

# Hill

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transports them to Christ-masland, which is not exactly a happy land of enchantment.

But for all its carnage, “The Fireman” is deeply concerned with its people. (Hill may have picked up his knack of creating multidimensional characters from his dad, Stephen King; mom Tabitha and brother Owen are also writers.) “The Fireman” protagonist, nurse Harper Grayson, watches in horror as her New England community succumbs to the explosive threat. She tries to help the sick at the hospital. Then she discovers she’s pregnant and infected and finds herself fighting for her life against her husband, who prefers the relative peace of a double suicide to living in a terrifying new world.

Harper escapes with the help of a shadowy, smoldering (quite literally) figure who calls himself The Fireman, who introduces her to a group of the infected hiding out at a summer camp. But religious fanaticism begins to pervade the enclave, and a homicidal madman who calls himself the Marlboro Man is scouring the countryside with his crews, searching for the sick and murdering them.

Hill is dealing here with the end of the world as we know it, but the book also displays an insouciant sense of humor, an affection for pop culture, especially music and an admiration for human resilience, something Hill believes must exist in any dystopian fantasy.

“Apocalyptic stories have always been popular, going back to the Book of Revelations,” says Hill, who’s also the author of the story collection “20th Century Ghosts” and the comic book series “Locke & Key.” “We’ve become as a culture increasingly aware of how fragile our happiness and contentment is. The apocalyptic story makes you look at how easily it all can be swept away. ... Every generation faces an apocalypse. The end of the world will happen — eventually you’ll be dead. That’s the nature of the remorseless march of time. But the next generation takes its place, and good apocalyptic stories like ‘The Walking Dead’ insist on the continuation of life.

“Now, Cormac McCarthy’s ‘The Road,’ I love that book. He’s 10 times the writer I am. But there’s that scene where some cannibals have a baby on a spit and are cooking it. It’s either the most horrible scene or the funniest, so beyond what our normal depictions of evil are. I guess I don’t completely buy that. Kindness and affection and a sense of humor are tightly wired into the human personality. We’re not equipped to totally give up when things turn bad. We don’t necessarily start biting each other’s throats out for the last can of beans. When the Twin Towers caught fire some people ran upstairs to see if they could help. Any depiction of a crisis or the end that doesn’t show heroism or decency, that doesn’t show how bighearted we can be, is founded on a lie.”

Still, the allegories Hill plays with in “The Fireman” are impossible to miss. Growing religious fanaticism in the face of fear. The fact that anxiety and stress ignite and doom the

infected. The way the remaining population falls into one of two camps: the sick and those who are afraid of them and vow to wipe them off the earth.

Discussing that fear of the other was important to Hill.

“We have a major presidential candidate who wants to keep out all Muslims because we don’t know which ones might be terrorists. He wants to keep out all Mexicans because some might be rapists,” he says, adding that he wishes he’d put a “Make America Great Again” cap on the Marlboro Man. “I wanted to write something about the danger of looking at people who were different, who are not you, and responding with fear and rage instead of empathy and understanding. That idea of: It’d be better if you weren’t in the world because I’m afraid of what you’ll do to me. That’s the heart of the story. There’s a version of The Fireman that would be easy to write where the heroes are the healthy people. But I wanted to be on the side of people who are ill and contaminated.”

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JOE HILL

“The Fireman” is already drawing comparisons to such novels as “Lord of the Flies” and Justin Cronin’s “The Passage” trilogy, but naturally the most impossible similarity to overlook is its relationship to “The Stand,” published by Hill’s dad in 1978. However, Hill says “The Stand” — to which he pays homage in numerous ways, few of which will be spoiled here — wasn’t what was on his mind when he started writing.

“I was thinking about the ‘Harry Potter’ novels and focused on that structure,” he says. “About two-thirds of the way through, I realized ‘The Stand’ and ‘The Fireman’ had similarities. You have two choices when you see an influence casting its shadow on your own work. You can try to run away or turn around and embrace it. It’s always better to embrace it and have fun with it. I went back through the story and made changes. Remember Nick Andros from ‘The Stand’? Well, my Nick was named Travis originally. I looked at places where my dad had done interesting things in ‘The Stand’ and tried to figure out how to subvert them.”

Hill says he might revisit the world of “The Fireman,” possibly in comic form. Then again, he may not.

“There’s something to be said for letting the reader tell their own story,” he says. “Give them the big, long ride and leave them with the toys to play with. Any sequel you’re imagining will be better than any actual sequel I could write.”

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# Theater

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The holiday production for the PTC this year is a classic Dickens tale — but not the one you’d expect. “Oliver!” will be staged Dec. 1-24, in all its “Please, sir, may I have more?” glory.

The PTC also will be the second company ever to stage Monica Wood’s “Papermaker,” which tells the story of a paper mill strike in a small Maine town. It premiered in Portland in April 2015 and will be staged by PTC in March 2017. “Papermaker” is novelist Wood’s first play and touches on subjects that will be familiar to many Maine people, including issues concerning mill town life.

A surprise seventh show will be announced in August, and the season will include children’s productions via the company’s dramatic academy. Those will include “The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales,” “The Neverending Story” and “Ramona Quimby,” according to director of education Roder.

PTC isn’t the only professional theater company gearing up for the next season. Travel south, and a completely different round-up of shows offers even more variety to Maine’s theater scene.

A Pulitzer Prize-winner, a tale of romance, a Christmas classic, a one-man show, a historical drama and a story about the struggles of everyday life — these and many others comprise the 2016-2017 season for Portland Stage.

Their common bond? “The theme this season is around love and marriage and family, how people build their personal lives,” Anita Stewart, executive and artistic director of Portland Stage, said. “We try to get a good range of material — stuff that’s going to be funny, stuff that’s going to be moving and poignant, stuff that will make you think.”

# Cheese

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planned from 5 to 7 p.m. Thursday, May 26, in Bangor.

“Tastings are very casual and educational, and we always pair cheeses with each wine,” Tony Rose said Tuesday. “Everyone is welcome.”

This will be the second cheese shop in Bangor. Bangor Wine & Cheese has been

The season started taking shape with A.R. Gurney’s “Later Life,” a tale of two people who meet at a cocktail party.

“We’re bookending that with the final show of the season, which is ‘Disgraced,’” Stewart said. “Disgraced,” a 2013 Pulitzer Prize winner, is “multicultural, hard-hitting, fast-paced, and features multiethnic relationships,” Stewart said. “It’s about how the world has moved to where it is now.”

Following “Later Life,” “Sotto Voce” will be staged in November.

“The second show is a play by Nilo Cruz, and it’s about a woman who is older, lives by herself, doesn’t see people, is hermit and has memories of the past of the great love of her life, who was a man who ended up being on board a cruise ship leaving Germany during the Second World War,” Stewart said.

Portland Stage’s season isn’t complete without Charles Dickens classic “A Christmas Carol.” Another classic, “Arsenic and Old Lace,” will follow in January and March will feature “Buyer and Cellar,” a one-man show.

The winner of The Claud-er Competition, a competition that takes place every three years, will stage in April 2017. This year, Brenda Withers’ play, “String Around My Finger,” was chosen from 240 submissions.

“It’s about a woman and man who are about the get married and have a medical emergency that makes them go, ‘Woah. Where do we go from here?’” Stewart said.

Community theater companies are preparing for their new seasons as well, including Some Theatre Company, a new addition to the Greater Bangor theatre scene.

Some Theatre Company only got their last year, but their second season is planned and the company is excited to undertake a new, challenging list of productions.

To start off their season, the company will stage

located on Hammond Street since 2000, and sells a selection of wines, beers, cheeses, cured meats and seafood and more.

In Belfast, Eat More Cheese also is known for creating special cheese party platters and a willingness to make cheese recommendations and offer samples to customers. The Roses, who were into cheese as a hobby before becoming full-time cheesemongers, said they were inspired to open the Belfast shop after



BDN FILE

Actors in “Duck Hunter Shoots Angel” go over a scene during a dress rehearsal at the Penobscot Theatre Company at the Bangor Opera House in Bangor in April.

“Next to Normal” in November, a rock musical that takes on some heavy subject material, including bipolar disorder, suicide and drug abuse.

“It’s a feel-everything musical. It’s a rock musical, and there’s very little dialogue. It follows the story of a family, and something happens to the mother/wife and she is diagnosed with depression and bipolar disorder. We meet up with her in the middle of a bad episode. She sees a psychiatrist, and things gradually get worse. She has electroshock therapy. It chronicles her journey,” artistic director Elaine Bard said.

“I wanted something a little deeper — a little darker and edgier. We’re in a place in society where there’s a lot of mental health issues, so it seemed like something people could relate to, even if it’s not them who has a mental disorder,” Bard said.

This commitment to work that is difficult in nature will continue on in the March 2017 production of “Agnes of God,” the story of a nun whose infant has been found strangled. She insists the child was the result of virgin conception and an investigation ensues.

“We don’t want to always do stuff just because it’s fluffy and nice and it can make money. It’s nice to do a

show that’s a little darker and edgier — that has a different story and meaning to it,” Bard said.

“A lot of these shows are not traditionally done because they’re so hard to do as an actor. I think a lot of people don’t believe they can push community actors to get there, but we’re confident in the community and our people.” Erryn Bard, Elaine’s daughter and secretary of the Some Theatre Company board, said.

“I think most actors are looking for that deep challenge and want to push themselves in these roles,” Elaine Bard said.

In addition to these productions, Some Theatre Company will stage “Velve-teen Rabbit” in December, which was written by Main-er Andrew Frodhal. The show will feature puppetry and consist of a children and adult cast. The company will stage their productions for the 2016-2017 season in the Keith Anderson Community House in Orono.

To complete the season, a surprise fourth show, a family musical, is in the works for May 2017.

From productions lovingly produced by members of Maine’s communities, to shows featuring unfamiliar, fresh faces, there’s something for everyone in the upcoming season of Maine theater productions.



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# CALENDAR of Events

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY
<b>Men's Night</b> <i>Corn hole tournament. Mens give away.</i>	<b>Taco Tuesday</b> <i>\$2 tacos &amp; \$5 margaritas</i> <b>Lip Sync Battles</b> <i>from 9-11 P.M.</i>	<b>Ladies Night</b> <i>with Margaritas, Martinis, &amp; Makeovers (door prizes including salon gift certificates &amp; designer handbags)</i>
THURSDAY	FRIDAY & SATURDAY	SUNDAY
<b>8-10 P.M. Trivia</b> <b>Family Night</b> <i>kids eat for \$2</i>	<b>Live Music</b>	<b>Watch for the return of Reggae Sunday</b>

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