

LEED COUNCIL FOCUSES ON A MEMBER: STEPPENWOLF THEATRE COMPANY

Steppenwolf Theatre Company
1650 N. Halsted Street
Chicago , IL 60614
(312) 335-1650
www.steppenwolf.org



Steppenwolf Theatre Company is a Chicago-based international performing arts institution committed to ensemble collaboration and artistic risk through its work with its permanent ensemble, guest artists, partner institutions and the community. Steppenwolf has redefined the landscape of acting and performance by spawning a generation of America's most gifted artists. Founded in 1975 as an ensemble of nine actors, Steppenwolf has grown into an internationally renowned company of forty-two artists whose talents include acting, directing, playwriting and filmmaking. No other American theater ensemble has survived as long and thrived as much as the Steppenwolf company of artists.

The company started in January of 1974, in Highland Park, Illinois when Gary Sinise was approached by high school classmates Rick Argosh and Leslie Wilson about putting on a production of Paul Zindel's *And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little*. Sinise had recently graduated from high school and Rick and Leslie had one semester remaining. Highland Park High School was where co-founders Jeff Perry and Gary Sinise had met and became fast friends having done several plays together. Jeff was now attending college at Illinois State University where he had met co-founder Terry Kinney.

Gary agreed to be in the production of Zindel's play and proceeded to seek out a space where Rick, Leslie and Gary could produce the play. Gary's parents had a very good friend who had designed a beautiful Unitarian church on Half Day Road in Deerfield, Illinois and it was through this family friend that he was able to secure the right to use the church for this inaugural production of The Steppenwolf Theatre Company. The name Steppenwolf came from the book by Herman Hesse which Argosh happened to be reading at the time.





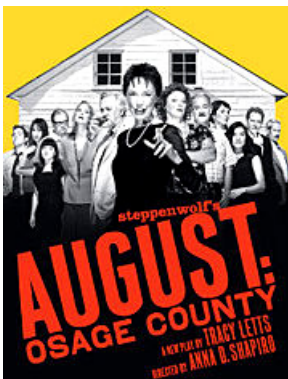
Three more plays were produced under this very first incarnation of Steppenwolf. *Grease*, which Sinise would produce, direct and act in with Argosh in the band and Wilson acting on stage, *The Glass Menagerie*, which Argosh directed with Sinise appearing as Tom, and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, also directed by Argosh, which would reunite high school pals Sinise and Perry and be the first teaming of

[Terry Kinney](#), [Jeff Perry](#), and [Gary Sinise](#), our three founders. It was during this production, in June of 1974, that the three founders decided that when Kinney and Perry were finished with college they would find a permanent space and would attempt to start a professional resident ensemble theatre company.

Steppenwolf incorporated as a non for profit in 1975 and, after a series of meetings, the founders expanded the ensemble to include six other friends from Illinois State University . The company took up residence in the basement of a Catholic school in Highland Park in the summer of 1976 and produced its first season of plays. The nine original members were founders Terry Kinney, Jeff Perry, Gary Sinise and H.E. Baccus, Nancy Evans, Moira Harris, John Malkovich, Laurie Metcalf and Alan Wilder. In 1980 the company moved from Highland Park to the city of Chicago, expanded the ensemble and produced its work in two different spaces before, in 1991, it built its current theatre at 1650 North Halsted Street. Steppenwolf has now grown into a company which includes forty-two theater artists whose strengths include acting, directing, playwriting, and textual adaptation.



Now in its fourth decade as a professional theater company, Steppenwolf has received unprecedented national and international recognition from media, theater critics, and audiences alike. While Steppenwolf continues to live up to its many accolades, the company has not lost sight of its original vision. Today Steppenwolf remains committed to producing dynamic and exciting theater. The company's subscription base of over 20,000 is an indicator of the Chicago community's enthusiasm for Steppenwolf Theatre.



A great achievement the company experienced was last year's Broadway opening of ensemble member Tracy Lettis' *August: Osage County*, a work developed and premiered at Steppenwolf. Earning Tony Awards for Tracy Lettis (playwright), Anna D. Shapiro (director), Deanna Dunagan (lead actress), Rondi Reed (featured actress), and Todd Rosenthal (set designer), *August* captured long list of prestigious honors that also includes the 2008 Pulitzer Prize for drama, three Drama Desk Awards and six Jefferson Awards. While continuing to run on Broadway with new cast members, Steppenwolf took the *August: Osage County* with the original cast to London this fall, where it played to sold-out houses at the National

Theatre. It begins a national tour starting in Denver in late 2009. The national and international coverage of this production focuses a spotlight directly upon Chicago as a leading center for excellence in theatrical and artistic innovation.

When asked if the company had any obstacles while growing David Schmitz, General Manager, stated, "Like any institution that has been around for four decades, we have run unto our share of challenges and we are defined by how we overcame them."

David said, "We have been in the North River Industrial Corridor area for over 15 years. Many of our patrons live in the neighborhood, which is a great advantage for us. We love that we walk down the street and see our patrons as we engage in the community we exist in. We are also active members in the Lincoln Park Chamber of Commerce, which is an excellent catalyst for Lincoln Park business." He continued, "We are looking forward to the completion of the developments that are happening throughout the North/Clyburn area including the Apple store and the New City project."



The company has over 80 full-time and 20 permanent part-time employees. They also hire an additional 150+ people over the course of the year who are short-term contractors (including actors, designers and technicians). The positions they fill include everything from telemarketer, to actor, to administrative professional, to trades men and women. The company serves over 200,000 patrons in their three theatres.

David said, "Steppenwolf is unique because it has redefined the landscape of acting and performance by spawning a generation of America's most gifted artists. Founded in 1975 as an ensemble of nine actors, Steppenwolf has grown into an internationally renowned company of forty-two artists whose talents include acting, directing, playwriting, filmmaking, and textual adaptation. No other American theater ensemble has survived as long and thrived as much as the Steppenwolf company of artists."



"We are currently actively involved in green initiatives around the theatre which I know the council is involved in. In years past we were actively involved in the movement to redesign the North/Clyborn Redline station", stated David.

As a good lunch recommendation David said, "We like Mangia Roma (next door to us at 1623 N Halsted)...many staff members call it the "Steppenwolf Café."

Thank you Steppenwolf Theatre Company for being a great supporter and may you have a successful year of great performances and bringing entertainment to many!