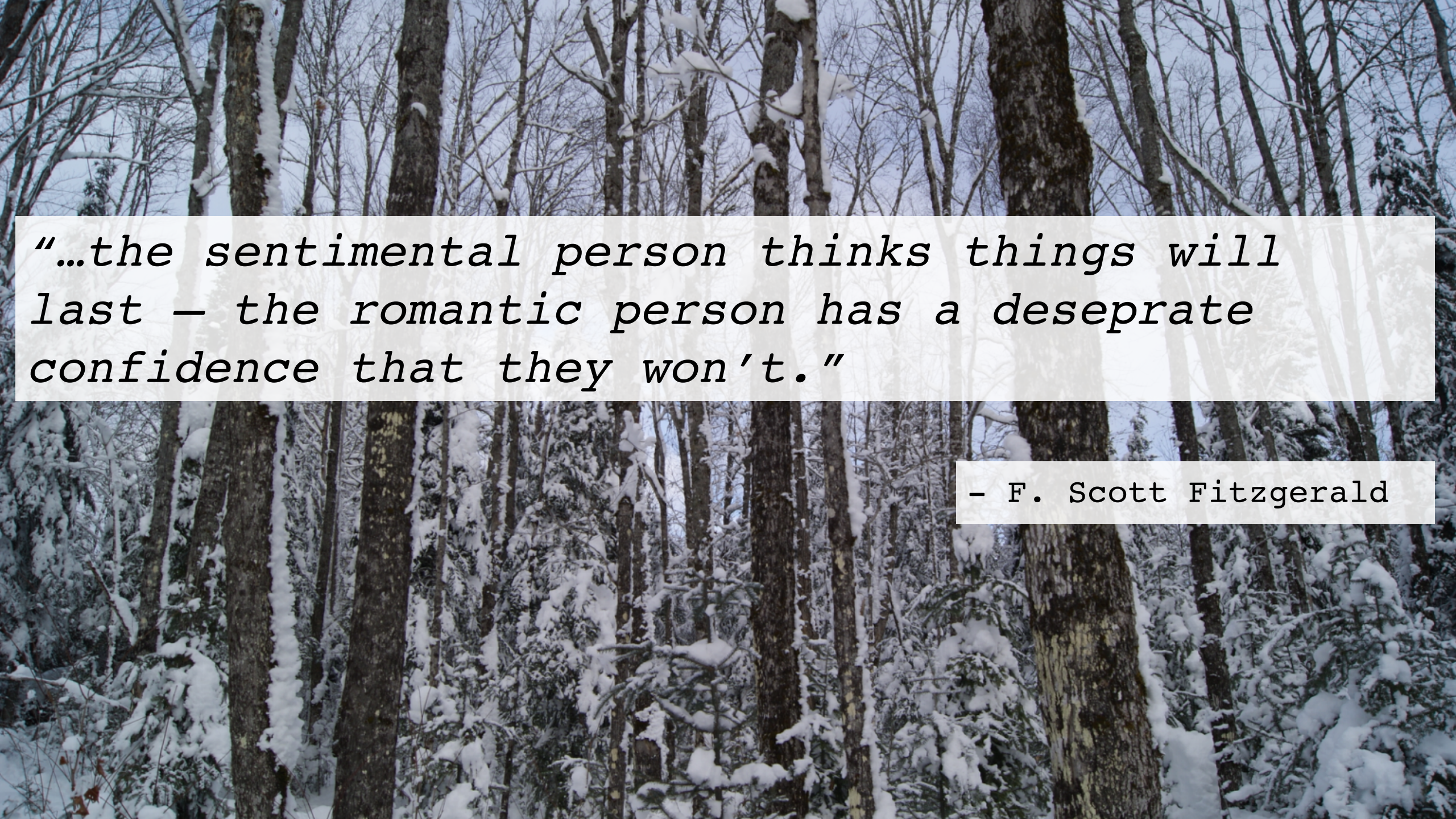


ALMOST, MAINE

By John Cariani





"...the sentimental person thinks things will last — the romantic person has a desperate confidence that they won't."

– F. Scott Fitzgerald

ABOUT THE PLAY

What do a broken heart in a bag, a bar that gives free drinks to patrons if they tell their waitress they're sad, bags full of love (literally), and a man who shrinks in height after losing hope have in common? They are all things that can be found in the magical town of Almost, Maine.

Almost, Maine by John Cariani follows nine different couples who interact in a series of vignettes that each take place “from around 8:50 to a bit after 9pm on a cold, clear, moonless, slightly surreal Friday night in the middle of the deepest part of a Northern Maine winter.”

Though the play was received quite well in its initial run at Portland Stage, when it moved to New York in 2006, it received critiques like the following from Charles Isherwood of *The New York Times*: “*Almost, Maine* may leave the cloying aftertaste of an overly sweetened Sno-Kone.” This kind of review, along with poor ticket sales, led the play to close after a month-long run.



ABOUT THE PLAY

The poor reception in New York suggested that the scenes were perceived as simple, fluffy depictions of love. However, *Almost, Maine*, when looked at closely, reveals itself to be a story about human connection and self-discovery. The characters' declarations of love may seem hasty and typically romantic, but they are also about recognizing the feeling of being seen by someone for the first time in a capacity previously unknown.

Almost, Maine is also a story about perseverance. The citizens of Almost, despite the hardships they face, still find the strength to carry on and figure out what comes next. The play itself also showed this resilience. Despite the reviews it received in New York, *Almost, Maine* garnered mass appeal and success with community theaters, high schools, and colleges.

The chilly environment of Almost melts away in the face of genuine human connection, showing just how warming this feeling can be. Through love and friendship, through hardship and discovery, we see just how complex the search for love can be, and just how much one interaction can impact a life.

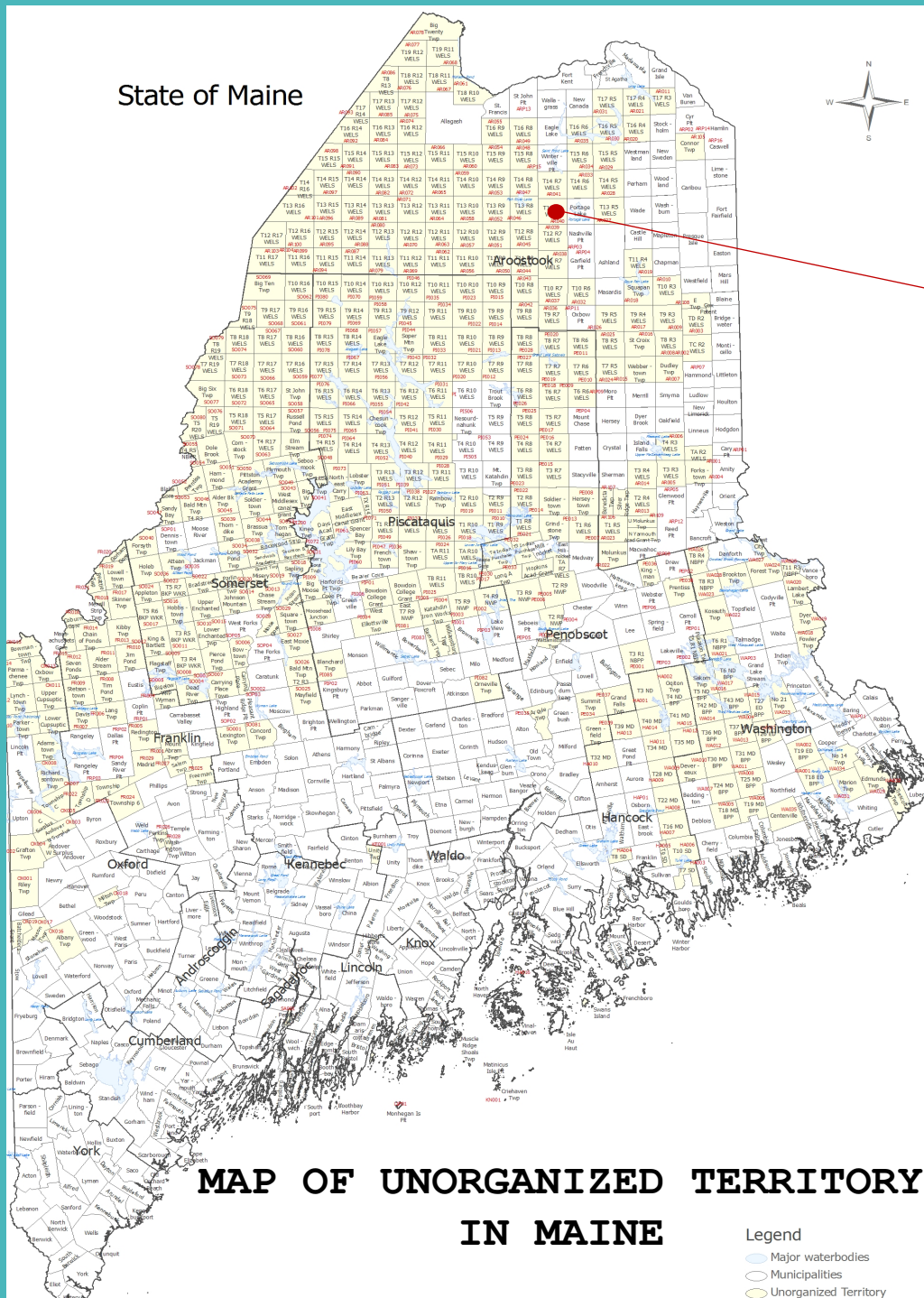


ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT



John Cariani is an actor and a playwright. He has appeared on Broadway and Off Broadway, at regional theaters across the country, and in several films and television shows. He's been nominated for a Tony Award and has done movies with Robert De Niro, Christopher Walken, and Ed Asner. Most people seem to know him from "Law & Order," where his character, Forensics Tech Beck, is alive and well in reruns. As a playwright, John is best known for his first play, *Almost, Maine*, which premiered at Portland (Maine) Stage Company in 2004 and opened Off-Broadway in 2006. It has since become one of the most frequently produced plays in the United States and has been translated into nearly twenty languages. His other plays include *cul-de-sac* (Transport Group), *Last Gas* (Portland Stage Company, Geva Theater Center), and *LOVE/SICK* (Portland Stage Company, Hartford TheaterWorks). Both *Almost, Maine* and *Last Gas* are published by Dramatists Play Service. Originally from Presque Isle, Maine, John is a graduate of Amherst College. He lives in New York City. www.almostmaine.com

State of Maine



MAP OF UNORGANIZED TERRITORY
IN MAINE

- Legend
- Major waterbodies
 - Municipalities
 - Unorganized Territory

AR074 T16 R12 WELS	Allagash	AR055 T16 R9 WELS	T16 R8 WELS AR049	Eagle Lake	T16 R6 WELS AR035	T16 R5 WELS AR030	T16 R4 WELS AR020	Stock - holm	Cyr Pt ARP02	ARP14	Hamlin
T15 R12 WELS AR073	T15 R11 WELS	T15 R10 WELS AR060	T15 R9 WELS AR054	T15 R8 WELS AR048	Winter - ville Pt	T15 R6 WELS AR034	T15 R5 WELS AR029	Westman land	New Sweden	AR105 Connor Twp	ARP16 Caswell
T14 R12 WELS AR072	T14 R11 WELS AR065	T14 R10 WELS AR059	T14 R9 WELS AR053	T14 R8 WELS AR047	Portage Lake	T14 R6 WELS AR033	T14 R5 WELS AR027	Wood - burn	Caribou	Lime - stone	Fort Fairfield
T13 R12 WELS AR071	T13 R11 WELS AR064	T13 R10 WELS AR058	T13 R9 WELS AR052	T13 R8 WELS AR046	Portage Lake	T13 R6 WELS AR038	T13 R5 WELS AR034	Nashville Pt	Garfield Pt	Ashland	Chapman
T12 R12 WELS AR070	T12 R11 WELS AR063	T12 R10 WELS AR057	T12 R9 WELS AR051	T12 R8 WELS AR045	Portage Lake	T12 R6 WELS AR033	T12 R5 WELS AR030	Castle Hill	Mapleton	Presque Isle	Easton
T11 R12 WELS AR069	T11 R11 WELS AR062	T11 R10 WELS AR056	T11 R9 WELS AR050	T11 R8 WELS AR044	Portage Lake	T11 R6 WELS AR033	T11 R5 WELS AR030	T11 R4 WELS AR019	T11 R3 WELS AR010	Westfield	Mars Hill
T10 R12 WELS PI046	T10 R11 WELS PI035	T10 R10 WELS PI023	T10 R9 WELS PI015	T10 R8 WELS AR043	Portage Lake	T10 R6 WELS AR032	T10 R5 WELS AR026	T10 R4 WELS AR018	T10 R3 WELS AR009	TD R2 WELS AR003	Monti - cello
T9 R12 WELS PI044	T9 R11 WELS PI032	T9 R10 WELS PI022	T9 R9 WELS PI014	T9 R8 WELS AR042	Portage Lake	T9 R6 WELS AR032	T9 R5 WELS AR026	T9 R4 WELS AR017	T9 R3 WELS AR009	TC R2 WELS AR002	Littleton
T8 R12 WELS PI042	T8 R11 WELS PI033	T8 R10 WELS PI021	T8 R9 WELS PI013	T8 R8 WELS PI027	Portage Lake	T8 R6 WELS AR032	T8 R5 WELS AR026	T8 R4 WELS AR017	T8 R3 WELS AR008	ARP07 Hammond	Houlton
T7 R12 WELS PI043	T7 R11 WELS PI032	T7 R10 WELS PI020	T7 R9 WELS PI012	T7 R8 WELS PI027	Portage Lake	T7 R6 WELS AR032	T7 R5 WELS AR026	T7 R4 WELS AR017	T7 R3 WELS AR007	New Limerick	Hodgdon
T6 R12 WELS PI042	T6 R11 WELS PI031	T6 R10 WELS PI020	T6 R9 WELS PI012	T6 R8 WELS PI026	Portage Lake	T6 R6 WELS AR032	T6 R5 WELS AR026	T6 R4 WELS AR017	T6 R3 WELS AR007	Linneus	Hodgdon
T5 R12 WELS PI041	T5 R11 WELS PI030	T5 R10 WELS PI020	T5 R9 WELS PI012	T5 R8 WELS PI026	Portage Lake	T5 R6 WELS AR032	T5 R5 WELS AR026	T5 R4 WELS AR017	T5 R3 WELS AR007	Linneus	Hodgdon

"WHERE IS HERE?"

RURAL IDENTITY

John Cariani's *Almost, Maine* follows the residents of a rural town in northern Maine. Rural Maine is known for their generous people and tight-knit communities; their pulp, paper, and lumber industry; and crops like blueberries, potatoes, and maple syrup.

While speaking about his inspiration for *Almost, Maine*, Cariani told The Portland Phoenix in 2004 that “everything that [he] sees in New York as far as theater goes seems to be about well-to-do people and what I and a lot of my friends from Maine call ‘made-up problems.’” Unhappy with the types of stories he was seeing in New York, Cariani, who grew up in Presque Isle, Maine, wanted to create “a community where we get some truth, and *Almost, Maine* is that place.” Sparked by his desire to better represent his geographic identity on the stage, John Cariani's *Almost, Maine* depicts rural living in an honest way, creates complex characters with genuine challenges, and fights harmful stereotypes.

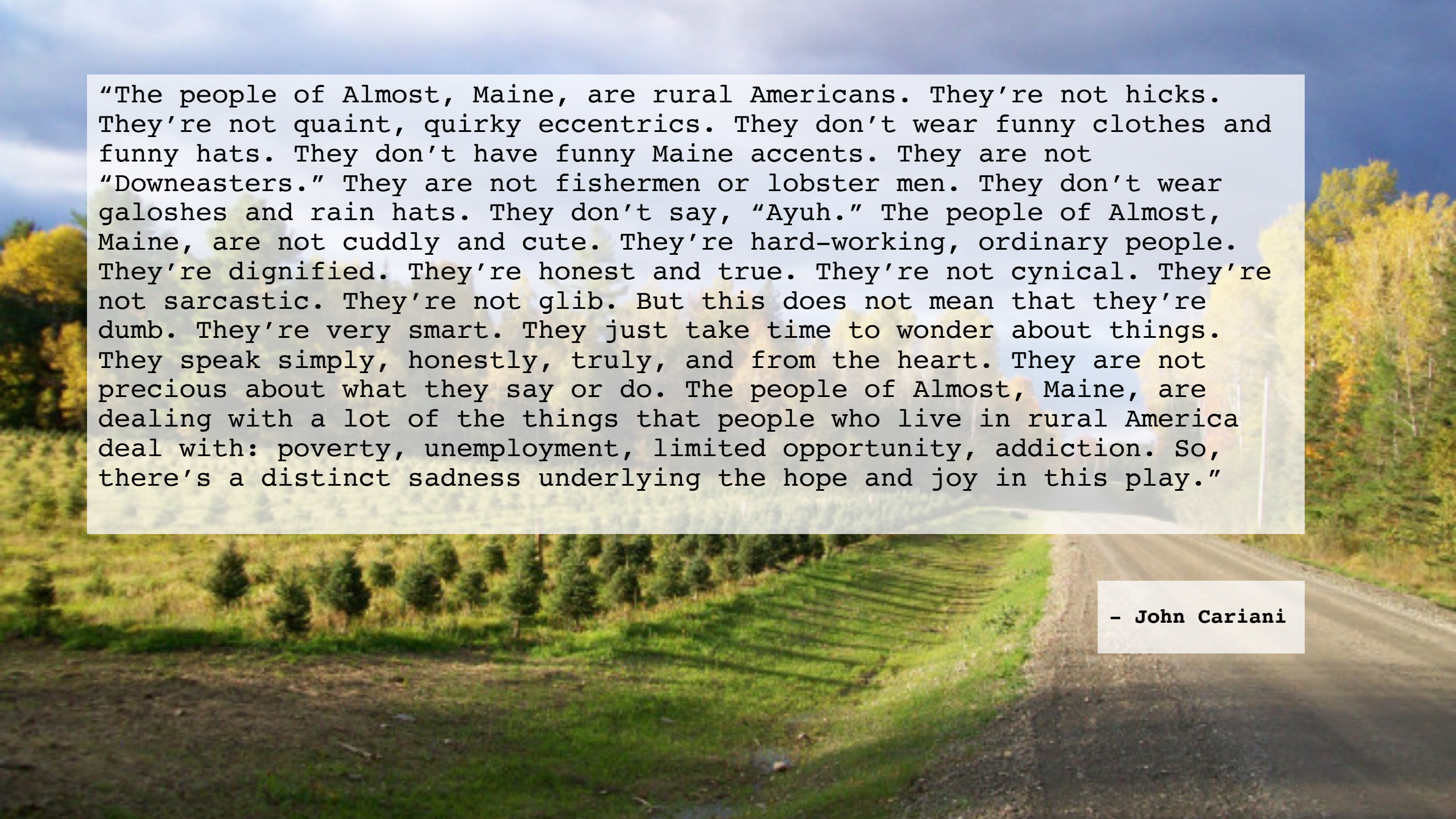


RURAL IDENTITY

A rural area is a region with a low population density, fewer houses and commercial buildings, and less infrastructure. People living in rural areas are more likely to work in agriculture or a primary industry, like mining or forestry, than people living in urban areas. An urban area is the region surrounding a city that has a high population density. These areas also have a high density of houses, commercial buildings, roads, bridges, and railways. Typically, most people in urban areas have nonagricultural jobs. The dominant migration pattern is from rural areas to urban areas because of new technology that decreases the need for many agricultural jobs. New jobs are also more likely to be created in urban areas.



It is important to fight against the depiction of any harmful stereotypes, even though it is sometimes well-intentioned people who perpetuate them.



"The people of Almost, Maine, are rural Americans. They're not hicks. They're not quaint, quirky eccentrics. They don't wear funny clothes and funny hats. They don't have funny Maine accents. They are not "Downeasters." They are not fishermen or lobster men. They don't wear galoshes and rain hats. They don't say, "Ayuh." The people of Almost, Maine, are not cuddly and cute. They're hard-working, ordinary people. They're dignified. They're honest and true. They're not cynical. They're not sarcastic. They're not glib. But this does not mean that they're dumb. They're very smart. They just take time to wonder about things. They speak simply, honestly, truly, and from the heart. They are not precious about what they say or do. The people of Almost, Maine, are dealing with a lot of the things that people who live in rural America deal with: poverty, unemployment, limited opportunity, addiction. So, there's a distinct sadness underlying the hope and joy in this play."

- John Cariani

Almost, Maine

By John Cariani
Directed by Gabriel Barre

October 26–November 21, 2004

A portland stage company production



World Premiere Romantic Comedy

Seven quirky little **love vignettes**, expressed with a sense of clever innocence, all set in the potato country of **northern Maine**. Maine playwright **John Cariani** has a refreshingly charming voice, offering a sense of hope and childlike joy rarely found in contemporary writers. Come discover why this play is already scheduled to transfer **Off-Broadway** in March of 2005.

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FROM THE ARCHIVES

Poster from 2004 World Premiere of *Almost, Maine*

AUDIENCE

Nothing almost about 'Almost'

By MARY SNELL

Opening night of the world premiere production of John Cariani's "Almost, Maine," was a love fest, a celebration, a homecoming. The sold-out audience applauded, cheered. I laughed. I cried. (Really.)

Portland Stage Company, in collaboration with Bulldog Theatrical of New York and director Gabriel Barre, have a big hit in this funny, warm and oh-so-human romantic comedy set in a mythical northern Maine town. Maine theatergoers will be particularly vulnerable to the local jokes and references, but the strength of the play is its universality.

The mood is understated, driven by the snappy dialogue. But the gift of the writing is in the creative flights into metaphors that are realized in this world – a heart is really broken into pieces; love that has been given is bagable, returnable; and the northern lights ARE a soul's guiding lanterns.

Cariani, who grew up in Presque Isle, has crafted a series of vignettes that take place the same night in the same small town of Almost in the middle of winter. But there's some strange love thing going on.

Men and women are falling in

REVIEW

"ALMOST, MAINE"

WHERE: Portland Stage Company
25A Forest Ave.
WHEN: Through Nov. 21
CALL: 774-0465

and out of love in the most unexpected and sudden ways. There are also new diseases in this town – obsessive-impulsive disorder, and feeling no pain.

Set designer James Youmans has created a winter world with multiple levels, piles of "snow," and an inventive cutout of a forest clearing rimming a star-spangled night sky.

Lighting designer Tim Hunter keeps the feel of a dark night without any loss of visibility through the scenes.

It looks like wise costume designer Pamela Scofield worked closely with costume sponsor L.L. Bean as she dressed the men and women in just-right practical Maine clothes, funny hats, outdoor wear.

Composer Julian Fleisher's original music helps retain the emotion from scene to scene.

And, oh, the acting. Four outstanding actors play the multiple characters who populate Almost. These characters are original but

familiar, plain but quirky. That is due in part to the well-crafted script and partly to the perfectly nuanced performances by Justin Hagan, Ibi Janko, Lawrence Nathanson and Wendy Rich Stetson. They all are masters of the long silent reaction, of impeccable timing. But they also give these characters real heart.

The only reservation I felt comes from the repetition of situations and types of characters. It worked, but also it didn't.

It's interesting to see how different actors handle similar situations (a man encounters an unexpected, high-strung woman outside his house late at night; a couple falls in love at first sight). You get set up for similar endings but that doesn't happen. Good.

But there is a danger that these similarities can lose impact the second time around. The vignettes are pulled together when a character in one is mentioned in the other. You are reminded they all live in the same small town.

If you are lucky enough to get a ticket, do it. This is a show they'll be talking about for some time. It moves to an off-Broadway run next.

Mary Snell is a theater critic who lives in Gorham.

"A love fest, a celebration, a homecoming."

"The gift of the writing is in the creative flights into metaphors that are realized in this world."

"These characters are original but familiar, plain but quirky."

PORTLAND, MAINE

Portland Exposure

IT'S BECOME TRADITIONAL FOR NEW England playwrights to write about the repressed lives of New Englanders, whether it's Eugene O'Neill setting *The Oresteia* in Massachusetts, or Thornton Wilder observing the dead wryly lamenting the blindness of the living in New Hampshire. But for John Cariani, whose romantic comedy *Almost, Maine* opens Oct. 26 at **Portland Stage Company** (then moves Off-Broadway in early 2005), New Englanders aren't repressed. They're just cold.

"I don't think that society is so puritanical up there," he says. "I just think it's the weather! It's so cold that you wear a lot of clothes, but people still have burning passions underneath. They still ache—and the ache is what really interests me."

That ache takes solid form in *Almost, Maine*. The play is set during a winter night, as the people in an isolated Maine town interact with unexpressed yearning, holding their emotions so tightly under layers of clothing that the sentiments spill out in an unexpected way: in a cascade of magic realism, where the lines between the literal and the figurative blur. Characters "fall" in love—literally fall to the ground, unable to stand—or watch as "the other shoe" drops out of the sky. The citizens of *Almost, Maine*, don't put their hearts on their sleeves—they carry them around in bags.

Cariani, who won acclaim this season playing Motel in the Broadway revival of *Fiddler on the Roof*, based *Almost,*



John Cariani

Maine on his own childhood in "potato country," as Mainers call the state's northern tip. As Portland Stage's managing director Tamera Ramaker says, "All you have to do is look at a map to get a sense of it...there's only one highway to get you there. There are places where there's no road accessibility at all. That's Maine."

"My friends always said they understood Chekhov, because we're from a place that's so cold and so hard to get out of," says Cariani. "Here in New York, you're busy all the time. When you're in a place with a big sky, you're more aware of how small you are as a human being. The sky is so much bigger than the world." —Peter Royston

AMERICAN THEATRE

OCTOBER

ARTICLE ABOUT JOHN CARIANI AND *ALMOST, MAINE* IN AMERICAN THEATRE MAGAZINE, 2004.

ARTICLE ABOUT JOHN CARIANI AND *ALMOST, MAINE* IN AMERICAN THEATRE MAGAZINE, 2004.

"It's so cold that you wear a lot of clothes, but people still have burning passions underneath. They still ache, and the ache is what really interests me."

WENDY STETSON AND LARRY NATHANSON IN "STORY OF HOPE", DIRECTED BY GABE BARRE, PORTLAND STAGE COMPANY, 2004.

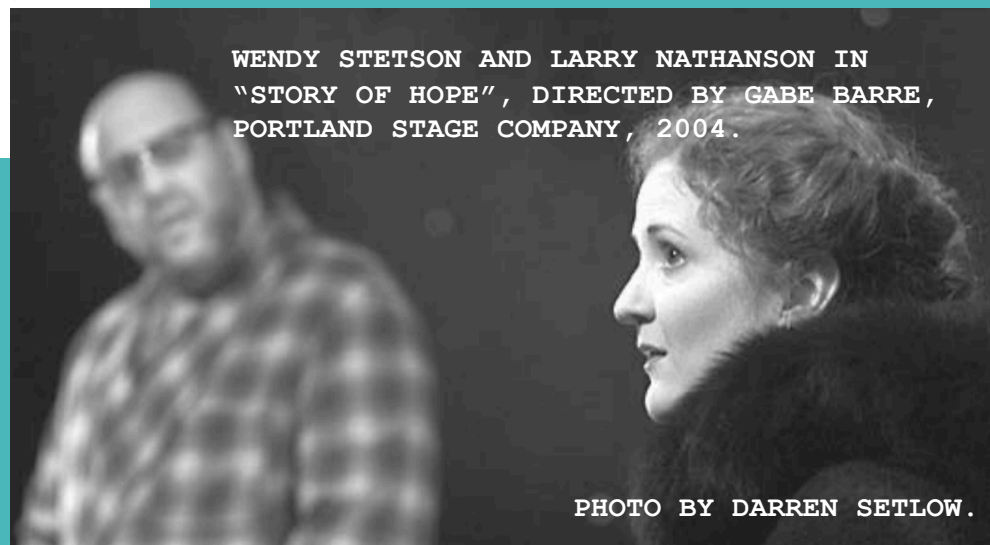
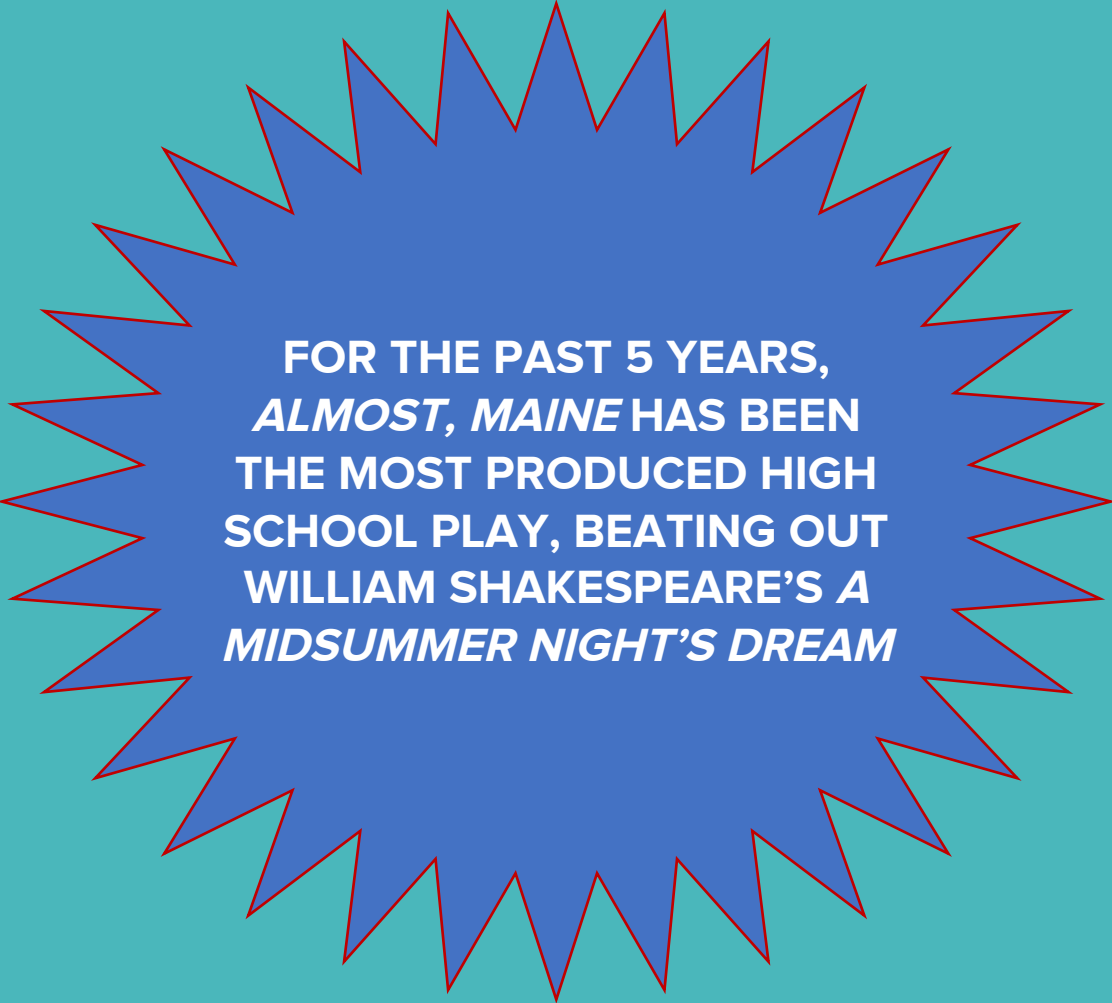
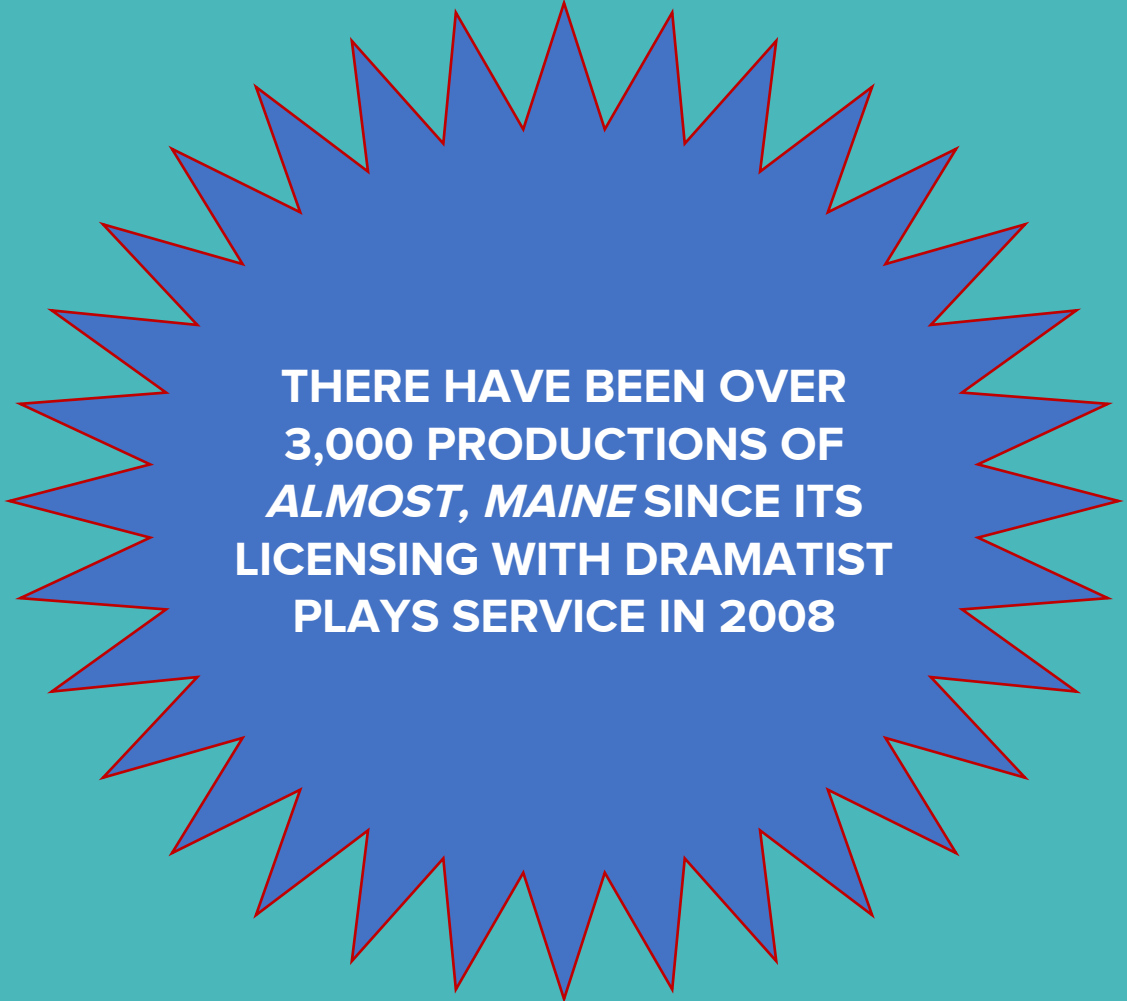


PHOTO BY DARREN SETLOW.

DID YOU KNOW...



FOR THE PAST 5 YEARS,
ALMOST, MAINE HAS BEEN
THE MOST PRODUCED HIGH
SCHOOL PLAY, BEATING OUT
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S *A
MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*



THERE HAVE BEEN OVER
3,000 PRODUCTIONS OF
ALMOST, MAINE SINCE ITS
LICENSING WITH DRAMATIST
PLAYS SERVICE IN 2008

"... And, see, the northern lights—did you know this?—the northern lights are really the torches that the recently departed carry with them so they can find their way home, to heaven, and, see, it takes a soul three days to make its way home, to heaven, and this is Friday, this is the third day, so, you see, I will see them, because they're him: He'll be carrying one of the torches."

- Glory in "Her Heart", *Almost, Maine*



NORTHERN LIGHTS AND LEGENDS

- The ancient Greeks believed that the northern lights were the goddess Aurora racing in her chariot to alert her sisters, the goddesses Helios (the sun) and Selene (the moon) of the new day.
- In Finland, people said that the lights were sparks generated from a firefox's tail as he darted across the snow.
- In northern China, the lights were thought to be a good and an evil dragon fighting in the sky.
- Indigenous tribes in North America also have different beliefs regarding the lights. The Cree in northern Canada believe that the lights represent spirits who have left this Earth and are trying to communicate with those they left behind.
- Many Inuit tribes hold that the lights are the spirits of dead humans playing a game with a walrus skull serving as a ball.
- The people residing on the Nunavik Island reverse this belief, and instead think the lights are a group of walruses playing ball with a human skull.





For Northern Maine and the people who live there

*- John Cariani,
Almost Maine*