

DIRECTOR'S VISION BY MICHAEL PERLMAN



Director Michael Perlman at the first read-through of *A Wonderful Life*. ©Diane Sobolewski

What is your inspiration for *A Wonderful Life*?

Our inspiration, as a creative team, springs from trying to honor the story's spirit of warmth, hopefulness, and family. *A Wonderful Life* is a story with a huge heart. Especially when times are tough, as times certainly grow tough for George Bailey, it is important, relevant, and necessary to remember that we all have the power to affect and transform others' lives in profound and unexpected ways. In this way, the story of George Bailey is the story of all of us. For the telling of this story to be successful, we have to be able to see ourselves in George Bailey's struggles, but also in the ways that he keeps going, keeps moving forward, and puts the hopes, dreams, and needs of others first. He is a remarkably dynamic, complex, and sympathetic character, which explains a lot of why he has such resonance in American life.

To bring Bedford Falls to stage, the designers and I looked at Norman Rockwell paintings, which are the sort of timeless artwork that inspires nostalgia for small town America. We were also looking for ways to communicate how the angel characters in the show, Matthew and Clarence, are able to observe Bedford Falls from heaven. The concept of a snow globe was a recurring theme in our conversations, the idea being that heaven is populated with various snow globes, each containing a different person's story. We were also drawn to the way that windows are used in the story—including as a magical way to make wishes come true. You will notice that a collage of windows serves as our set. This is part of the idea of a window as a way to peer into someone else's soul.

What makes *The Goodspeed* the perfect fit for this production?

The Goodspeed is the perfect fit in so many ways. East Haddam, like Bedford Falls, is a small, close-knit community, evocative of a simpler time. The performance space is so intimate that it allows the audience to truly feel close to the action onstage, which reinforces the idea that we are sharing an intimate glimpse into each character's life.

Also, since part of the show actually takes place in heaven, we thought it would be useful to imagine *The Goodspeed* itself as heaven. As soon as the lights go down and the show begins, we are transported to another realm, and we share the vantage point of an angel when we observe, as Clarence does, the process of watching critical moments unfolding in George Bailey's life.

What are the challenges to staging in this unique venue?

Well, it's a very small space, that's true. When I first saw the space, I described it as a big hug around the stage. For our creative team, we knew the uniqueness of the venue would reinforce our efforts if we could get the heart of the story right and build our approach from there. Our biggest challenge was figuring out how to produce a musical with so many locations over such an expanse of time. We are talking about decades in the life of a town, and this requires a great variety of interiors and exteriors.

What can the audience expect to see?

The audience can expect a timeless story in a timeless setting. I think it will be fun for them to notice that, while there are definitely homages to the movie in both the script and the design, the actors are bringing life to these well-known characters in surprising and heartwarming ways. I think people will be visiting a world that feels at once familiar and new, and they will see *The Goodspeed* as a place where magic can happen.