

# NEW CEO HAS BIG PLANS FOR PLAYHOUSE SA

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Photography Daniel Baumer



George Green has no trouble recalling the experience that ignited his love for live theater. In 1988 he saw a production of Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*, produced by the San Antonio Little Theater, a community theater organization residing at the San Pedro Playhouse.

"That show changed my life," he says simply. "At the end of the play, I realized I had not been in my life for two hours. The play transported me to another place and time. It inspired me to think. I decided I needed to be part of that kind of inspiring work for the rest of my life."

Since then, the San Antonio Little Theater has gone through two name changes, first by adopting the name of the building it was operating from, and more recently by assuming the name of Playhouse San Antonio. But it's still a non-profit producer of plays and musicals, still residing in the charming old building in San Pedro Park where, like Green, generations of San Antonians have had their first encounters with the thespian art.

After an absence of 20 years, Green is now back at the San Pedro Playhouse as the new CEO and artistic director of the current company. He has certainly realized the goal he set for himself in 1988 but it took him a little longer than he hoped. Though involved with theater since his school days, at 18, he joined the US Air Force and served for nine years as a paramedic. At the time, it seemed like a more pragmatic and stable occupation. Still, while stationed in Lubbock, he and a pal created a small producing entity to stage plays, which eventually became the resident theater company at the Godbold Cultural Center. After leaving the military, the new civilian, now living in Spokane, Washington, experimented with a marketing career in radio and print media for a while before "jumping off the cliff" into the joys and tribulations of live theater. "I wish I had done it sooner," he says.

Changing careers was clearly good for him as well as for the companies he got involved with. Green first served as the director of development for the Spokane Civic Theater for a few years before moving to the Lake City Playhouse in 2010 to become its executive/artistic director. Under his leadership, the latter experienced considerable growth in revenue, donor support and subscriptions. In addition, he eventually helped the company merge with another thespian group to form the Modern Theater, the first resident professional company in the Inland Northwest.

And this is something he hopes to accomplish in San Antonio as well. Though the Playhouse has been moving in that direction for a while, turning it into a truly professional company is a long-term goal, he says, to be reached in six or ten years. For now, he is focusing on staff and on enhancing the artistic and technical quality of the shows. And there are encouraging signs

already. The October production of *Disney's Beauty and the Beast* was the highest selling show in the theater's history, he points out proudly. Many factors contributed to that: the high quality of the production, the popular and "fantastic" performers, the well-known title and the nature of the show which is suitable for the entire family.

Though the 2016-17 season was already planned before he officially took the reins of the nonprofit organization, he's made a few changes in the lineup. Instead of the pre-announced A Christmas Carol, this December, San Antonians will have a chance to see the unique musical play *All is Calm: The Christmas Truce of 1914*, which is based on a real event. On and around Christmas of 1914, the German and Allied soldiers halted the fighting on the Western Front, and without seeking permission from commanders, emerged from their trenches, exchanged greeting and small gifts with their enemies, sang songs and played a soccer match together. It sounds surreal but it actually happened.

"It's a beautiful story," notes the artistic director. "Such a thing happened only that one time. A book was written about it, there was a movie and now there's a musical. It's also a brilliant piece of theater. Not much glitz and glamour. You feel like you are witnessing the event."

The show will be enhanced by the participation of the Marcsmen, an a cappella men's singing group that will also have a separate holiday concert immediately following the Dec. 17 performance of *All is Calm*.

Upon his arrival, Green stirred up a controversy in local thespian circles by firing nearly the entire Playhouse staff, which gave rise to a petition seeking his removal. The decision to take that difficult step was necessary, he explains, both because of a budget deficit – since taken care of – and the needs of the company as it moves forward toward its goal. To forge a new in-house "culture" of professionalism, he needed people with different skill sets. Most new hires came from outside San Antonio, mostly people whose work his was familiar with.

Other changes we will be seeing include many more productions per season and casting that will not be limited to local performers only. Programming, however, will continue to offer something for everyone, from American Broadway classics to edgy, provocative plays and contemporary musicals. Auxiliary activities such as children's programs will be re-evaluated.

"We'll focus on our core product – producing high quality theater – in a wide range of productions. Our staff and artists are in the business of creating art. We are heading in the right direction... I am extremely enthused about our progress."