

Wishes, Suspicions and Secret Ambitions: The Stories of Carl Sandburg

The fall Arts Exchange production, *Wishes, Suspicions, and Secret Ambitions*, is taken from the writing of the great Chicago poet, Carl Sandburg. Sandburg uses words to describe the world in all its beauty and ugliness, pain and ecstasy.

He was born in 1878 in a small cottage in Galesburg, Illinois, to Swedish immigrant parents. He once told his brother, "I'm either going to be a writer or a bum." His years of working dead-end jobs and traveling the country gave him a clear vision of America, the inequities of the times, and an appreciation for adventure.

In 1902, he left college without receiving a degree and eventually moved to Chicago to pursue a career in writing. When Sandburg's father asked, "Is der any money in dis poetry business, Sholly?" Carl responded, "I guess, papa, I haven't got anything but hope."

After years as a reporter for the *Chicago Daily News*, publishing several volumes of poetry, and a Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of Abraham Lincoln, Sandburg began to perform as an orator, combining poetry readings, fanciful stories for children, folk songs, and wry political commentary.

This performance format and his *Rootabaga Stories* (stories he wrote in the 1920s for his own children as a refuge from a world teetering on madness" for the basis for *Wishes, Suspicions, and Secret Ambitions*. At the center of the *Rootabaga Stories* is the Potato Face Blind Man, a character that is a reflection of Sandburg himself: "And it is in the Rootabaga country where the Potato Face Blind Man sits with his accordion, with his eyes never looking out and always searching in. And sometimes he finds in himself the whole human procession. When he asks, 'Who are you?' it is almost as though he should say, 'Who am I?'"

Wishes, Suspicions, and Secret Ambitions interweaves drama, dance, and the folk music Sandburg loved. It will explore the tension he saw between the beauty of life and the harshness of the world around him, the struggle to maintain hope in the face of the world's brutality, and the tension between his radical ideals and the reality of life.

Now in its 25th Anniversary Season, **Steppenwolf Theatre Company** is a Chicago-based international performing arts institution committed to ensemble collaboration and artistic risk through work with its permanent ensemble, guest artists, partner institutions and the community. Founded in 1976 as an ensemble of nine actors, Steppenwolf has grown into an internationally renowned company of thirty-three artists whose talents include acting, directing, playwriting, filmmaking, and textual adaptation.

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