

BACKSTORY

YOUR GUIDE TO TIMELINE PRODUCTIONS

CHICAGO PREMIERE

BY J.T. ROGERS
directed by Nick Bowling



YESTERDAY'S STORIES.
TODAY'S TOPICS.

Timeline
Theatre Company

From Artistic Director PJ Powers

a message



Dear Friends,

I couldn't be more excited to bring J.T. Rogers' *Blood and Gifts* to Chicago to conclude TimeLine Theatre's 16th season.

The road to bring this dynamic play to our stage started more than five years ago—before J.T. had even begun work on the script. Having read his play *The Overwhelming*, which is about the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, TimeLine's Company Members were blown away by the intelligence, depth and scope of his writing. His is a fresh, dramatic voice that is global in perspective, probing, and clearly fascinated with examining history in a way that provokes thought, emotion and discussion. We felt that we'd found a kindred spirit.

On the night I first met him in 2008, it became abundantly clear that his interests and theater sensibilities were so in sync with TimeLine's mission that I told him, "even if it takes years, we'd love to find a project to work on with you."

We've been in conversation ever since.

As our mutual admiration for one another's work continued to grow, J.T. mentioned that he was starting to write a play about the CIA's involvement in Afghanistan during the early 1980s. I said, "As soon as you've got a first draft, send it to me!" And he did.

So we've had the privilege of watching *Blood and Gifts* evolve over the last few years, cheering for the play's deserved acclaim after its premiere at London's National Theatre as well as its heralded run at New York's Lincoln Center. And we've been grateful that through it all, J.T. kept talking with us about premiering the play in Chicago at TimeLine.

Today we are proud to see that wish fulfilled.

While epic in scope—spanning 1981 through 1991—and ripe with historical and political context, *Blood and*

Gifts, at its core, is an intensely human play. It zeroes in on the role of the individual—ordinary men in extraordinary circumstances who, decision after decision, shape history.

Even with a cast of 14, the striking thing about this play is how much of it is two-person scenes. It's two guys in a room talking, contemplating decisions most of us cannot imagine. Navigating barriers of language, culture, history, religion and custom, their's is a fragile dance of trust earned and trust lost. With the full knowledge that there are no good decisions, these men seek just to make the least bad one, all the while pondering the world they'll leave for their children.

Under the ever-inspiring leadership of our Associate Artistic Director Nick Bowling and his stellar design team and cast, TimeLine's production of *Blood and Gifts* has been crafted for our intimate

We invite you to explore the theater—open drawers, read files, scour for facts and insight.



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space to bring you as close to the story as possible, immersing you in the tangled web of covert operations.

While inside the theater, we invite you to be curious. And to see where that curiosity takes you!

Director Nick Bowling (from left), production manager John Kearns, scenic designer Collette Pollard and props designer Julia Eberhardt review the model of Pollard's uniquely immersive—and explorable—set during a break at an early rehearsal of Blood and Gifts.



We invite you to fearlessly explore your surroundings—perhaps in ways that you might normally feel too timid to try on the set of a play. Open drawers, read files, scour for facts and insight, and bravely enter the clandestine world of this play.

The amount of research that J.T. conducted as he wrote this story is staggering, and we've tried to share as many resources with you as possible. All so you can dig deeper, not just via what you may find inside the theater, but also in this *Backstory* publication and online at timelinetheatre.com, where our dramaturg Joshua Altman has assembled a wealth of information.

TimeLine's production of *Blood and Gifts* owes a special debt to many, but to two men in particular. First to J.T., for sharing so much insight with the cast and production team and for

being so enthusiastically involved. And second to Steve Coll, author of *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001*, for his generosity and for sharing his expertise.

Blood and Gifts gives us much to dissect, discuss and debate, and we are so thrilled to give this play a platform for that conversation in Chicago. After so many years in the making, we can't wait to get you talking about it.

I thank you for continuing to travel with TimeLine to new places, as we explore eras, cultures and parts of the globe that we haven't before. And I thank J.T. for his belief in our company through the years. We hope that you'll hear more from him here in the future.

Best,

J.T. Rogers and *Blood and Gifts*

the playwright

Global in perspective, overarching in scope, J.T. Rogers' plays fearlessly tackle some of the most complex issues of modern world politics and human rights.

A playwright and student of history, his writing is characterized by a steadfast dedication to research. In order to develop a comprehensive understanding of relevant history and context, he reads voraciously and interviews an array of experts. He also travels

to the countries he writes about to spend time with its people and, often, survivors of a particular conflict. This breadth of knowledge infuses his work with authenticity and multiple points of view.

Blood and Gifts began in 2009 as a 20-minute piece for the Tricycle Theatre's *The Great Game: Afghanistan*, in which 12 one-act plays pertaining to Afghanistan's past and present were performed in repertory. He and the other playwrights of this festival

earned an Olivier Award nomination in 2009. Rogers' contribution featured a series of interactions between a CIA operative and an Afghan warlord in the 1980s.

He developed the script into a full-length play, which had its world premiere at London's National Theatre in 2010. *Blood and Gifts* went on to play Lincoln Center Theater's off-Broadway Mitzi E. Newhouse Theater the following year. That production was nominated

Special Events and Resources

the conversation

TimeLine looks forward to engaging our audience in conversations inspired by our productions. We hope you will participate in the array of additional resources and online communities available:

SUNDAY SCHOLARS

Sunday, June 9 is Sunday Scholars, a one-hour post-show panel discussion featuring experts talking about the play's themes and issues. **Admission is free.** Visit timelinetheatre.com for panelists and more.

COMPANY MEMBER DISCUSSION

Our Company Members shape the artistic vision and choose programming for TimeLine. On **Sunday, June 23**, join them for a free post-show discussion.

POST-SHOW DISCUSSIONS

On **Wednesdays, May 15 and 29 and June 19 and 26; Thursdays, May 23 and 30 and June 6 and 13; and Sundays June 2 and July 7**, moderated by a TimeLine Company member and featuring cast and production staff.

STUDY GUIDE

A **study guide** is available at timelinetheatre.com.

BLOG AND MORE!

Find behind-the-scenes insight and conversation on our blog, **Behind the 'Line**, via timelinetheatre.com.



For the latest, "like" us on Facebook (**TimeLine Theatre**), follow us on Twitter (**@timelinetheatre**) and visit our YouTube channel (youtube.com/timelinetheatre).



“I had to start learning ... so that I could tell stories that dig under the surface of people and cultures that seem deeply foreign ... and find the connections between us.”

for a Lucille Lortel Award and named one of *The New York Times* top 10 plays of 2011. Last summer it was staged at the La Jolla Playhouse in California. TimeLine's production is the play's Midwest premiere.

Rogers' other best-known play, *The Overwhelming*, also premiered at London's National Theatre. In both plays, a primary male character ventures to a third-world country for work. Inevitably, each play's major historical conflict catalyzes the clash between a visiting American and a

native non-Westerner. This relationship is at the heart of Rogers' work.

Rogers is not only consumed by wanderlust, but by a determination to expand the purview of drama in order to better reflect a shrinking world. One of his most characteristic qualities as a playwright is his ability to shine light on faraway issues and force audiences to question just how distant they really are. In his Laura Pels Keynote Address to the 2008 A.R.T./New York Theatre Conference, Rogers outlined his goals:

“I had to start learning more—much more—so that I could tell stories that dig under the surface of people and cultures that seem deeply foreign—even scary—to me and find the connections between us. To try and understand what those connections mean.”

Rogers' plays have been staged across the United States and in Canada, Germany, Israel and the United Kingdom.

Playwright J.T. Rogers pictured outside Lincoln Center Theater, where Blood and Gifts received its U.S. premiere.



TIMELINE: A History of Events in Afghanistan

- **1973** Mohammad Daoud Khan leads a bloodless coup and overthrows his cousin Zahir Shah. He installs himself as President and declares Afghanistan a republic. He accepts aid from the Soviets.
- **1978** Soviet-backed conspirators in the Afghan army kill President Daoud. Nur Mohammad Taraki, a founding member of the communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, becomes President.
- **1979** The exiled religious leader Ayatollah Khomeini returns to Iran. The Islamic Republic of Iran is declared months later.

President Jimmy Carter authorizes the CIA to spend \$500,000 on propaganda, radio equipment and medical supplies for Afghan rebels. To disguise its involvement, the CIA uses intermediaries to distribute equipment in Pakistan.

A bitter rivalry develops between President Taraki and Columbia University-educated party comrade Hafizullah Amin. Amin ousts Taraki, has him killed and assumes leadership.

In an attempt to remove Amin just a few months later, the KGB plants rumors that he is working for the CIA. After Amin holds a meeting with American diplomats, the KGB fears the rumors they planted are true.

The KGB sends military troops to Kabul to assassinate Amin and replace him with Babrak Karmal.

Afghanistan

the country

Roughly the size of Texas, Afghanistan is a landlocked nation primarily made up of rugged mountains and plains.

The Hindu Kush, whose parent mountain range is the Himalayas, stretches nearly 500 miles to divide Afghanistan's northern provinces from the rest of the country. Natural dams along the peaks of this mountain range create the Band-e-Amir, which was established as Afghanistan's first national park in 2009. These interconnecting lakes are famous for their extraordinary deep blue color.

The renowned Khyber Pass connects Peshawar, Pakistan with Jalalabad, Afghanistan and, ultimately, with Kabul. This impressive transnational pass now



One of six natural lakes protected as part of Afghanistan's first national park, Band-e-Amir. (Alex Dehgan/Wildlife Conservation Society)

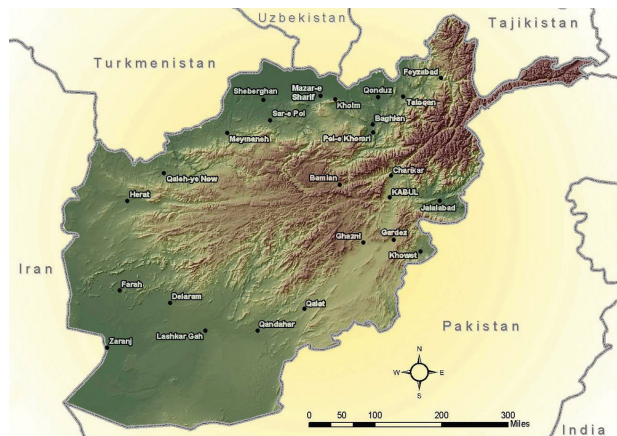
features a road and railroad that weave through barren, broken hills. It is one of the most historically and strategically significant passes of the region: Alexander the Great maneuvered his army through the Khyber toward the plains of India in 327 BCE; Darius I of Persia conquered the area around Kabul and moved his army south through the pass in the 5th century; the British made their first advance

northward through the Khyber Pass from British India in the 19th Century. In the last 10 years, NATO has used the pass to transport supplies to troops fighting Afghan insurgents.

During the 4th and 5th centuries, when the Bamiyan province of central Afghanistan was a center for Buddhism, two gigantic statues of standing Buddha were carved out of the land, embellishing the living rock of a steep mountain. Standing 175 and 120 feet tall respectively, these monuments were finished with plaster, painted and decorated. For thousands of years these statues made Bamiyan an internationally significant archeological site.

In 2001, supreme Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar deemed the Bamiyan Buddhas un-Islamic symbols of idolatry—and

Physical map of Afghanistan.



on March 2, explosives and antiaircraft weapons destroyed the sculptures beyond repair.

The landscapes and people of Afghanistan have been plagued by violence for thousands of years. The land is fruitful, enduring,



Khyber Pass.

filled with natural beauty. But history weighs on Afghanistan, and its iconic features feel more like the symbols and landmarks of a war-torn nation.

Much of the turmoil in Afghanistan's history stems from geography. In what is now known as the Great Game, Britain and Russia jockeyed for control of Central Asia during the 19th and 20th centuries. Both empires believed the locus of power lay in this land, one that was not particularly cohesive in its ethnic make-up, but rather dominated by the strength of various tribes.

The first Anglo-Afghan war—there would be two

more—began in 1839, when British and Indian troops marched north to protect against a Russian invasion. In 1893, in an effort to create a clear buffer state between Russia and British India, the British drew the Durand Line between British India and Afghanistan. This imposed boundary essentially split the vast and powerful Pashtun people in two; it still marks the southern border of Afghanistan, abutting Pakistan.

Even after the conclusion of the Great Game, as the Tsarist Russian Empire became the Soviet Union, its communist republics remained focused on Afghanistan. After decades of investment in a Marxist Afghan government, the Soviet Union sent troops to Afghanistan in 1979. This decision to invade remains one of the great mysteries of the Cold War. It is commonly theorized that the Soviet Union wanted

Bamiyan Buddha statue.



- **1979** Iranian students demanding the extradition of the overthrown Shah storm the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and take more than 60 Americans hostage.

A religious zealot leads an attack on the Great Mosque in Mecca. Incited by Ayatollah Khomeini's accusations that the Americans are behind this violent act, Pakistani students storm the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad and burn it to the ground.

By Christmas Eve, there are 80,000 Soviet troops in Afghanistan.

- **1980** The U.S. changes its policy toward Pakistan and the CIA begins working with President Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq and the ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence), supplying the rebel groups with \$30 million. Annual Soviet aid to the Afghan government is \$1 billion.
- **1981** President Ronald Reagan takes office in January. The American hostages in Iran are released within moments of his inauguration.

Reagan re-authorizes Carter's top-secret presidential funding to clandestinely ship weapons to the mujahedin.

The CIA's Afghan program budget reaches \$30 million.

The CIA secretly purchases hundreds of thousands of .303 Lee Enfield rifles. They are shipped into Pakistan and delivered to the Afghan rebels through the ISI.

- **1982** The Soviet Union appoints Mohammad Najibullah chief of the KhAD, the secret police force and primary security and intelligence agency of the Afghan government.

to conquer Afghanistan and push south through Pakistan in order to claim the warm-water port of Karachi, a vital anchorage for global trade. In the end, as with many great empires past, the Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan with billions of dollars lost and more than 15,000 soldiers to bury.

A young Winston Churchill, travelling through Afghanistan, once reported in *The Daily Telegraph* that the Pashtuns have “produced a code of honour so strange and inconsistent that it is incomprehensible to any logical mind.”

Perhaps the future British Prime Minister was speaking to something singular about Afghanistan's diverse population: the power of tribal law rivals the power of national law.

Several major ethnic groups exist within Afghanistan's boundary lines. They speak different languages, ascribe to different belief systems and belong to different sects of Islam. All of these cultures exist outside Afghanistan's borders as well, a geographic incongruity that contributes to the nation's complexity.

Afghanistan has come to be known as the Graveyard of Empires. Indeed, the Soviet Union dissolved only two years after leaving Afghanistan. But the rolling plains and steep mountains also bury those native to the land, the people who have persisted in the face of a long history of occupation. During the Soviet invasion alone, between one and 1.25 million Afghans were killed, nearly 9 percent of the population.

It is with this history, these losses sustained, that Afghanistan continues to endure.

Afghanistan's Panjshir Valley.



CIA, ISI, KGB, MI6 and more

the agencies

United States: CIA

The Central Intelligence Agency is responsible for providing national security intelligence to senior U.S. policy makers. Led by William Casey from 1981-1987, officers of the agency's clandestine services operated its foreign stations. During this period, the Islamabad Station Chief was responsible for the covert action program in support of the Afghan resistance to the Soviet-supported government.

Pakistan: ISI

The Directorate of Inter-Services Intelligence is Pakistan's premiere intelligence service. Between 1980 and 1987, Akhtar Abdur Rahman served as the director-general of the ISI, a division of the Pakistani military. Akhtar and the ISI worked closely with the CIA to funnel weapons and supplies into Afghanistan.

Soviet Union: KGB

The Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (in English, the Committee for State Security) was the foreign intelligence and domestic

security agency for the Soviet Union. At one point the world's largest foreign intelligence service, the KGB was actively involved in Soviet-Afghan policies and nurtured communist leadership throughout the country. It was led by Yuri Andropov until 1982, when he became General Secretary.

Great Britain: MI6

The Secret Intelligence Service is the foreign section of the Secret Service Bureau in Great Britain, responsible for overseas intelligence collection. MI6 both ran its own operations in Afghanistan and collaborated with the CIA on others.

Afghanistan: The Mujahedin

Meaning "holy warriors," this was the name given to the Afghan resistance against the invading Soviets. The group comprised many different factions, each associated with an ethnic identity. They fought the guerilla war on the ground with weapons and aid provided by the U.S. and other foreign nations.

- **1982** Torture and executions are routinely carried out in Afghanistan in an effort to penetrate mujahedin groups.

More than one million civilians flee Afghanistan and take refuge in Pakistan.

- **1984** The U.S. Congress approves an increase in the CIA's Afghan program budget, now totaling \$200 million annually. Reagan negotiates a deal with the Saudi royal family: For every American dollar spent, Saudi Arabia will match that amount. Combined annual aid reaches \$400 million.

Large numbers of RPG-7s, mortars and heavy machine guns begin flowing into Afghanistan, via Pakistan.

The Soviet Union's total spending on the Afghan War reaches \$12 billion.

2,000 Soviet spetsnaz (special purpose forces) are deployed to Afghanistan.

- **1985** The CIA's Afghan program budget increases to \$250 million.

National Security Decision Directive 166 is issued. It allows the CIA to increase funds allocated toward the CIA's covert operation and to supply mujahedin with weapons that can be used to assassinate Soviet officers.

Foreign fighters, mostly from nearby Arab nations, come to Pakistan and Afghanistan to fight alongside the mujahedin.

At a summit in Geneva, Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet Union's new General Secretary, tells Reagan that he intends to withdraw Soviet troops from Afghanistan within four years.

- **1986** American-made Stinger weapons are distributed. U.S.-trained ISI officers teach mujahedin how to operate these heat-seeking anti-aircraft missile launchers.
The Soviets install secret police chief Mohammad Najibullah as Afghanistan's president.
- **1987** U.S. spending on covert action in Afghanistan increases to \$470 million.
- **1988** The Geneva Accords, which set out the terms of Soviet withdrawal, are signed by Afghanistan's communist-led regime, Pakistan, the U.S. and the Soviet Union. The agreement permits the U.S. to continue to support the mujahedin and the Soviets to fund their allies in the Afghan government. The mujahedin, however, are not party to the Geneva Accords and refuse to accept the terms of the agreement. Twelve thousand Soviet troops begin withdrawing from Jalalabad and other bases throughout Afghanistan.
Pakistan's President Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, ISI Director-General Akhtar Abdur Rahman and Arnold Raphel, American ambassador to Pakistan, die in a plane crash. The cause is unknown.
- **1989** The Soviets launch Operation Typhoon to beat back the mujahedin and remove the last of their troops from Afghanistan.
As rival mujahedin groups battle to take Kabul following Soviet withdrawal, the U.S. Embassy there is closed for security purposes.
On November 9, the Berlin Wall comes down.
The U.S. Congress cuts funding of the CIA's Afghan program to \$280 million.
- **1990** Fearing the Stingers will be used for terrorism, the CIA launches a highly classified program to buy the weapons back at a rate of \$80,000 to \$150,000 per missile.
- **1991** The U.S. and the Soviets pledge to stop funding the mujahedin and Najibullah's Afghan government, respectively. On Christmas Day, Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev resigns. The Soviet Union dissolves the next day. CIA authority to conduct covert action in Afghanistan ends and funding of the Afghan program is shut down.
- **1992** Najibullah's government is toppled. A brutal civil war over Kabul ensues.
- **1996** The Taliban, an Islamic fundamentalist political movement, seize power in Kabul. They enforce a strict version of Islamic law that bans women from the workplace and enforces punishments including stoning to death. Najibullah is killed by the Taliban. His body is hung in central Kabul.
- **1997** The Taliban gain control of two thirds of Afghanistan and are recognized as legitimate rulers by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.
- **2001** On September 9, the leader of the opposition to the Taliban, Ahmed Shah Massoud, is assassinated.
On September 11, the Islamist terrorist group Al-Qaeda uses hijacked passenger planes to attack the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C.
Operation Enduring Freedom begins. The U.S. and Great Britain launch a bombing campaign against Afghanistan in an effort to destroy terrorist training camps. Ground forces enter the country 12 days later.
- **2002** The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) takes formal control of Kabul's peace force.
- **2004** In the first democratic election ever held in Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai is declared the winner and assumes the presidency.
- **2005** U.S. President George W. Bush and Karzai announce a military partnership in the "war against international terror."
- **2006** NATO forces take control of security in Afghanistan.
- **2008** President Bush sends an extra 4,500 troops into Afghanistan.
As civilian deaths climb, more than 200 foreign troops perish in Afghanistan during the deadliest year for the U.S.
- **2009** NATO countries increase troops in Afghanistan—the U.S. sends an additional 17,000. President Barack Obama takes office and introduces a new strategy in Afghanistan. The United States sends 4,000 troops to support and train the Afghan army.
In December, President Obama announces the deployment of 30,000 more troops in Afghanistan, bringing the total to 100,000.
- **2011** President Karzai visits Russia. It is the first state visit by an Afghan leader since the Soviet invasion.
- **2012** The United States' SEAL Team Six kills Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden during a raid of his compound in Pakistan.
At the NATO Summit held in Chicago, a plan is endorsed to withdraw foreign combat troops from Afghanistan by 2014.

Playwright J.T. Rogers

the interview

During rehearsals for *Blood and Gifts*, TimeLine Artistic Director PJ Powers (PJP) talked with playwright J.T. Rogers (JTR) about his genesis as a playwright, the extensive research that informed the writing of *Blood and Gifts*, and the lamentable lack of plays with a global perspective premiering on American stages. Read on:

(PJP) You started in the theater as an actor. When did you shift to playwriting?

(JTR) I started writing short plays when I was in acting school at the North Carolina School of the Arts. I'd write them; my friends and I would put them up; people would come.

Midway through my training I realized that I had made an internal shift whereby I now identified as a playwright first.

(PJP) You and TimeLine are kindred spirits, with our shared interest in exploring history. Have you always been a history buff?

(JTR) Yes. I'm only now realizing how much so as I watch my 10-year-old son become obsessed with history and mythology and legends—through his eyes re-remembering how much I loved these same subjects when I was ten.

(PJP) Michael Billington, the British theater critic for *The Guardian*, called you "that rare creature: an American dramatist who writes about global issues." What about

your upbringing prompted you to look and think beyond your homeland?

(JTR) My father was a political scientist who taught South East Asian studies. Because of his field work, I lived for two years when I was young in rural Malaysia and Indonesia, which utterly marked my life and point of view as a person. Being the "other," the foreigner, as well as becoming fascinated about other lands and people, set me on a course.

(PJP) Your last two plays—*The Overwhelming* and *Blood and Gifts*—certainly fall into this global mindset. Let's start with *The Overwhelming*, a play about the genocide in Rwanda. How did it come to be?

(JTR) When the Rwanda genocide occurred in 1994, I was gripped by the horrible images coming



J.T. Rogers (Photo by Rebecca Ashley)

through the Western media and completely confused by the incoherence of what was being reported, which we now know was mostly egregiously wrong. And I was ashamed. Here I was, thinking I was knowledgeable about the world and its four corners, and I couldn't have found Rwanda on a map.

So I started reading, to just learn what and why and how ... and slowly I crossed a line and found that I had gone from reading with my general-interest eyes to reading with my dramatist's eyes. But I had no idea how to write about it and was terrified at the prospect.

"I lived for two years when I was young in rural Malaysia and Indonesia, which utterly marked my life and point of view as a person."

“There is an audience, hungry and waiting, for American political plays in America.”

Soon thereafter the Salt Lake Acting Company in Utah asked me to apply with them for an NEA/TCG Playwrights in Residence fellowship. I looked at who had won the award in years past. They were so very much hitting above my weight. So I thought, well, I have to sound impressive so I'll write that I will create “my Rwanda play” if they choose me. And they did. And then I had to get to work. Without deadlines there is no art.

(PJP) And then *Blood and Gifts*. How did you zero in on the early 1980s as your starting point?

(JTR) I was approached by the Tricycle Theatre in London about being the one American playwright among a dozen dramatists who were all going to create a short play set against key moments in Afghan-Western conflicts.

I was given a few options and immediately chose the Soviet-Afghan war of the 1980s because I remember as a child being very interested in it. From there I read a number of books,

looking for my “in” to the story. The more I read about Stingers and spies the more I thought, “Here is where to begin.”

(PJP) You got access to some heavy hitters while researching—Jack Devine, the former number two man at the CIA, and Steve Coll, author of *Ghost Wars*, among others. How do you go about gaining not only access but, perhaps more importantly, trust?

(JTR) One of the things I treasure most about being a playwright and writing out into the world is all the fascinating people I continue to meet.

I called my friend Lawrence Wright who, like Steve Coll, writes for *The New Yorker*, and asked if he would write Steve and say, basically, I'm not an idiot and would he please write back if I emailed. Steve ended up meeting me and answering endless questions. His help and insights were invaluable. I had recently used contacts at the National Theatre to introduce me to the British journalist Stephen Grey when I was researching a

different play I'm writing. When I wanted to talk to someone who was actually involved in the Stinger program at the CIA, I called Stephen and he put me in touch with Jack Devine, who was gracious and more than forthcoming with anecdotes. He fact checked me up to my eyeballs, which was wonderful.

(PJP) I've heard you say to the *Blood and Gifts* cast, “Trust no one in this play.” Can you elaborate?

(JTR) This is a hard play, in the sense that when it works it pushes back—hard—against the American ethos that everyone speaking to you is honest and true unless you know otherwise. We are lucky people indeed that that is our default position.

For most of the world, it's the opposite, whether this ethos is born out of recent traumas (Rwanda, say) or a longer, sometimes jaundiced national history (much of Europe, say). This is a play firmly rooted in the latter worldview.

(PJP) How many of the characters were inspired by

specific people, and how do you make decisions about who you fictionalize?

(JTR) One character is based on a real person, albeit filtered through my ideas and sensibility, in a way I've not written before. Everyone else is mine: events and ideas I read may be what they fight to the death about, but their voices are spun out of my imagination.

(PJP) I can't tell you how many people have asked me if you're British. How does a guy from Brooklyn find himself having his plays premiered on a London stage normally reserved for names like Alan Bennett and Tom Stoppard?

(JTR) My relationship with the National Theatre started when in a fit of hubris I said to my agent about the just-finished *The Overwhelming*, "Will you send this to the National?"

Three months later, [National Theatre Artistic Director] Nicholas Hytner called me at home and asked if I'd come to London to meet the next day. I said I had a temp job, so could I come next week? I did. And we went into rehearsal six months later. It was, truly, the moment when everything changed for me.

(PJP) In 2009 you wrote a provocative piece in Britain's *The Independent* about some differences between London and New York theatre and how the daring of London theatres to tackle big, messy, political dramas was not nearly as common in the United States. Now that you've had very successful, high-profile productions in New York and elsewhere, has your opinion changed?

(JTR) No. I love a great deal of the theater I see in New York, but very little of

it is political—in the sense of simply being outward looking and engaging ideas and peoples that are not just about American-only stories. Much of this is simply a theatrical cultural difference.

But I am interested in the fact that in New York, we don't want to acknowledge this difference. I was recently interviewed by a *New York Times* reporter who asked me if, now that the cycle of political plays I was part of in London had come to the U.S., I wanted to revisit my argument.

But those plays simply "visited" as part of a world tour. That's hardly commissioning and presenting American political plays in America—for which there is an audience, hungry and waiting, by the way.

All to say, it does make me feel like a bit of a theatrical platypus: not really "like them" or "like us." Though I'm damn happy to get produced wherever.

(PJP) What's next for you?

(JTR) New play for Lincoln Center, new play for the National, not much sleep.

This is an edited version of our interview with J.T. Rogers. To read the complete text, visit timelinetheatre.com.

Production photo from the 2010 world premiere of J.T. Rogers' Blood and Gifts at London's National Theatre. (Photo by Richard Hubert Smith)



backstage

On Friday, March 15, 2013, more than 200 supporters gathered in the gilded grand ballroom of the Hotel InterContinental on Michigan Avenue to celebrate and support TimeLine's mission of exploring history at our annual gala benefit, *Step Into Time*. The event raised more than \$130,000 in net income to support TimeLine's mission and programming.

This year, guests stepped back to 1799. It was the beginning of Romanticism: an electrifying new age that celebrated the individual, the emotional and the free expression of artists. Underscoring this tremendous era of change and possibility was Ludwig van Beethoven's music (brought to life in TimeLine's acclaimed production *33 Variations*)—the perfect inspiration for our most important party of the year.

One of history's most revolutionary minds, Beethoven's relentless curiosity pushed his work to new places—creating innovative music that made you think and feel. TimeLine seizes Beethoven's boldness as encouragement to be endlessly inventive, to remain undaunted by inevitable challenges, and to be-

lieve, as Beethoven did, that art can—and must—spark thought and emotion.

TimeLine's family and friends came out to show their support and celebrate this exciting year. The elegant evening began with cocktails and a silent auction offering one-of-a-kind experiences, artwork, sports memorabilia, pampering packages and more. Guests enjoyed a delicious gourmet dinner and two feature videos followed by entertainment custom-made for the event featuring George Lepauw (lead pianist from *33 Variations*, International Beethoven Project founder, and *Chicago Tribune* 2012 Chicagoan of the Year for classical music) and Cassie Slater (TimeLine's award-winning *Fiorello!* and past winner of New York Music Theater Festival's Next Broadway Sensation Competition).

Such a successful event could not have been possible without the leadership of the *Step Into Time* Committee, chaired by Jennifer Moeller and John Sirek, and the generous support of TimeLine's Board of Directors, donors and gala guests. Thank you to all who helped make *Step Into Time: 1799* a night to remember!



Above, from top and left: Board Member Debra Siegel, Artistic Director PJ Powers and Board President Cindy Giacchetti; Dawn Gray, Rae Gray and Board Secretary Rick Gray; an elegantly set table in the Hotel InterContinental Grand Ballroom.

Opposite, from top and left: Sofia Medvedev, Bernard Ewigman and PJ Powers; Managing Director Elizabeth Auman, Stephanie Pendexter and Marcia Pendexter; Shelley Powers, Lori Kleinerman, Bruce Beatus and Kassie Davis; Mary Feay, Bruce and Joyce Chelberg, and Bruce Feay; singer Cassie Slater; Board Member Matthew Reilein, *Step Into Time* Committee Member Elizabeth Whitehorn, Board Member and *Step Into Time* Co-Chair Jennifer Moeller, and Alex Moeller; pianist George Lepauw; *Step Into Time* Co-Chair John Sirek and Colleen Loughlin on the dance floor; and the team of Board Members, Committee Members, Company Members, staff and volunteers who helped to make *Step Into Time: 1799* a huge success!



BACKSTORY: THE CREDITS

*Dramaturgy @ Historical
Research by Joshua Altman*

*Written by Joshua Altman,
PJ Powers, Lydia Swift and
Lara Goetsch*

*Edited by Kerri Hunt and
Lara Goetsch*

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*Blood and Gifts Photo
Illustration by Ryan Robinson*

*Backstory is published four
times each season.*

*Pictured on front cover
(from left): Actors Terry
Hamilton and Timothy Edward
Kane; director Nick Bowling;
actor Anish Jethmalani;
actor Raymond Fox; a map
of Afghanistan posted on the
rehearsal room wall; actor
David Parkes; and actor
Behzad Dabu.*

Our Mission:

TimeLine Theatre presents
stories **inspired by history**
that connect with today's
social and political issues.

Our collaborative artistic
team produces provocative
theatre and educational
programs that engage,
entertain and enlighten.

2013-2014 Season

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2013-2014
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“

[TimeLine] is known for **taking care of its patrons.**
It is a theater that **audiences trust.**

— Chris Jones, *Chicago Tribune*

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- Tickets before they sell out — subscribers receive priority access to TimeLine productions and events
- Discounts on additional tickets
- *Backstory*, our magazine with historical background, artist interviews and more, provided in advance of each production
- Special offers from our dining and shopping partners in Lakeview East
- Exclusive news and invitations to special events with TimeLine artists

“

TimeLine takes care to choose interesting plays, then mounts them with **a combination of panache and physical dynamism that I find altogether irresistible.** — Terry Teachout, *The Wall Street Journal*

Read more about our 2013-14 season in your
program, or visit ***timelinetheatre.com/subscribe***