

“Steelbound,” the context

The Bethlehem Gadfly Arts, the, Fun Stuff, Touchstone Theater September 28, 2019

(9th in a series of posts on Touchstone Theatre)

Gadfly captured these videos at the *Steelbound* showing Wednesday, September 25.

Bill George — a driving force in Touchstone Theatre — played Prometheus in *Steelbound* as he will in *Prometheus/Redux*.

Hank Barnette was Chairman of the Board at Bethlehem Steel from 1992-2000, the period the Steel was closing and in which *Steelbound* was developed and performed.

Bill George: <https://youtu.be/UzgoyZygZbA>

Bill reminded us that the dying of the Steel — “in many ways the poppa of this community for a hundred and some years” — was a traumatic event for all of us and that people needed some way to mark the transition.

He stressed “how unusual it was for the Steel [especially Hank Barnett and Steve Donchez] to have the courage to bring this little theater company into their kitchen at this extremely emotional time when there was a lot of anger and a lot of shame, a sense of failure, a lot of sadness, a lot of fear about the future . . . to bring us into that situation showed so much courage on the part of a *business*.”

Hank Barnette: <https://youtu.be/5kXu8y1ST8A>

Hank stressed how difficult the decision to close the Steel was, knowing the impact on the community would be severe. He stressed that serving the community/public was a Bethlehem Steel goal and that they didn't "walk away" as they could have legally. He pointed to the large and lucrative development that has already occurred on the Steel site, with more to come. He pointed to a valuable partnership including Steve Donchez, and Mayor Ken Smith and City Council president Jim DelGrosso.

Jennie Gilrain, *Steelbound's* Movement Director, sent Gadfly this informative reminiscence from the Detroit airport:

It was an incredible experience . . . so rich and full of integrity and true storytelling based on community engagement. My husband, Mark McKenna, was Artistic Director of Touchstone at the time and played a key role in making it happen along with Bridget George who was Producing Director. Mark played "Herman the historian," the guy who climbs the ladle at the end of the play to interview Prometheus. We actually got the inspiration for the production from our teacher, Jacques Lecoq. While visiting Bethlehem from Paris for "The Festival of Creation" at Touchstone, Lecoq took a tour of the functioning Centec branch of the steel mill (a French based company), witnessed a pouring of molten metal, and exclaimed, "Il faut... un chœur qui chante!" The vastness of the space made him imagine a Greek chorus chanting in the mill. It was Gus Ripa at Lehigh who suggested the Aeschylus tragedy, "Prometheus Bound." Alison Carey of Cornerstone adapted the Greek tragedy to our local situation. Deb Sacarakis at Lehigh was key in

commissioning Jay O'Callahan at Zoellner, who created and performed an amazing story about a steelworker family based on hundreds of interviews that he did in Bethlehem. Jay's story is available on C.D., titled "Pouring the Sun." The festival was about 5 years in the making!

Festival UnBound

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

October 4-13