



## ***The Water*, Musical About a Town in Peril, Gets Premiere at University of Michigan Nov. 18-21**

*By Kenneth Jones*

The Water, the new musical by composer Georgia Stitt, lyricist Jeff Hylton and librettists Hylton and Tom Werenko, gets its world premiere in a developmental workshop staging by the University of Michigan musical theatre department this fall.

Focusing on a flood in the Midwest, the musical will be directed by U-M's head of musical theatre, Brent Wagner, the respected director-professor whose department has produced many Broadway performers.

Though dubbed a “workshop,” this is the first full production of *The Water*, which was previously seen in an April 2004 staged reading at TheatreWorks in Palo Alto, CA. Performances — off-book, with costumes and scenic design — play the Trueblood Theatre Nov. 18-21 on the U-M campus in Ann Arbor, MI.

According to the U-M announcement, “In a small town along the Onkeenton River, a gentle rain starts to fall as the town gathers for breakfast at the café. From the pontificating mayor to the schoolgirl hastily preparing her assignment on dams, the rain is a reminder of past floods and a metaphor for the cycle of life. As the townspeople prepare to fight the rising waters, will their efforts save the town or will the river wash away more than just their homes? In the aftermath of the storm, lives will both be forever changed and remain the same. Featuring a score filled with folk sensibility and pop references, *The Water* highlights a tight-

knit community dealing with everyday life on a floodplain, lived at a price and loved with a passion.”

In 2003, Wagner directed the workshop world premiere of Brad Ross and Mark Waldrop's musical, *Luck*. Performances of *The Water* play 7:30 PM Nov. 18, 8 PM Nov. 19-20 and 2 PM Nov. 20 & 21. The run is listed as sold out on the U-M website.

The U-M musical theatre department season began Oct. 14 with *A Chorus Line* and continues April 14-17, 2005, with *City of Angels*.

For more information about U-M's theatre program, [Click Here](#).

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Georgia Stitt is the respected music director who worked on *The Baker's Wife* for Goodspeed Musicals in 2002 and whose pop songs have been popping up in Manhattan venues. She is the production music coordinator for ABC/Disney's “*Once Upon A Mattress*,” the TV movie musical, set to air on “*The Wonderful World of Disney*” in the 2004-05 season, starring Carol Burnett and Tracy Ullman.

Stitt's husband is composer-lyricist Jason Robert Brown.

“Set in 1997, it's a completely original story about a small Missouri town that survives a flood,” Stitt previously said of *The Water*.

“It's fiction, but bookwriter Tim Werenko lived through a flood and drew quite a bit from his personal experiences,” she told Playbill On-Line.

The three writers spent a year developing *Watertown*, as it was first known, in residence at the Tribeca Performing Arts Center.

*The Water* was Stitt's idea, she said. “I wanted to write about why people choose to live in places that are devastated by nature, and why people rebuild in those same places knowing they face the possibility of another disaster,” she explained. “I wanted to write about the concept of community, particularly in middle-America. This town is situated on the banks of a river that is a tributary to the Mississippi River. It has flooded before, even within memory of some of the older people in town. The river is as much a character in the show as any of the actors, and the idea of 'water' — its presence or its absence — is almost always in the music.”

What's the musical nature of *The Water*?

“It's a book musical,” Stitt said. “I write both folky music and groove-driven music. Some of it is very lyrical and some of it is more pop. I wouldn't call it 'rock,' but it's definitely a step outside the norms of traditional musical theatre. I grew up outside of Memphis as a classical pianist, so there are hints of the South in the music, alongside very pianistic accompaniments.”

Among those who sang in previous readings of *The Water* were Danielle Ferland, Sally Wilfert, Andrea Burns, Jeff Edgerton, Corey Reynolds, Ed Romanoff, Brooks Ashmanskas and Sean McCourt. Jeff McCarthy (*Urinetown*, Side Man) and Donna Lynne Champlin (*Hollywood Arms*, *My Life With Albertine*) are

the demo recording, along with McCourt, Burns and several others.

Stitt said the title was changed from *Watertown* to *The Water* to avoid any comparison to *Urinetown*, the comic Broadway hit about a town devastated by drought.

“There are 12 actors in the show, and it is multi-generational,” Stitt said in 2003. “There are (among others) two men in their 60s, a single father in his late 40s, a love triangle involving a married couple in their 30s, sweethearts in their 20s getting engaged, and a 13-year-old girl.”

Director Wagner has expanded the company to include an ensemble. The minimum needed for production is 12, Stitt told Playbill On-Line.

For more information, visit [www.georgiastitt.com](http://www.georgiastitt.com).