

Interview: Warren Leight of HOME FRONT at The Victory Theatre

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by Andrew Child

The Longtime 'Law & Order' Showrunner Talks about his Return to Theatre with his Latest Play

"It's probably one of only three good things to ever come of Twitter," Warren Leight warmly jokes about the West Coast premiere of *Home Front* at Victory Theatre coming up this month. Leight responded to a Tweet from an actor looking for plays about interracial relationships, sharing that he had a draft of a play which he has been working on for the past 20 years. One thing led to another, and a few years later (the pandemic threw a curve into original plans), Victory Theatre is premiering that play, which tells the story of a Black Naval officer returning from World War II to navigate an interracial relationship in a stormy political climate.

Leight explains that his father was a jazz trumpeter, so he grew up around interracial couples in the 1960s. "The odds against them were tremendous," he reflects. The third character in the play, he continues, is based on his Uncle Eddie, a gay man who served as a medic in the war. "These three characters are people I grew up with, so I take them to heart," he shares. But beyond exploring the individual struggles of the trio, Leight has taken a broader look at the historical context for their burdens.



"It's a story about a time not long ago, but which many people don't realize we've come perilously close to repeating in the last few years. So it's a cautionary tale to keep your guard up," he intones. "There's a bit of the feeling of that famous kiss in Times Square at the beginning of the play-- a feeling of infinite possibility at the end of the war, which is a version of America we all know. Many people don't realize how harshly the pendulum swung back after that." In creating this play, Leight researched the backlash against Black soldiers in the south after the war, and the ways anti-Black violence surged as soldiers returned home.

However, Leight has striven to ensure the play not become "didactic". "This is not a play I want people to be told they 'should' see. It's good drama." He highlights the ways his years of work in television, showrunning, executive producing, and writing for shows like *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*, *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, and *In Treatment*, have sharpened his dramatic writing skills. "It's good to have stakes, which is something a beginning playwright doesn't necessarily know about." But, he cheekily adds, "I've worked enough in TV that I can finally afford to return to theatre." He holds the work of this cast and Victory Theatre artistic director Maria Gobetti in high regard, honoring how much they have done for new works being developed in LA. "It is complicated writing about this topic, but I feel very protected by (this team). They help you figure out your vision then make that vision happen. That's as good as it gets in theatre."

Home Front opens Friday, January 13 at the Victory Theatre.