

BACKSTORY

YOUR GUIDE TO TIMELINE PRODUCTIONS



CHICAGO PREMIERE | BY LEE HALL | INSPIRED BY A BOOK BY WILLIAM FEAVER

The Pitmen Painters



YESTERDAY'S STORIES.
TODAY'S TOPICS.

TimeLine
Theatre Company

a message



Dear Friends,

Last winter I approached BJ Jones, artistic director of Northlight Theatre and my friend and colleague for the last dozen years about possibly directing *The Pitmen Painters* at TimeLine. At the time I wasn't sure if he even knew the play, but my TimeLine colleagues and I had a strong feeling he'd connect with the humor and heart of Lee Hall's terrific script, and I wanted to share it with him and hear his thoughts. Little did we know how personal his connection to it would be. "I love that play!! Are you kidding me?!" was the first thing out of his mouth. Followed by: "PJ, those guys in the play are me. This is my story."

Growing up in a blue-collar community in Cleveland, BJ became a member of the United Mine Workers as a young man and could have easily followed that career path, like so many others around him. But his life took a dramatically different course when his

grandfather, who worked as a janitor, and grandmother took him to the opera at a young age. An altogether different fire was lit.

Today, BJ runs a major regional theater and has had a successful career as an actor and director—a distinguished artist who blossomed because he had access at a young age to a world outside his own.

This theme is not new to Hall, who also penned *Billy Elliot*, the film-turned-musical, about how art transforms a young boy, son of a coal miner, into a life as a dancer. With *The Pitmen Painters*, Hall uses the writing of William Feaver as inspiration to expand on this theme, introducing us to the Ashington Group of pitmen painters.

Started in the early 1930s, this group of miners came together for an evening class to learn art appreciation. The intention was never to be practitioners of art but to become more keenly aware observers, trying to understand what makes "good art." To the surprise of themselves initially and, later, countless others, their endeavor took a markedly different turn when they were encouraged to pick

up brushes and use paint to put their lives, their souls, their imaginations on canvas, creating a stunning collection of work that captured life in a north England mining town.

The Ashington Group is astonishing not just for the quality of its work but for its courageous venture into the world of socialites, galleries and exhibitions—foreign territory that was previously deemed not for them. The enthusiastic reception they received and their impact on the art world underscored the folly in this class inequality.

Today, years later and across the Atlantic, a debate about the value of the arts for all rages on, with arts funding regularly the first to go in our school systems or other government and corporate expenditures. The pity of that I surely don't need to echo to you, cherished theater patron.

But it's something that strikes me every time we go into Chicago Public Schools with TimeLine's Living History program. Under the inspired leadership of TimeLine co-founder Juliet Hart, this five-year-old program brings theater and history to life for a generation and population

"Some artistic outlet—and the ability to approach problems creatively, with critical thought and fearlessness for self-expression—is a treasure that too many are not afforded, a luxury unfairly split between the have and have-nots."

that often has had precious little access to the arts.

Each time we engage with those amazing students I am inspired, energized and enlightened by their wonderment. I am also unbelievably frustrated by a desire for these kids to have more opportunities than they have—the opportunities that I had, introduced to theater and music as a child, and that BJ had as well; opportunities that many of you probably had, too. Not because a life in the arts (or, certainly, a life running a theater company) is for everyone. But because some artistic outlet—and the ability to approach problems creatively, with critical thought and fearlessness for self-expression—is a treasure that too many are not afforded, a luxury unfairly split between the haves and have-nots.

Hall has sparked an important discussion about that class structure with *The Pitmen Painters*, a play that was one of the

fastest, funniest and most inspiring reads I'd had in a long time when a friend gave me the script nearly two years ago. Since then, the play has had multiple sold-out runs in England, a Broadway transfer and a remount in the West End this fall. We are deeply proud to share it with you in the play's American professional premiere after Broadway. And we are equally delighted to have BJ working at TimeLine for the first time, sharing a story that is not only personal to him, but one that I believe we all can find ourselves in, re-experiencing the moment of artistic discovery.

While we share with you the Ashington Group's triumphant story here on Wellington Avenue, a few blocks away we also present Lee Blessing's *A Walk In The Woods* through Nov. 20—a stirring debate about the importance of negotiating with our adversaries. The play brings two arms negotiators together in an attempt to overcome

differences and find common ground.

It's an exciting time for TimeLine, producing in two venues and igniting conversations among a broader audience. Your support has enabled us to grow exponentially in recent years, and we hope you're as proud and excited as we are about not only what TimeLine is today but also what we're continuing to build. You are playing a major role in pushing TimeLine forward to become a stronger organization and a more dynamic place for even more people to experience theater.

Thank you for being a part of our 15th season. And thank you, too, for being a part of the ongoing conversation here at TimeLine about our role and place in history.

All the best,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'PJ' followed by a stylized flourish.

Lee Hall



Playwright Lee Hall.

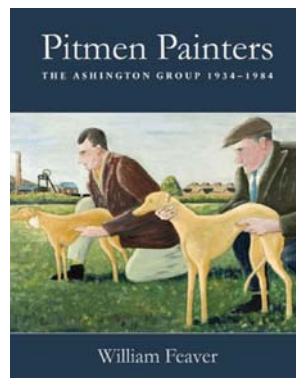
Born in Newcastle, England, in 1966, Lee Hall is a playwright and screenwriter. His plays include *Billy Elliot: The Musical*, *Bollocks*, *The Chain Play*, *Child of the Snow*, *Children of the Rain*, *Cooking with Elvis*, *Genie*, *I Luv you Jimmy Spud*, *Spoonface Steinberg*, *Two's Company*, *Wittgenstein on Tyne* and *The Pitmen Painters*. He has written the screenplays for *War Horse*, *Hippie Hippie Shake*, *Toast*, *The Wind in the Willows*, *Gabriel & Me*, *Billy Elliot*, *The Prince of Hearts* and *Spoonface Steinberg*. He was a writer in residence at the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1999-2000. He received an Oscar nomination for Best New Screenplay for *Billy Elliot*.

(Right) The cover of William Feaver's book *Pitmen Painters: The Ashington Group 1934-1984*, which was the inspiration for the play *The Pitmen Painters*.

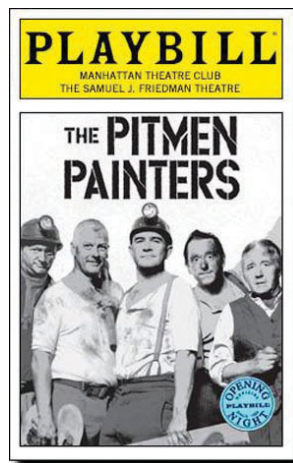
William Feaver

William Feaver was the art critic for the British newspaper *The Observer* between 1975 and 1998. He is also a writer, painter, curator and founding trustee of the Ashington Group collection. He wrote the book *Pitmen Painters: The Ashington Group 1934-1984*, which inspired Lee Hall's play. He has written several books on art including *When We Were Young: Two Centuries of Children's Book Illustration*, *Masters of Caricature: From Hogarth and Gillray to Scarfe and Levine*, *Frank Auerbach and Lucian Freud*. He curated the 2002 retrospective of Lucian Freud at the Tate Britain gallery in London.

In 2008, Feaver's landscape paintings were exhibited with the work of pitman painter Oliver Kilbourn at the Northumbria University Gallery in Newcastle upon Tyne.



William Feaver

Program cover from the Broadway production of *The Pitmen Painters*.

Production History

The Pitmen Painters premiered at the Live Theatre in Newcastle upon Tyne in 2007 before touring throughout Britain. It was produced at the National Theatre in London in 2009. In 2010, the play made its American premiere at the Manhattan Theatre Club, with the original British cast and director. The British production began a second British tour in March of this year, culminating in a run at the Duchess Theatre in London's West End starting October 11. TimeLine Theatre's production is the play's first American professional production after the Broadway run.

"One thing about Ashington: there's very little snobbish class distinction. You can make an error or a mess of things and still be accepted as a reasonable person."

— Harry Wilson

The village of Ashington is located in the far northeast of England, just north of Newcastle in Northumberland. It was built by the Ashington Coal Co. and the village's life revolved around the mines. Like many pit villages it had its own clubs and activities and was a very tight-knit community. Pit cottages, where the miners and their families lived, formed rows down muddy street lanes. A typical cottage had two to four rooms and sometimes a small garden.

The 1937 *Shell Guide* to Northumberland & Durham counties described the village as follows: "Ashington: Pop. 40,000. Mining town, mostly built in the early part of this century. Dreary rows a mile long. Ashpits and mines down the middle of still unmade streets."

The coal company was responsible for much of the town's welfare; it ran the stores and in tough times built football and cricket pitches. However, the role the company played in the village's life did not mean it was a compassionate

benefactor. Mining history was fraught with accidents, health risks and strikes to obtain better pay and working conditions. Life in mining villages was difficult, and the closeness and collaborative spirit of their communities reflected the values of the people rather than the business.

Mine families were responsible for creating their own entertainment. Football, cricket, pigeon and greyhound races were popular, as was gardening and breeding dogs and pigeons. Most colliery towns, including Ashington, had their own band. The miner's gala was a very popular annual event.

Harry Wilson, a dental technician, recalled that when he arrived in 1926, "There was no public library, no one here could get the loan of a book. The hospital was a small affair run by the miners themselves. There was no higher education except a small college run by the mine for mine training. There was no grammar school or technical school."

TIMELINE:
Mining History
in England

Coal mines in England date to the Romans. The energy supplied by coal was key to the industrial revolution and World Wars I and II. Northeast England was particularly defined by coal mining. Many villages, like Ashington, were created by or for coal mines, and the life of those communities revolved around the mines.

- **1909** The West Stanley Pit disaster. Explosions from two illegal lamps kill 160 men; 59 of them are under 20 years old.
- **1913** The Great Northern Coalfield employs nearly 250,000 people and produces 56 million tons of coal per year.
- **1920s** Most mine workers are still using pickaxes to mine coal. Only one fifth of the mines use machines.
- **1924** *The Daily Mail* publishes a letter claiming to be from the Soviet Communist leader Grigory Zinoviev. It urges British communists to start a revolution. The letter proves to be a hoax, but damage has been done to the trade unions because the middle class fears revolution.
- **1926** On May 26, a general strike is called by the Trades Union Congress (TUC) to support mining unions in their efforts to improve mining conditions and prevent a reduction in wages. *The Daily Mail* accuses the unions of trying to start a revolution. The strike collapses, and the TUC is ruined as an organization.

the artists

On Oct. 29, 1934, under the auspices of the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), a group of miners met in Ashington's YMCA hall. They were there to begin a course in art appreciation taught by Robert Lyon, the master of painting at Armstrong College, part of Durham University.

Lyon began by showing slides on a projector. He chose mostly Renaissance paintings with religious or mythological subjects, which did not appeal to the miners. Lyon swiftly changed his approach. He described it in 1935 in the WEA magazine, *The Highway*:

"It was perfectly clear that these men had decided views on what they did not want the class to be. They did not want to be told what was the correct thing to look for in a work of Art but to see for themselves why this should be correct; in other words they wanted a way, if possible, of seeing for themselves."

The WEA had a policy that nothing could be taught that could be used to make a living, so Lyon had to get permission to teach the men how to make art as a means to learning to appreciate art.

The men started with linoleum cuts and worked their way through a variety of other mediums. As the miners progressed, Lyon wrote articles about their "experiment in art appreciation." He introduced them to heiress and art patron Helen Sutherland, who invited the miners over to see her art collection at her home, Rock Hall, and funded a trip to London for them to go to the National Gallery and Tate Gallery.

The class became a group who met regularly to critique each others art. In 1936, they held their first exhibition. Publicity grew for the group and the miners were profiled in articles and on the radio as both a novelty and an inspiring story.

The miners didn't seem changed by this exposure,

but there were conflicting interests surrounding them and their work. Artists and organizers of Mass-Observation (a group that aimed to create an anthropological study of the lives of ordinary people in Britain) Tom Harrisson and Julian Trevelyan visited Ashington. They hoped to report on them for their project and drew broad assessments of their art, seeing it as stemming from a working-class sensibility. Harrisson offended the miners by bringing a case of beer—most of the men didn't drink—and leaving without paying for his lodging.

In spite of the publicity and preconceptions, World War II and the decline of the mining industry and the Ashington colliery itself, the Ashington Group continued to meet and paint, respond to each other's work and

exhibit their art. After World War II they created a rule book for the group and met weekly to discuss each other's work. In the 1970s, a renewed interest in their work led to exhibitions in Durham, London, Germany and Belgium. In 1980, their work was exhibited in China. It was the first exhibit from a western nation since the cultural revolution.

In 1983, the hut in which the group worked was demolished. And after the miner's strike between

1984 and 1985 broke the back of the industry, the Ashington colliery closed in 1988, a victim of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's efforts to close unprofitable mines as part of denationalizing the mines.

The group sold paintings to pay for supplies but kept much of their best work. Many of the paintings of the Ashington Group have been housed at the Woodhorn Colliery Museum in Ashington since 1989.

"From the very beginning one of the reasons the class remained so was that we hadn't any desire really to become artists. That was entirely foreign to our way of thinking." —*Oliver Kilbourn*

Worker's Educational Association

The Workers' Educational Association (WEA), founded in 1903, offered lectures and courses to workers and others. The courses offered included wide-ranging topics like music, drama, biology, geology and evolution.

It advertised as "a federation of over 2,500 organisations, linking labour with learning." Between 1926 and 1927, approximately 70,000 people took advantage of its educational programs. All were welcome—"an enquiring mind is sufficient qualification," claimed their materials.

The WEA courses offered not only a chance to learn more and fill a vital educational gap in mining villages, but also provided an opportunity for members of the community to socialize and build friendships.

"There's a desire in all pitmen I think to learn a little bit more than we were taught in school." —*Oliver Kilbourn, one of the pitmen in the Ashington Group*

Members of The Ashington Group at work, 1938. (Photo by Julian Trevelyan)



- **1927** The Trade Disputes and Trade Union Act makes sympathetic strikes and mass pickets illegal.
 - **1946** The Coal Industry Nationalisation Act passes, establishing the National Coal Board.
 - **1947** January 1, all coal mines are taken into public ownership under the government-run National Coal Board.
 - **1951** 81 men are killed in an explosion at the Easington Colliery.
 - **1950s** Thirteen mines close in the north of England.
 - **1960s** More than 70 mines close in the north of England.
 - **1972** The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) strikes against the government for seven weeks, seeking a pay raise. 289 mines close across the country. The electricity is turned off in numerous regions because of power shortages resulting from the lack of coal.
 - **1974** A coal strike results in the ousting of Conservative Prime Minister Edward Heath.
 - **1981** The NUM votes to strike if any pits are closed for any reason other than that the coal seam is exhausted. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher backs down.
 - **1984** The NUM strikes over threatened pit closures. Thatcher, who wants to end mine subsidies, has stockpiled coal and is prepared for a long standoff. Difficult economic conditions in mining towns lead to picket-line violence.
- 180,000 miners are working in 170 pits.

the people

Oliver Kilbourn



Oliver Kilbourn, 1971 (Photo by Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen)

Oliver Kilbourn was one of only two miners who worked in the pit at the time the Ashington Group was formed. Other miners worked for the mine, but at other jobs, not as miners underground. Kilbourn was one of the most passionate members of the group and continued working on his art even as other members of the group left. He painted a series of works on his life in the mines. His work was featured in a 2008 exhibit in the Northumbria University Gallery in Newcastle upon Tyne.

Harry Wilson

Harry Wilson was gassed during World War I and, because of the damage to his lungs, was judged unfit to become

"I haven't been one for the usual pursuits of pitmen. I didn't go in for keeping whippets or pigeons or growing leeks ... I took a great desire to express myself not with any thought of gain or anything like that but I couldn't express myself so well in words and I found that I could express my feelings and what I wanted to get over in drawing and painting." —Oliver Kilbourn

a miner. He trained as a dental technician. His skills at molding false teeth later would help his art as he created sculptures blending his art and technical skills.

"In the WEA I soon found myself among friends. In fact by the next year I was secretary of it. That gave me an opportunity to influence some of the things I was interested in and that was how we developed for about seven years. Biology, geology and the rest of it: it was a very interesting class and when that finished we felt we were at a dead end again so we started on Art." —Harry Wilson

Harry Wilson, 1971 (Photo by Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen)



Jimmy Floyd

Jimmy Floyd was the other miner in the Ashington Group who was consistently working underground at the time the group was formed. Like Kilbourn, he would spend most of his working life underground. He was an onsetter, a role that involved moving filled tubs of coal into the cage to be winched up to the surface and receiving empty tubs.

George Brown

George Brown was the first named on the list of those who attended Robert Lyon's class in art appreciation. One of the oldest members of the Ashington Group, he was a prominent member of the WEA class on evolution. He had a reputation for being cantankerous and was among those who wanted to lay down rules for the group. He was known to chastise Jimmy Floyd for breaking the rules, and he once stormed out of the group's work hut in a rage. He worked as a joiner,



Jimmy Floyd, 1971 (Photo by Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen)

or carpenter, in London before moving to Ashington to do the same work at the colliery. Artists and workers for Mass-Observation, Julian Trevelyan and Tom Harrison, stayed with Brown and his wife while profiling the Ashington Group. Trevelyan paid board, but Harrison left without paying for his.

Young Lad

Young Lad is identified as George Brown's nephew. He is a composite of characters of various young artists in the Ashington Group. He reflects the tight-knit community in which fathers, sons, uncles and cousins all could work in the pit. He also reflects the changing values surrounding mining, as the young men left the mining villages during World War II.

Robert Lyon

Robert Lyon was the Master of Painting at Armstrong College (then affiliated with Durham University) when he went to Ashington to teach the WEA art-appreciation class in October 1934. The miners didn't connect with the religious and mythological subject matter he initially chose for his lectures, so he quickly switched his approach to art appreciation through application. Both because WEA guidelines said students could not learn anything that might be construed as a wage-earning skill and because he was a trained artist, Lyon frequently distanced the work the miners were producing from any kind of professional art.

After eight years teaching the group, in July 1942 he accepted a post at the Edinburgh College of Art. He continued to communicate with various members of the group and came to their exhibitions. His "experiment in art appreciation" came at the right time to dovetail with public interest in art by the miners and social and educational movements about improving access to art and education.

- **1985** March 3, miners call off the year-long strike, and Thatcher's pit-closure and privatization program continues. The power of the strongest labor union in the country is severely undermined.
- **1987** The National Coal Board becomes the British Coal Corporation.
- **1988** The Ashington Colliery closes.
- **1994** The Coal Industry Act creates the Coal Authority, taking over certain functions of the British Coal Corp., including granting leases, environmental compliance and historical preservation.
- **1997** Nationalization of the coal industry ends completely.
- **2004** In Britain, there are only 12 working pits with 6,000 employees. By the end of the year, three more pits close and 2,100 more jobs are lost.
- **2011** The private UK Coal company operates 9 mines with 2,900 employees.

"The programme was not in any sense of the word an adaptation of the normal course followed in a School of Art, or of that of the training of an artist, but one which, it was hoped, would provide the class with a creative experience, and would so help them to appreciate better the creative experience in others." —Robert Lyon, in his article "An Experiment in Art Appreciation" in The Listener, published in 1935

Ben Nicholson

Ben Nicholson was born in Denham, the son of artists William Nicholson and Mabel Pryde. He studied at the Slade School of Fine Art in London. He married Winifred Roberts in 1920. His relationship with sculptor Barbara Hepworth resulted in the breakdown of his marriage in 1931. He married Hepworth in 1938; they divorced in 1951. He experimented with figurative and abstract works as well as Post-Impressionism, Cubism and Constructivist principles applied to art. His first solo show was at age 21. He won the Carnegie Prize in 1952 and the Guggenheim International painting prize in 1956. Helen Sutherland was a friend and patron and she created a Ben Nicholson offertory box in her chapel at Rock Hall, her home in Northumberland.

Helen Sutherland

Helen Sutherland was the heiress of the P&O ocean liners through her father; she also inherited a fortune from her mother. She was a liberal; for a time, a Quaker; and a devoted patron of the arts. Robert Lyon brought her to meet members of the Ashington Group in 1935.

"We'd not experienced this sort of thing before and we certainly hadn't met a practicing painter producing the abstract work that Nicholson was doing. So gradually our horizons were widening. You could really get down to it and talk about their pictures with the artist and really get to know what he was driving at, and you found that he was quite ordinary in a way, nothing to be afraid of: a person tackling a job." — Harry Wilson, describing meeting Nicholson and other painters

Sutherland would become a supporter of the group, buying paintings, inviting them to her home at Rock Hall, introducing them to artists such as Ben and Winifred Nicholson. She funded their trip to London to visit the National Gallery and the Tate Gallery. She continued to see their exhibits. The last time the painters saw her was when she visited their exhibit in 1959.

"Miss Sutherland expected you to be able to stand up and account for your activities. She would stand in front of a picture and ask precisely why this was done this way or why that person was included, and you couldn't put her off. She was very perceptive and very rarely did you find out how her mind was working."

—Harry Wilson

Robert Lyon painting a mural.



It is difficult to classify the art being produced by the Ashington Group. Art produced by untrained artists often is called naïve, outsider or folk art. These terms can sound patronizing to the artists, though they are used throughout the art world.

The men in Ashington did not receive training in technique, yet, as they practiced, experimented with different mediums, read about and viewed art, the sophistication of their artwork grew. At the

same time, members of the Ashington Group resisted identifying themselves primarily as artists.

In her 1987 article, "Toward a Theoretical Approach to Teaching Folk Art: A Definition," in *Studies in Art Education*, Dr. Kristin Congdon works toward a definition of folk art and some guidelines for teaching folk art. She points out that it is frequently "made by persons who do not call themselves artists as readily as creators from other art groups do"

and is often the product of "a small close group."

Congdon argues that when folk art is taught, it should be emphasized that it is "not necessarily inferior, unsophisticated, or naïve" and that "folk artists are not categorically uneducated, nor are they culturally deprived."

The Pitmen Painters prompts us to interrogate our responses to the art of working-class artists and examines cultural assumptions about class and access to art.

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

After the show on **Sunday, Oct. 23** is Sunday Scholars, a one-hour 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, Nov. 6**, join them for a free post-show discussion.

POST-SHOW DISCUSSIONS

On **Wednesdays, Sept. 14 and 28, Oct. 19 and Nov. 2; Sundays, Sept. 18 and 25 and Oct. 2 and 30; and Thursdays, Sept. 22 and Oct. 27**, 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 Company**) and follow us on Twitter (**@timelinetheatre**)!

the interview

During rehearsals for *The Pitmen Painters*, TimeLine Artistic Director PJ Powers (PJP) caught up with Northlight Theatre Artistic Director BJ Jones (BJJ), who makes his TimeLine directing debut with this show.

PJP: When I first approached you about directing *The Pitmen Painters*, I knew you understood the heart and comedy of this piece but didn't realize what a personal connection you had to the story. Can you talk a bit about that?

BJJ: I joined the United Mine Workers in 1969 as a summer job during college. The whole notion of being an actor was a source of amusement with my union brethren. I actually got offered a full-time job at the factory where I made varnish. They couldn't understand why I would turn down a full-time union job for the life of a want-to-be actor, in Cleveland.

Now that factory is out of business, and I am directing a play about miners who are artists!

PJP: This play's politics, dialogue and, certainly, dialect, are distinctly British. What are the challenges of doing this play for an American audience?

BJJ: Oh, I suppose the accents will be challenging for the untutored ear, but

I think the fact that the play starts in a recession, traverses a war, embraces socialism and finally faces the prospect of an England under [Prime Minister Margaret] Thatcher's Conservative government, has great resonance for our audience. I also feel the journey of discovery and the blooming of the artistic impulse in the souls of these men is as electrifying as any play I've read.

PJP: What do you think we have to learn today from *The Pitmen Painters* regarding access to the arts?

BJJ: The first things cut from education budgets at all levels of school seem to be the arts departments. If there is any money left, it goes to the sciences, math and the athletic departments.

At the end of *The Pitmen Painters*, we learn that all the dreams of these miners, to have a socialist approach to class accessibility to education and the arts, are dashed by the Conservative agenda in Great Britain.

Let's hope we will fight for a future in which the arts are



part of the culture of a great country and valued by all, regardless of politics.

PJP: Talk about your design process and why you wanted to create an elongated 3/4-thrust stage, with the audience surrounding much of the action?

BJJ: I wanted to replicate the Workers' Educational Association meeting hall that the pitmen worked in and to give the audience a sense of being in the room for the progress of the play. I work at Northlight in a very deep thrust, so for me it is very comfortable working in this environment.

I grew up theatrically here in Chicago in storefront theater, working at Wisdom Bridge, Body Politic, Remains, Victory Gardens. Having an audience member at your side while revealing your innermost thoughts and feelings is what separates Chicago

theater from other towns. With the audience this close ... you can't lie.

PJP: This is your first directing gig at TimeLine and, after seeing many of our shows, what's it like to work here, going from your much larger home turf to our intimate space?

BJJ: There is no difference in the impulse to do good work on worthy material, with artists who are passionate and keen to climb into the room with you. Oh, sure, we have a swell green room at Northlight, and a few more zeros on our budget line, but I've worked with you and some of these actors before and will again. The issue is never the theater, but the artists and the work—and that is paramount.

PJP: You and I first met in 1999 when I acted in your production of *The Cripple of Inishmaan* at Northlight. It was your first season as artistic director there and my first as artistic director

at TimeLine. Since then you've not only been a dear friend but also a great mentor and colleague in the world of running a theater. I could certainly go on and on about how much TimeLine has changed since 1999 and, as a result, how much it has changed my life. Can you tell me what the last dozen years have been like for you, running Northlight and building it into a premiere regional theater?

BJJ: First of all, I am so proud of what you have accomplished at TimeLine, PJ, and honored to be working for you on this project.

Since you and I started, we have lived through two recessions, three wars, a near economic collapse, and the market is down 300 points today alone! We have our first African-American president, and a bit of a political revolution with the rise of the Tea Party. It has been a roller coaster for all of us in the American theater, reflecting the turbulence in the country.

I think all of us are trying to suss out the subscription model, the impact of the Internet on live theater and what the next generation of theatergoers will respond to as we move forward.

Like you, I have a family, and they are grown now, but during these years I have seen them go from junior high through grad school. Trying to balance being a parent and spouse and run a regional theater is challenging, to say the least. I'm sure you'd agree. But I am "living the dream," as my kids would say, and it is a huge gift.

PJP: During your tenure at Northlight you've shifted your focus from acting, which you'd done for years, more toward directing. What has that transition been like, and do you still have the itch to act?

BJJ: I'm always itching, the scratch I hope will never heal—but when to find the time? And more people (ahem) keep asking me to direct. This year alone I will do two shows at Northlight, one for you, one for Second City, and one for Baltimore Center Stage (Martin McDonagh's *A Skull in Connemara*).

“The journey of discovery and the blooming of the artistic impulse in the souls of these men is as electrifying as any play I’ve read.”

backstage

Last season more than 200 TimeLine enthusiasts gathered in the historic ballrooms at Germania Place in Chicago's Gold Coast neighborhood for TimeLine's biggest party of the year—*Step Into Time: Birth of the Blues*.

Step Into Time, TimeLine's annual fundraiser, is a unique celebration of our mission of exploring history that raises funds vital to fulfilling that mission. At *Step Into Time: Birth of the Blues*, guests experienced a look back at the early years of this powerful musical style, its continuing influence on Chicago's

Mark your calendar! Step Into Time 2012 is Friday, March 16

music scene and its unique ability to lift our spirits.

The evening featured performances by some of the most famous ladies of the blues, including Big Mama Thorton, Billie Holiday and Koko Taylor, and guests dined on a delicious gourmet dinner, shopped live and silent auctions and tried their luck at two raffles. By the time the last song was sung and the last prize was auctioned off, the event broke company

records, raising more than \$100,000 in net proceeds to support TimeLine's general operations. Thank you to everyone who helped to make the evening a tremendous success!

We hope to see you at the next *Step Into Time* party on Friday, March 16, 2012, in the stunning Grand Ballroom at the InterContinental Chicago. Stay tuned for more details!

To see more pictures from last year and learn about our upcoming event, visit timelinetheatre.com/step_into_time or call Lydia at 773.281.8463 x26.



(Clockwise from above) Tina Brown and Melody Betts brought down the house singing the blues; TimeLine supporters David Cooper and Bruce Nesbitt enjoyed the night; actors and volunteers Ebony Wimbs and Mechelle Moe were radiant ladies in blue; Broadway in Chicago's Eileen LaCario shopped the silent auction; and the "Blues Brothers" stopped by Step Into Time: Birth of the Blues!



(Above) The 2011 Step Into Time Committee (clockwise from left): Jennifer Moeller, Rob Waters, Robert Alpaugh, Norman Cutler, Michelle Cucchiaro, Jill Hurwitz and committee chair Nicole Thomas.



(Left) Renowned Chicago boogie-woogie, blues and jazz pianist Erwin Helfer provided expert entertainment and accompaniment throughout the evening.

TimeLine Theatre is delighted to recognize the support of our friends Ron and Nancie King Mertz around the corner at Art De Triumph. Each season they generously open their beautiful gallery to us, hosting some of our favorite events, and we are very grateful for their support!

ART DE TRIUMPH
Artful Framers Studios

2938 N Clark Chicago
773.832.4038

Present this *The Pitmen Painters* program book to receive 10% off framing and artwork.

Offer expires Dec. 18, 2011

Nancie was named Artist of the Year by the Chicago Convention & Tourism Bureau for 2005, 2006 and 2007, and you can view her work at the Art De Triumph gallery. Artful Framers Studios frames all of Nancie's originals, and helps customers select the best framing choice for their own photos, posters and fine art.

BACKSTORY: THE CREDITS

Dramaturgy @ Historical Research by Maren Robinson

Written by Maren Robinson, PJ Powers, Lydia Swift and Lara Goetsch

Edited by Karen A. Callaway & Lara Goetsch

Photography by Lara Goetsch

Graphic Design by Lara Goetsch

The Pitmen Painters Photo Illustration by Ryan Robinson

Backstory is published four times each season.

Pictured on front cover (from left): Actor Amanda Schaar; actors William Dick, Dan Waller and James Houton; actor Loretta Rezos; actors Steven Pringle and Jordan Brown; and director BJ Jones.

Pictured on back cover (from left): Stage manager Ana Espinosa and production assistant Brittainy Barattia; actors Loretta Rezos and Dan Waller; actors Andrew Carter, James Houton and William Dick; lighting designer Charles Cooper; and actor Jordan Brown.

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.



September 6 - December 4, 2011

by **LEE HALL** | inspired by a book by **WILLIAM FEAVER** | directed by **BJ JONES, SDC**

Heralded in London and on Broadway, this new play by the Tony Award-winning writer of *Billy Elliot* is based on a triumphant true story. A group of miners in Northern England taking an art appreciation class start experimenting with painting and soon build an astonishing body of work that makes them the unlikelyst of art world sensations. An arresting and hilarious salute to the power of individual expression and the collective spirit, *The Pitmen Painters* is a deeply moving and timely look at art, class and politics.

Cast

William Dick **
Dan Waller **
Jordan Brown
Andrew Carter
James Houton
Steven Pringle
Loretta Rezos
Amanda Schaar

Production Team

Timothy Mann, U.S.A.:
Scenic Designer
Jacqueline Firkins, U.S.A.:
Costume Designer
Charles Cooper, U.S.A.:
Lighting Designer
Joshua Horvath, U.S.A.:
Sound Designer

Julia Eberhardt:
Properties Designer
Mike Tutaj: *Projections Designer*
Dina Spoerl: *Lobby Designer*
Marena Robinson: *Dramaturg*
Tanera Marshall: *Dialects*
Ana Espinosa*: *Stage Manager*
John Kearns:
Production Manager

The director is a member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society, a national theatrical labor union.

***Member of Actors' Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers.*

Those designers and scenic artists identified by U.S.A. are members of United Scenic Artists, IATSE Local 829, AFL-CIO

SEPTEMBER 2011

SU	M	T	W	TH	F	SA
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	

OCTOBER 2011

SU	M	T	W	TH	F	SA
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2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

NOVEMBER 2011

SU	M	T	W	TH	F	SA
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6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

DECEMBER 2011

SU	M	T	W	TH	F	SA
				1	2	3
4						

LOCATION TimeLine Theatre,
615 W. Wellington Avenue, Chicago.
Directions, parking and dining
information at timelinetheatre.com.

- Regular Performance**
- Preview Performance**
- Opening Night *Sold Out***
- Post-Show Discussion** with cast & production crew **Free**
- Sunday Scholars** a one-hour post-show panel discussion with experts on the themes and issues of the play **Free**
- Company Member Discussion** a conversation with TimeLine's Company members **Free**

SHOW TIMES

PREVIEWS 8 PM
OPENING NIGHT 7:30 PM
WEDNESDAYS & THURSDAYS 7:30 PM
FRIDAYS 8 PM (Also 4 pm on 11/25)
SATURDAYS 4 PM & 8 PM
SUNDAYS 2 PM