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**‘Prometheus/Redux,’ sequel to groundbreaking ‘SteelBound,’ to anchor upcoming Festival UnBound in Bethlehem**

Original commissioned work by Touchstone Theatre explores the question of moving forward 20 years after the closing of Bethlehem Steel

“Let’s go.”

Those were the last words uttered in *Steelbound,* Touchstone Theatre’s groundbreaking 1999 theatrical work that anchored its Steel Festival, a multi-arts festival celebrating Bethlehem’s heritage of steelmaking soon after steelmaking stopped in Bethlehem.

Now, 20 years later, Touchstone – and Bethlehem – have moved forward into the future. It is exploring that future in a new work, a sequel to *Steelbound* called *Prometheus/Redux,* which anchors a new and bigger festival – Festival UnBound.

“We used to be bound by the steel or bound to the steel. It defined us,” says *Prometheus/Redux* director Christopher Shorr. “The steel is gone. The [Martin] tower has fallen. We are no longer bound by that. We are, as a community, unbound. Now we ask the questions: How do we define ourselves? What is the future we make?”

*Prometheus/Redux* on stage Oct. 4-6 at Lehigh Valley Charter High School for the Arts, is the opening work of Festival UnBound, a 10-day community convergence of art, music and conversation Oct. 4-13. The festival features two dozen free and ticketed events, including nine original theater pieces. It is a collaboration with the City of Bethlehem, local African-American and Latinx communities, local schools such as Moravian and local steelworkers and residents.

*Steelbound* was an adaptation of Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound,* a Greek tragedy in which Prometheus stands for human progress against the forces of nature. In the work, Bill George, Touchstone co-founder and ensemble member, played a steelworker named Prometheus. Written by Alison Carey of Cornerstone Theater of Los Angeles and inspired by stories gathered from the community, *Steelbound* featured a cast of more than 50, including former steelworkers and their families and neighbors, and was produced in the foundry of the closed steel plant in south Bethlehem.

In *Prometheus/Redux,* commissioned for Festival UnBound, George returns as Prometheus. It’s 20 years after he left the Steel – and now, instead of being chained to the ladle, he is bound to a hospital bed, suffering from liver failure. Where has he been? What’s on his mind? And how can he find a place for himself in such a changed world?

“The fact that we have a character dealing with this stuff makes it very, very timely because we do need to figure out how, in a changing world, there is a place for everyone,” says Shorr, who is also a Touchstone ensemble member and director of theater at Moravian College.

Prometheus/Redux is written by Gerard Stropnicky, a founding member of Bloomsburg Theatre Ensemble, which has worked with Touchstone on other projects. Stropnicky started the project with a new round of story gathering, with former steelworkers, their children and grandchildren, as well as other community residents, including those in local government, hospital workers, social workers and residents of a homeless shelter.

“We’re not only looking at our community 20 years later, but the specific characters 20 years later,” says Shorr. “Whereas *Steelbound* was asking how do we stop the bleeding, this play approaches from a much more comfortable place – we’re not in a moment of trauma, but things have changed.”

The play takes place in a hospital, a nod to the healthcare industry that has replaced steel manufacturing as the primary industry. It marks a shift in the community from building things to building bridges.

Actors play doctors, nurses and other health care professionals. They trained with people from the Moravian College nursing program.

“We want to get this medical work right in a way that honors the healthcare industry in the way that we honored steelworkers in ‘Steelbound,’ “ says Shorr.

The play incorporates text and music from *Steelbound*, including music by Ysaye Barnwell from a cappella group Sweet Honey in the Rock. Some comes via abstract sequences in which Prometheus is having medically-induced hallucinations.

The plot includes twists and turns that cannot be revealed. Sometimes the players will directly address the audience as they share their thoughts about the community.

The cast is a tapestry of old and new. It includes former steelworkers, a county judge and members of previous generations of the Touchstone ensemble. It features Ashley Tait Weller, who was part of the Young People’s Chorus as a 12-year-old in “Steelbound” and now plays Prometheus’ doctor. She is also choreographer. Costumer is Bethlehem City Councilwoman Olga Negron, who studied theater at the University of Puerto Rico.

Music is by Harry Mann, a musician and veteran of the New York theater scene. There will be live sound on stage as well as recorded music. The chorus is directed by Alyssa Lou Ann Allen, Touchstone Theatre apprentice and local musician.

Images and footage from the Steelworkers Archives is also incorporated into the work. Watch for the image of the Martin Tower implosion in May.

While a Bethlehem resident who is familiar with *Steelbound* or worked at the Steel or has an awareness of the issues affecting the city will get the most from the play, there will be plenty to appreciate for the general public, says Shorr.

That the play opens Festival UnBound is significant in that it looks back and positions the festival – and the community -- to move forward.

*Steelbound* launched Touchstone, one of the country’s longest continuously-producing ensemble theaters, on its community -based work path, which has continued with works such as *The Don Quixote Project*, inspired by the diverse South Side Bethlehem neighborhood and the desire to bridge the gap between the Anglo and Latino culture, and *Journey to the East*, another two-year project, this one inspired by the influx of Chinese people into Bethlehem.

 “Beautifully, each of the Touchstone community-based projects speaks to major American issues,” says Shorr.

*Prometheus/Redux* is sponsored by Air Products, the Lehigh Valley Charter High School for the Arts, WDIY 88.1 and PBS 39.

For more info on Festival UnBound, see [www.festivalunbound.com](http://www.festivalunbound.com) or call 610-867-1689.

**CONTACT:**

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Lead actor Bill George: 610-570-1335, bill@touchstone.org

**DATES & TIMES:**

Friday, October 4 – 8:00-10:00p

Saturday, October 5 – 2:00-4:00p (panel discussion follows performance\*)

Saturday, October 5 – 8:00-10:00p

Sunday, October 6 – 7:00-9:00p *(Open Captions*and*Audio Description)*

**VENUE:**  Lehigh Valley Charter High School for the Arts | 321 E. Third Street, Bethlehem, PA

**PRICE:**  $25 adult & $15 student/senior/steelworkers; limited amount of **Pay What You Will** tickets for purchase; please call 610-867-1689 to order.

\**There will be a****panel discussion****following the Saturday, October 5th 2pm performance facilitated by Bethlehem City Councilman Willie Reynolds from City of Bethlehem.  The discussion will explore the changing landscape of our post-steel community, including topics of health and housing.*