

## A Witty, Moving, and Somehow Familiar Love Story

Mary Ethel Schmidt is familiar to Scranton area audiences mostly as an actress. She most notably interpreted the role of Lettice in Peter Shaffer's comedy, *Lettice and Lovage*, but audiences have also enjoyed her performances in *Wenceslas Square*, *Benefactors*, *Boston Marriage*, *Lackawanna Rails*, and numerous staged readings. They have seen her work as a director with TNT productions of *Proof* (the Pulitzer Prize winning play by David Auburn) and *Over the River and Through the Woods* by Joe DiPietro. Now we have the privilege of seeing this talented theatre artist flex her craft as a playwright with the world premiere of her play, *Rapunzel's Song*.

*Rapunzel's Song* opens as Susan, a musicologist at a midwestern university, (played by New York actress Jane Petrov) prepares for the umpteenth time to leave her position for another job in a different city. Charlotte, her amiably strident secretary (played by Karen Gilat) does everything she can to convince her to stay, but it is only when a student confronts Susan on the same issue that her decision to relocate is at all in doubt. The student is a young painter named Peter who has lost his sight (played by New York actor, Adam Sullivan), and as the blind painter and the former pianist begin to share their fears, anger, and past aspirations, things begin to change. The result is a witty, touching, and oddly familiar journey through time, as Susan remembers her younger self (played by Tessa Barrett) and her ambitious and outrageous mother, Beulah (played by Scranton actress, Agnes Cummings.)

Ms. Schmidt, who is a dual resident of South Boundbrook, New Jersey and New York City, teaches, directs, and acts, regularly traveling between New York and Williamsport, making stops along the way. She received her masters degree at Rutgers University, and it was in that program that she first developed *Rapunzel's Song*. Her instructors saw in it a remarkable work, and encouraged her to continue writing. She has written several other plays since, most of which have been produced, but *Rapunzel's Song* was not one of those even though it has been submitted to dozens of theatres, contests, and festivals over the years.

One person who did take notice of the play's excellence, however, was Nagle Jackson. Mr. Jackson has had a long and varied career in theatre, ranging from artistic director of the McCarter Theatre, and of Milwaukee Rep, to directing at the Bolshoi Dramatic Theater in St. Petersburg, Russia. When he read *Rapunzel's Song*, he fell in love with it, and he and Ms. Schmidt began to look for opportunities for production. They almost made it into several very prestigious venues, such as the Sundance Festival, but nothing finally caught.

The other person who noticed the play was David Zarko, The Northeast Theatre's producing artistic director. He first saw the play ten years ago as a staged reading at The Directors' Company in New York, and never forgot the experience. While planning the current season, he asked Mary Ethel if perhaps she and Nagle would like to stage their dream production at TNT, and was delighted when they both said they would. "I see this and a kind of major coup," he says, "These are two fabulously talented artists, and this play is an extraordinary work that should have been picked up ages ago. It almost feels like it was waiting for this moment, in this city, and for these actors and designers. It is a tremendous opportunity for us all."

*Rapunzel's Song* plays January 27 through February 5 (with discounted previews on January 25 and 26, at 7:00), the Performance Space at the Jermyn, Corner of

Wyoming at 326 Spruce, Downtown Scranton. Tickets may be purchased at the box office Wednesday through Saturday after 3:00 p.m., by phone at 570-558-1515, or online at [www.thenortheasttheatre.us](http://www.thenortheasttheatre.us)

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## About Mary Ethel Schmidt

At the age of eight Mary Ethel could imitate all the characters in the Fletcher's Castoria and Bayer Aspirin commercials and did a brilliant Louis Armstrong, causing many adults to laugh uproariously during cocktail hour. At the age of 9 she suffered a severe trauma when her parents refused to extend their vacation in Cape Cod so she could catch the concluding act of *Rip Van Winkle*. These two elements, making people laugh and searching for a resolution, thoroughly - and some might say sadly - determined the rest of her life.

She received a B.A. in theatre from Lycoming College and an M.F.A. from Rutgers, where she was a recipient of a three-year Levin Scholarship to write plays. She studied at the Classic Stage Company, the National Theatre in London and The Directors Company in New York City where she received the Revson Fellowship in Directing and became Associate Artistic Director. She was a founding member of the Metropolitan Playhouse in New York City, taught on the Faculty at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts for ten years, and currently is an Adjunct Professor at Lycoming College.

Directing credits for The Northeast Theatre include *Proof* in 2003 as well as last season's *Over the River and Through the Woods*. Performances include *Lettice and Lovage*, *Benefactors* and *Wenceslas Square* at TNT; the world premiere of *Sister Week* at Centenary Stage in Hackettstown, NJ; and *Boston Marriage*, produced by Highwire, a company she co-founded with Page Clements to bring professional performances and actor-led workshops to universities. Mary Ethel has worked in Lithuania as an actor and Sweden as a director and is a member of Actors Equity and the Society for Stage Directors and Choreographers.

## About Nagle Jackson

After a distinguished directoral career on the national resident theater scene, as Associate Director with A.C.T., San Francisco, during its golden age under William Ball, then as Artistic Director of the Milwaukee Repertory Theatre and the McCarter Theatre in Princeton, Mr. Jackson has been a guest director at leading resident theaters in the U.S. and has also directed at the Bolshoi Dramatic Theater in St. Petersburg, Russia and the Trondelag Theater in Trondheim, Norway. He directed several operas for the Opera Festival of New Jersey and staged his own plays at the Kennedy Center and the Denver Center. Mr. Jackson began his career at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival where he has worked as actor, director and playwright, two of his plays having premiered there.

Nagle Jackson most recently served as Director of New Play Development at the Denver Center Theatre Company, where he has staged numerous productions over the past 12 years, most notably a Molihre Cycle: six plays by the French master,

three of which he also translated. Mr. Jackson was recipient of a Fullbright Fellowship and holds an honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from Whitman College. In 1991 he stepped down from administrative directorship to pursue his next career as a playwright. A winner of the \$150,000 Onassis Foundation International Playwright's Competition in 1998, presented by the President of Greece in Athens, Mr. Jackson has since seen six of his plays published by the Dramatists Play Service and produced at many theaters both here and abroad. He and his wife, Sandy, live in Princeton Junction, N.J.