collection that make speculation on the connection intriguing.



Forage Cap, Collection of the Southampton History Museum, 2009.1.294. Photo courtesy Steve Gould.

The exhibition accompanying the play at the Southampton Cultural Center includes a Pistol Cartridge Box and Rifle Carriage Box from the uniform of Alonzo Foster, which was donated by his son, Clarence D. Foster, to the Southampton History Museum. Also displayed are a letter from a soldier, carte de visites of Lincoln, Grant, General Hooker (a union commander at Chancellorsville) and from an unknown union cavalry soldier, from Gould's grandfather's collection.

Gould's grandfather, who collected Civil War artifacts, inspired Gould's interest in the Civil War along with a general interest in history and military history, he explained in an email.

“The Civil War is particularly compelling, given the division of our country and the sacrifice of so many to end slavery,” Gould wrote. “I have been lucky to work with the Southampton History Museum and being able to bring Alonzo’s story to life.



Installation view of an exhibition of objects from the Civil War Era presented at the Southampton Cultural Center. Photo courtesy Steve Gould.

Grice shares her husband’s enthusiasm for history, the importance of the Civil War and for the way literature can resonate for generations of readers such as the brilliance of Crane’s novel as done since its publication in 1895, she said. History has much to teach us about the past that can be applied to the present, she said.

Bringing Crane’s slice of history to the stage has also allowed local talent to shine as a troupe. Combining student actors with seasoned adult ones is another satisfying aspect of presenting “The Red Badge of Courage.”

“I love having the combination of student actors and adult professionals,” Grice said. “It’s not necessarily something that’s given to students; the ability to be in a play that’s seen by adult audiences and student audiences and for them to have first hand experience in the craft and art of theater.”

For audiences, “The Red Badge of Courage” provides the chance to see literature live, history at work and to see some of the talent that lives among them.



A scene from "The Red Badge of Courage" performed at the Southampton Cultural Center and presented by boots on the ground theater. Photo by Mary Godfrey. Courtesy Southampton Cultural Center.

BASIC FACTS: "The Red Badge of Courage" is performed at the Southampton Cultural Center from October 19 to November 4, 2018 on Fridays and Saturdays at 7 p.m. and Sundays at 2:30 p.m. Tickets are \$25; \$12 for students under 21 with ID. A Dinner & Theater package is available for \$69 in partnership with the Plaza Cafe.

A special performance offered free for veterans who reserve in advance is being performed on November 4, 2018. Veterans are required to reserve tickets in advance by emailing Kirsten Lonnie at klonnie@scc-arts.org.

Southampton Cultural Center is located at 25 Pond Lane, Southampton, NY

11968. www.scc-arts.org

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