

# Touchstone scored a touchdown with “Steelbound”!

The Bethlehem Gadfly Arts, the, Fun Stuff, Touchstone Theater September 27, 2019

*(6th in a series of posts on Touchstone Theatre)*

Gadfly has said that Touchstone Theatre is one of the things that makes Bethlehem special, very special.

Some of you went to the Wednesday film showing of Touchstone’s “Steelbound,” the 1999 play about the closing of Bethlehem Steel that provides the point of reference for “Prometheus/Redux,” the central event of this year’s 10-day [“Festival Unbound.”](#)

Let’s see, Holly; Geoff; Ron; Sharon; Kathy; CB, yeah, you were there, CB; Gene; neighbor Mrs. Bader; etc., etc. — a nice crowd.

But many of you weren’t there.

Well, now, you missed *something*!

But all is not lost >>>>>

In an incredible opening scene — which must have been simply fantastic to watch in the actual old deserted Steel building that acted as the stage — a steelmaker — Prometheus — a man locked in the past now that the Steel has closed — is chained to a huge — I mean HUGE — machine — a ladle.

A victim of “History, Progress, the invisible forces of fate, the inevitability of change.”

Prometheus isn't going quietly into what he sees as the dark night of the future as he was “supposed to.” He's welded to the ladle because he's a “whining son of a bitch” and people have “run out of patience with his mewling.” His fate as representative steelman is not pretty for “every once in a while progress needs a little brutality and indifference to close the deal.”

Prometheus is full of anger — outrage, really — and self-pity. He did his job, giving the nation “its planes, its guns, its paperclips” — its bridges, moon rockets, skyscrapers. “Steelmen made our time,” he says, and when people asked “What do you do?” those steelmen replied, “I'm building America.”

Well, that grand role only got Prometheus and his fellows a place in the unemployment line when the Steel closed, “the shame of greed and bad planning.”

In the final analysis, he's “a sucker who gave his life for a promise unkept, his “reward . . . to be pushed out to make room for the 21st century” — “agony with no end in sight.”

And he doesn't want to capitulate to the forces of Progress and move on: “Time will come for us again” . . . “Progress is going to need me.”

Surrounding voices of reason argue, beg, cajole him to leave. But “the only way to get out” Prometheus can see “is to promise to shut up and quietly give up my place in the world.” “It's too late for a new beginning for me,” he laments.

This is the end of Prometheus's world and, symbolically, the end of Bethlehem's life as it was known for generations, a life nobody imagined would end.

The potential death of a city, a community?

*"Steelbound* was not about the future as we had thought it might be," said actor and Touchstone artistic director Mark McKenna, "It was about closure on the past."

Are you seeing how important this play is/was to our understanding of the life of our City at the closing of the Steel?

We'll come back and talk more about that closure on the past and details of the play next time.

But for now Gadfly encourages you to watch "Steelbound."

## **Festival UnBound**

**Ten days of original theatre, dance, music, art and conversation designed to celebrate and imagine our future together!**

**October 4-13**