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# Directing under the spiritual domination of the sea

Nina Kelly Morrison  
*University of Iowa*

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DIRECTING UNDER THE SPIRITUAL DOMINATION OF THE SEA

by

Nina Kelly Morrison

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Master of Fine Arts  
degree in Theatre Arts in the  
Graduate College of  
The University of Iowa

May 2016

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Eric Forsythe

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Graduate College  
The University of Iowa  
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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MASTER'S THESIS

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This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

Nina Kelly Morrison

has been approved by the Examining Committee for  
the thesis requirement for the Master of Fine Arts degree  
in Theatre Arts at the May 2016 graduation.

Thesis Committee:

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Eric Forsythe, Thesis Supervisor

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Tlaloc Rivas

...The sea operates a power over one's moods, it works like a will. The sea can hypnotize. Nature in general can...She has come from the sea...

Henrik Ibsen  
*Notes, 1887*

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## **PUBLIC ABSTRACT**

This thesis is a partial production book for my direction of Henrik Ibsen's 1888 play, *Lady from the Sea*. I detail my personal and emotional connection to *Lady from the Sea*. I also cover the visual research of the location in Norway as well as the history and criticism that influenced my directing choices.

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# 1 CONCEPT

## 1.1 Path to the play

My path to Ibsen's *Lady from the Sea* was long and tortuous, qualities I now realize are appropriate for the themes of this play. I began the 2014 academic year thinking that I would be directing a play I was writing in an independent study, *Féminaal*. This would have been a "second stage" production in Thayer. Due to some last minute budget restructuring that option was taken off the table that fall. If I wasn't able to work on my own script, then I wanted to pursue the same themes of feminist and/or queer inquiry into the "bad boy" archetype. I then proposed some other options, Brecht's adaptation of *Edward II*, Elizabeth Meriwether's *Heddatron*, and Ariana Reines' *Telephone*. All were rejected, and I was asked to read Churchill's *The Skriker* and Aphra Behn's *The Rover* among other pieces considered feminist. They were excellent works, but they were not asking the questions that I hoped to address in my thesis.

Bryon Winn had offhandedly mentioned that everyone in the department "loves Ibsen," and that the season needed a classic, but assured me that I shouldn't base my search on their needs for the season. At this point in my search, though, I was becoming desperate for something that would be accepted by the faculty, so I began reviewing production photos of Ibsen works at theatres I respect. I found some production photos of *Lady from the Sea* at Deutsches Theater Berlin that piqued my interest. I read it once and was struck by its rich world of humor, mystery, sweetness, repression, longing and grief. Its emotional sprawl was exciting. I read it again more closely and then proposed it to the committee.

## 1.2 Personal Connection

In analyzing what about my life may have connected me to this play I first thought that it was Ellida's choice to which I most related. I had moved from my home of seventeen years in New York City to come to Iowa to get an MFA and qualify myself to teach at the university level. The decision to uproot my wife and our cats, leave my job, creative community, close friends and home for my entire adult life to be in academia in the midwest was one of the biggest changes I have ever made to my life. There are elements of this choice that drew me to this play, but upon further reflection I realized it was Ellida's isolation that I kept returning to as an access to understanding her, and, to some extent, all of the characters' situations.

Until I was fourteen, my family lived in a tiny town called Ivy outside of the city of Charlottesville, Virginia. It took roughly 20 minutes by car to reach our school, restaurants, and my other school friends, and we were surrounded by woods and only a couple of neighbors on farms within a mile radius. The views of the Blue Ridge Mountains were beautiful, and our home had been built to maximize our experience of the view. I was not, and still am not, a particularly outdoorsy person, and when my parents went to work during the summers I would be left to entertain myself. I didn't have friends within walking distance, and I preferred reading to outdoor fortmaking or other activities. I was expected to play outside though, and my solution to that directive was sneaking books outside. My fantasies as a child were focused on living in a place where pizza could be delivered and cable television could be watched, a place where I could walk to my friends' houses and where there were sidewalks for bike riding. All this longing for community as a child turned me into an urbanophile and a Europhile, and most likely it is why I moved to New York City a few weeks after graduating college.

Reading *Lady from the Sea* I began to recognize elements of my own experience as a child. Ellida is suffocated by the small fjord town she moves to with Dr. Wangel with its stifling air and stale tepid water. She was used to living by the open sea. The sea is a metaphor for her feral nature. As her former suitor Mr. Arnholm reminds her, the old priest used to call her “The pagan”<sup>1</sup> because she was named after a Viking ship rather than being given a Christian name. Ellida’s way of moving through the world was unconventional, most evident when learning that she and the Stranger married themselves to the sea.

Once the Stranger departs, Ellida is left not knowing when she will see him again, and after years of waiting, she meets Wangel. Wangel is much older than she is, and they barely know each other, but she decides to accept his proposal of marriage when he offers to maintain her for life. This decision binds her to him for the rest of her life, and for the first time in her life she is following rules of society rather than fulfilling her own desires as she was with the Stranger. She begins bathing in the fjord every morning. Her disgust with the “sick” “stale and tepid”<sup>2</sup> water of the fjord reveals that the sea is not only a metaphor for Ellida’s nature, but for her sexuality. Ellida’s sexual desire for the Stranger, a feeling that both “terrifies and attracts”<sup>3</sup>, is oceanic and can in no way be fulfilled by the gentle, stagnant waters of the fjord which are a metaphor for her marriage. Ellida’s agreement to marry Wangel and leave her home by the sea in exchange for being

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<sup>1</sup> Ibsen, Henrik, and Fjelde, Rolf. *The Complete Major Prose Plays*, 605.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 604.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 666.

“maintained” for the rest of her life was a pragmatic decision, and a decision about which she expresses regret later in the play.

Women’s circumstances in Norway at the time of the play’s writing left them with precious few choices for their futures. The dominant values were Victorian. Men were expected to be husbands, the caretakers and decision-makers of the household, and they were free to seek fulfillment from their careers and relationships. Women were expected to be wives and mothers, and they were expected to be completely fulfilled by these roles. If they stayed unmarried and were not wealthy, their spinsterdom could leave them in a frighteningly vulnerable financial and social position. Ellida’s isolation is prismatic: sexual, social, geographic, and financial. Though my childhood feelings of isolation did not reach the intensity and depth of Ellida’s, it was still that aspect of her experience that resonated most with me.

### 1.3 Concept, Verb, Basic Action and Target Audience

My concept for *Lady from the Sea* emerged from Ellida’s struggle to be free from societal, class and gender expectations and to be free from the rules she has created for herself. During the play she discovers that her lack of free will is what is keeping her from true happiness. She begs for the right to make her own decision of her own free will, and eventually Wangel grants her that freedom, and her choice is, unexpectedly, to stay with Wangel. Wangel has given her something that no one has ever given her before: freedom; the ability to act of her own free will. Looking at her choice from this perspective, it is obvious why she chose to stay with Wangel, Wangel set her free.

My concept verb is to free, as in to free from bonds. The characters and the whole world of this play move from a bound state to a free state. The Basic Action is: a woman

tormented by warring obligations, duties and expectations that she feels she cannot meet or act upon, strives to free herself from these obligations, duties and expectations and, ultimately, succeeds in acting of her own free will. The Target Audience is those who need to be freed in different ways, i.e. everyone.<sup>4</sup>

#### 1.4 Style

The style in which I chose to direct *Lady from the Sea* is expressionism. From the very first read, my connection with this play was emotional, and expressionism is focused on the emotional experience of the characters. The style choice will be reflected with varying intensity just as it is experienced in the play.

The scenic design pulls far into the abstract with spare open spaces, organically shaped moving platforms, and custom designed modular pieces that act as the only furniture in the world. The sound design is similarly abstract, utilizing a sound bed of distant ocean that is present throughout, starting in the pre-show, continuing through intermission and on until the moment in the final act when Ellida can act of her own free will. The sound designer and I have also found, with the help of the music librarian, the Danish folk song, *Agnete og Havmanden*, on which the idea of this play was at least partially based. We are using a combination of abstract expressionist layers with historical details to create a rich sound atmosphere of this world.

The lighting designer, Lucas P. Ingram, will be using elements of both expressionism and realism. He is using images of the midnight sun in northern Norway, and images of fjords at different times of day during the summer. He will be using fog at

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<sup>4</sup> Forsythe, Eric, PhD, *handwritten notes regarding Concept, Verb, Basic Action and Style*, September 24, 2015

the top of scenes in the morning, all of these are realistic elements. The more abstract expressionist elements are the use of booms for side lighting, often used in dance. The palette is far more abstract, cool colors, taking intensity cues from Ellida's emotional variation rather than realistic circumstances of the time of day.

The costume design is the subtlest expressionistic design element. Designer Catherine Parrot began her process with an entirely realistic world, then she abstracted the principals' looks by choosing a palette more reflective of their emotional states. She moved further into expressionism with her costuming of the ensemble of tourists/townpeople. For them, she took the period silhouette and softened it to give them more movement flexibility, and she made their palette very neutral, using geometric prints in black and white and deep teal in one, all are offset by small pops of color, the red and blue of the Norwegian flag.

### 1.5 Directing Actors in the Style of Expressionism

My approach to directing actors in the style of expressionism is to always keep the focus on the emotional arc of their character in each scene. This focus is not very different from a scene directed in a realistic style, but the difference lies in the freedom of the actor to build the scene and movement using impulses that are not always realistic and not necessarily in alignment with the realistic text. I encourage them to play more freely with subtext and to allow actions and reactions to be explored in a non-realistic way.

## 2 RESEARCH, HISTORY AND CRITICISM

### 2.1 Norwegian Landscape Research

I began my research into the landscape of a northern Norway fjord town by contacting a few Norwegians and asking them what it was like to live by a fjord, and why

would Ellida insist that it was so uncomfortable when surrounded by visually stunning views. I learned that while the vistas are breathtaking that often there is fishing happening in the fjords, and the fishermen used to take all the fish they catch during the day and impale them on a pole that stood in the shallow water while they continued fishing. This would cause a sometimes overwhelming odor. Additionally, during the summer months it is quite humid, and fjords are located between mountains and mountainous islands, so the air sometimes can feel like it is not moving.

There is also the very real problem of isolation, one of the Norwegians I interviewed told me that even now it is difficult to get to a fjord town by car. At the time of this play's writing in 1888 the only way to travel on land was by horse and carriage, and so their isolation was made that much more extreme. Cars had only recently been invented and had not become a normal mode of transportation yet. Even if one could travel by boat, the winter season is long in northern Norway and the sea lanes become quickly locked in ice. Again, I am reminded of my own far less dramatic isolation as a child in Virginia, unable to travel anywhere and craving adventure.

The weather in northern Norway at the end of the summer season (the end of July) is around 30 degrees Fahrenheit overnight and between 60 and 70 degrees Fahrenheit during the day. It is often humid, hazy and foggy. The summer is when Norway experiences the midnight sun, the phenomenon of the sun staying in the sky nearly all day and night then "setting" by briefly dipping below the horizon for a few moments then "rising" again. It has been described as being in twilight all night. The colors and light of the midnight sun are vastly different from the winter phenomenon of the aurora borealis, but both of these natural wonders are experienced in Norway. The designers

and I did a lot of research on the light of the midnight sun and the design palette and lighting looks are inspired by it. Ellida and the two Wangel daughters are trapped in a northern fjord town only visited by tourists during the brief months of summer. They see the midnight sun and, rather than enjoying its beauty, they think of how soon the sea lanes will be locked. The groups of tourists just remind them of how trapped they are.

## 2.2 Circumstances surrounding the writing of *Lady from the Sea*

Ibsen wrote *Lady from the Sea* while vacationing in Sæby on the coast of Denmark with his wife, Suzannah, and his mother-in-law Magdalene Thoresen.

The Ibsens spent the summer of 1887 on Denmark's Jutland coast, mostly in the seaside resort of Sæby, where Suzannah could take long walks in the neighboring forests and Ibsen could indulge in his habit of sea gazing as he thought out his next play. In Sæby, Ibsen encountered the story of a local author, Adda Ravnkilde, who had committed suicide at the age of twenty-one. He visited Ravnkilde's home and grave, and read her works with interest. The short story "Pyrrhic Victory" describes a marriage in which the wife, who wishes to become a writer, challenges a husband who demands that she devote her life to him, a conflict Ibsen would dramatize in *The Lady from the Sea* in Lyngstrand's and Bolette's argument about a wife's role in marriage. A repeated leitmotiv in Ravnkilde's autobiographical work is a longing to escape the provincial town for the great world, a dream Ibsen gave to Bolette. Another overriding subject is a young woman's losing battle to overcome her obsessional, self-destructive love for a man, the kind of disastrous attachment Ibsen would dramatize in his protagonist Ellida Wangel's relation with the seaman.<sup>5</sup>

Ibsen was writing directly from his own present experience, a journey by boat to Sæby, his constant sea gazing, and a fascination with investigating the life of the local young dead writer and mining themes from her short stories for his own work.

The writing of *The Lady from the Sea* (1888), like that of *Rosmersholm*, was preceded by a journey, this time to Denmark in the summer of 1887. The Ibsens stayed at Sæby on the coast of Jutland, where Henrik spent much time

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<sup>5</sup> Templeton, Joan. *Ibsen's Women*, 194.



staring out to sea. Several contemporary comments indicate the extent to which the sea was occupying his thoughts; the Norwegians, he was to claim in 1888, 'are spiritually under the domination of the sea'<sup>6</sup>

Ibsen's comment about Norwegians being spiritually under the domination of the sea may seem hyperbolic or poetic to non-Norwegians, but every piece of research I have found relating to this play and the country of Norway is associated with the sea in some way. For instance, the very first pop song I stumbled upon was "Running to the Sea" a collaboration between two Norwegian pop stars, singer Suzanne Sundfør and electronic music duo Röyksopp.

"The relationship between the text and performance is by no means determined solely or primarily by the way in which the text is used and appropriated. Just as or perhaps even more significant are the staging devices...Another device is the use of music that powerfully co-determines the relationship between text and performance."<sup>7</sup>

The mountainous islands and fjords that cover Norway's entire huge coastline have had a profound effect on the Norwegian psyche, and that is reflected in their music, art and folklore. Some of the most helpful research I have done is to look at photographs and watch films of the Norwegian landscape, after looking at it, a play about an obsession with the sea is understandable and expected.

### 2.3 Possible Inspiration for the Character of Ellida

Ellida is part of Ibsen's quartet of prose plays with female heroes: *A Doll House*, *Ghosts*, *Lady from the Sea* and *Hedda Gabler*. As he was creating the character of Ellida,

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<sup>6</sup> McFarlane, James Walter. *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen / Edited by James McFarlane*. (Chapter 7 *The Middle Plays* by Janet Garton), 114.

<sup>7</sup> Fischer-Lichte, Erika., Gronau, Barbara, and Weiler, Christel. *Global Ibsen : Performing Multiple Modernities*. 6.

there were some close personal influences, one obvious example being his mother-in-law, Magdalene Thoreson. In early drafts Ellida was called Thora.

The subject of a woman's unhappy thralldom to a man bears an obvious resemblance to the youthful experience of Magdalene Thoresen, who is generally recognized as having influenced Ibsen's portrait of Ellida Wangel (whom Ibsen first called "Thora"). Ellida's love affair with the mysterious Finn who exercises a mesmerizing effect on her recalls Magdalene Kragh's (her maiden name) similar experience with an Icelander in her student days. After these early liaisons, both women made financially secure marriages with men old enough to be their fathers. Her past aside, Magdalene Thoresen influenced Ibsen's protagonist principally in the kinship she felt with the sea. She regarded herself as both a sea and land animal; as an old woman, living on the Danish coast, she once told a visitor, gesturing toward the ocean, "Isn't it superb here? Oh, I belong to the sea. It draws me, it draws me." (H 11:26) Ellida Wangel's daily swims beyond the fjord directly recall the habit of Magdalene Thoresen, who continued her vigorous seabaths into her seventies. Ibsen also has his protagonist voice his mother-in-law's complaint that the fjord waters, too close to land, were stale and unhealthy.<sup>8</sup>

Ibsen was clearly influenced by his mother-in-law's experience of the fjord waters. From his first notes on the play we can see other influences, like old folklore of Vikings and trolls. Ibsen was also using the character of Ellida to house some of his musings about the sea and its effect on humans, and the sea's connection to human origins.

"People akin to the sea. Bound by the sea. Dependent on the sea. Must return to it. One fish species forms a basic link in the evolutionary series. Do rudiments of it still remain in the human mind? In the minds of certain individuals?"

"Ellida Wangel is one such mind. Living in a tiny, provincial town...she is both landlocked in a rootless marriage with the local physician and spellbound by the sea, whose fluctuating moods suffused her lonely impressionable childhood. Only daughter of a lighthouse keeper and a mother who died insane, she was irresistibly drawn as a young girl to the first mate of an American ship, a Finn whose talk conjured protean images of sea-creatures and whose sea-eyes mesmerized her."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Templeton, Joan. *Ibsen's Women*, 194.

<sup>9</sup> Quote from Ibsen's notes on the play written in 1887. Excerpt of Fjelde's introduction in Ibsen, Henrik, and Fjelde, Rolf. *The Complete Major Prose Plays*, 589.

The mesmerizing eyes of the Stranger bring us to another important element of this play, magic.

#### 2.4 The Presence of Magic

The inspiration sources for *Lady from the Sea* are plentiful and not all based in folklore, but there are enough instances of the unexplained in the play to warrant some exploration. The presence of magic and the supernatural reinforced my expressionistic choice

...on 5 June he jotted down his first notes, nearly two and a half thousand words:

...The sea operates a power over one's moods, it works like a will. The sea can hypnotize. Nature in general can...She has come from the sea...Because secretly engaged to the young, carefree ship's mate...At heart, in her instincts—he is one with whom she is living in marriage...

...His first wife appears as Thora (an echo of Magdelene Thoresen?), but Ibsen changed this to Ellida; in the *Saga of Frithiof the Bold* there is a ship named Ellida which (as Halvdan Koht as pointed out) is like a living person fighting against secret troll-powers that try to drag her down beneath the sea.<sup>10</sup>

In Ibsen's first notes for the play he talks about the power of nature and of the sea.

He also mentions her instincts. He was looking to draw from primal sources in her.

Meyer also mentions her name being taken from the name of a Viking ship that is written about as though it were a person who fought troll-powers to drag her (the ship) under the sea. The name Ellida is not the only instance of the story that is drawn from legend and folklore.

*The Lady from the Sea* draws on the merfolk of Nordic folklore. The male water-spirit the "nøkk," usually associated with rivers and streams, but sometimes with the sea, charms with his seductive songs and can cast dangerous spells. Through the mere fact of being Norwegian, Ibsen was familiar with this creature, who appears in his poems. He encountered the "havmand," the merman proper, in the

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<sup>10</sup> Meyer, Michael Levenson. *Ibsen, a Biography*, 597.

Danish and Norwegian ballad collections he read early in his career. Like the “nøkk,” the “havmand” can lure, but he is normally more benign than his female counterpart the “havfrue,” the mermaid, known for her power to seduce. Another important tradition in Nordic mermaid lore from the Christian era onwards is that of the “good” mermaid who desires to become human so that she may possess a soul. The most well-known version is Hans Christian Andersen’s *The Little Mermaid*, which Ibsen knew. The folk tradition also contains many accounts of stranded or captured mermaids who lived unhappily, some of them dying, in their foreign environment. In shaping his drama, Ibsen typically drew on the different traditions as it pleased him. His “merman” possesses the power to seduce, while his “mermaid” feels trapped in the human world, yet longs to be integrated within it.<sup>11</sup>

Ibsen thus imbues the psychology of his characters with the dynamics and circumstances of a human man and a mermaid, and her former lover, a merman. Ellida is gripped by a fear of the Stranger that seems otherworldly. She will no longer have a sexual relationship with her husband, Dr. Wangel, after her child with Wangel has eyes that resemble the Stranger’s eyes. Wangel thinks the child’s eyes were normal, but Ellida insists they were changeable just like the Stranger’s. The Nordic mythology includes magic powers and powers of possession that include the Stranger’s ability to possess Wangel and impregnate Ellida through him. Ellida believes this is how she had the Stranger’s child, and she stops sexual relations with Wangel to protect him and herself from repeating that experience.

In this play too, Ibsen has drawn on folk belief and legend, which carry much intuitive knowledge of intoxication and possession. It was established at the beginning of the play that Ellida belongs to a different world; and it is a world she shares with the Stranger. The whole play this time takes place in Northern Norway, with its brief hectic summers and isolated winters. Ellida belongs to the wilder shores of this land, and the stranger comes from even further north. At the start his origins are mysterious; Lyngstrand calls him ‘the American’, associating him with ‘the free world’ in the era of emigration, and his name seems to be Johnston. Later we learn from Ellida that his original name was, significantly, Freeman, and that he came from the northernmost part of

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<sup>11</sup> Templeton, Joan. *Ibsen's Women*, 196.

Norway, Finnmark, and had actually been born in Finland. This makes him a 'kvæn', a Finnish immigrant; the name carries untranslatable connotations both of mysterious foreignness and of suspicious unreliability. He possesses demonic powers associated with the far North, and can cast spells on things and people. His declaration about Ellida when he discovers her faithlessness has the incantatory ring of a Lappish curse: 'Men min er hun og hente hende some en druknet mand fra svarte sjøen' (literally translated: 'But mine she is, and mine she shall be. And me she shall follow, if I have to come home and collect her as a drowned man from the black sea').

As a rural community heavily dependent on the sea, it is not surprising that Norway has many legends of drowned sailors returning to haunt the living. Lyngstrand's image of a drowned man standing over his sleeping wife who has been unfaithful is based on one such legend, and the belief that a revenant can actually father a child is another. In another sense, the Stranger is a merman, is even the sea itself. His eyes, like the baby's, change with the sea. Ellida has been enticed by this sea creature as is the maiden in the eighteenth-century ballad of 'Agnete og Havmanden' (Agnete and the Merman), and in the play based on that ballad by Hans Christian Andersen, *Agnete og Havmanden* (1833), to which Ibsen's play bears many resemblances. Another story of Andersen's with which comparison is clearly invited is his *Den lille Havfrue* (The Little Mermaid, 1837), in which the mermaid chooses life on land at great sacrifice to herself and without ever finding a home in her new environment.<sup>12</sup>

Ellida's life being based on elements of a dark fairy tale again recommends an expressionist approach to the text. The mystery of Ellida's terror confounds Dr. Wangel, a man of science and reason, who eventually relents in his point of view when discussing the situation with Arnholm. Fjelde suggests this may be Ibsen speaking through Wangel.

...her immersion in the intuitive, will-less hyperaesthesia of the total self conveys Ibsen's art into the border zone of parapsychology. The Stranger's conjectural possession of Wangel's body to father a child by Wangel, his materialization "large as life" before her eyes, her seeming precognitive sense of his presence before he arrives are all paranormal phenomena, whereof Wangel perhaps speaks

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<sup>12</sup> McFarlane, James Walter. *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen*, Chapter 7: The Middle Plays, by Janet Garton, 114-118.

for Ibsen in saying: “I neither believe nor disbelieve. I simply don’t know. So I leave it open.”<sup>13</sup>

Ibsen, through Dr. Wangel specifically in the moment referenced above, but more generally throughout the entire play, questions the power of myth, magic and nature upon our human wills. The presence of magic and the subject matter heavily drawn from mythology and folklore also suggested expressionism was the most appropriate style for this play which, at times, can feel like a dream or a nightmare.

## 2.5 Ibsen’s Next Two Plays

The next play Ibsen wrote, a short two years later in 1890, was *Hedda Gabler*. Hedda shares many themes with *Lady from the Sea* that clearly Ibsen had not finished exploring: the madness of women without purpose; the danger of unrequited female sexual desire; the power of the object of lust returning, reawakening old feral behaviors, to name a few.

Enough parallels exist between the unhappy heroine of *Hedda Gabler* (1890) and Ellida Wangel in the immediately preceding to indicate that Ibsen was impelled to take a second look, in another context, at a single provocative set of relationships. Both women are depicted as restively enduring the limbo of an emotionally detached marriage to a dependable, unexciting husband chosen more for acceptability than for love. Both have their condition complicated by the lack of any real responsibilities or clear direction in their self-absorbed lives. Each woman is then perilously unbalanced by the sudden reawakening of a former involvement, through the return of a virile, undomesticated male with a strong romantic aura, who speaks to the heart of her being with a bewilderingly intimate authority.<sup>14</sup>

Ibsen’s play after *Hedda Gabler* (1890) was *The Master Builder* (1892), and in the only instance of a repeating character in this play cycle, Hilda Wangel returns, and

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<sup>13</sup> Ibsen, Henrik, and Fjelde, Rolf. *The Complete Major Prose Plays*, 590.

<sup>14</sup> Ibsen, Henrik, and Fjelde, Rolf. *The Complete Major Prose Plays*, 690.

she brings inspiration to Master Builder Solness. In addition to the return of a character, in *The Master Builder* Ibsen is also exploring some of the themes present in *Lady from the Sea*. Some notable overlaps are: a relationship between an older man and a younger woman that involves the older man being obsessed with the younger woman, and that obsession manifesting in wanting to impose his will upon her (Wangel more gently to Ellida than Solness to Hilda); the presence of magical powers, Solness uses telepathy with Kaja and with Hilda; and the presence of magical folkloric elements like trolls and devils.

*The Master Builder* (1892) is iridescently imbued throughout with the quality that J.R.R. Tolkien once declared so essential to any work of successful fantasy, an “arresting strangeness”. Halvard Solness, a distinguished architect at the peak of his career, keeps his hard-driven staff of three in forced servitude by literally spellbinding the young woman who does his bookkeeping... Into this airless prison of enslaved and exhausted energies comes an unanticipated and breezily refreshing caller from the seventh play of the cycle, the now grown younger daughter of Dr. Wangel, her entrance again seemingly in telepathic response to Solness’ troubled thoughts... They then proceed to converse like conspiratorial children in a secret language, an idiom of encoded images of castles in the air, dreams of falling, helpers and servers, trolls, devils, towers and princesses. And as they talk, the burdens of the master builder’s past and present melt away before an influx of resurgent vitality and creative purpose.<sup>15</sup> (p. 780)

Noting the growing instances of magic and the nature of will appearing in the plays following *Lady from the Sea*, I was emboldened to explore those aspects in depth in my direction. We treat the magic elements as reality, these characters are human beings living in the world who are experiencing the paranormal and find the truth of their experience.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibsen, Henrik, and Fjelde, Rolf. *The Complete Major Prose Plays*, 780.

## 3 PUBLICITY

### 3.1 Poster Design

Because my experience of this play was so tied to the emotional impact of the northern Norwegian fjord landscape, I, scenic designer Kevin Dudley, graphic designer John Foster and marketing coordinator Kristan Hellige, all thought it best to start with images of this landscape. Foster used a color treatment on a photo of a fjord in Norway that suggested a washed out fatigue rather than the usual majesty suggested in photos of this landscape. That turned out well and reflected the palette suggested by Dudley. After receiving the first draft of the poster, I requested a more distressed sans serif font and some sort of unusual color treatment behind the word Lady to hint at her mysterious depths. Foster returned an excellent new draft incorporating those thoughts.

### 3.2 Quotations about Ibsen and about the Play

Working on the latest draft of the poster, Hellige and I decided to add a quotation about either Ibsen or the play. I found some quotations in articles and reviews of the play. These are the three I presented to her as options for the poster.

“Ibsen is, arguably, the most important playwright writing after Shakespeare.” -Toril Moi, *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism*

“a profound, poetic dramatist, the best since Shakespeare.” - Richard Hornby, *Ibsen Triumphant*, *The Hudson Review*, Vol. 56, No. 4 (Winter, 2004), pp. 685-691

“*The Lady from the Sea* encompasses all those familiar Ibsen themes: duty, responsibility, the position of women and how the past encroaches on the future...It's as quicksilver as the sea itself, full of riptides, swells and undercurrents...” – Lyn Gardner, *The Guardian* (<http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2010/oct/19/the-lady-from-the-sea-review>)

Hellige chose the second quotation and Foster added it to the poster and the final version of that poster is attached in Part 12 of this document.



#### 4 DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Crafting the Director's Note for the program was challenging in that I wanted to include all the different elements that interested me about this play, while simultaneously wanting to focus the audience's experience. I compromised and focused my note on the oceanic nature of the emotional journey in this play.

Director's Note:

"...the Norwegians, [Ibsen] was to claim in 1888, 'are spiritually under the domination of the sea.'"(Janet Garton, *The Middle Plays*)

Rehearsing this play, I have been continually struck by its exploration of the oceanic nature of life. Ibsen throws us onto the open sea to experience vicissitudes of obsession, love, sexual desire, fear, pragmatism, youth, aging and mystery. Scenes swell with riotous humor and break with personal tragedy on the surface atop fathomless depths of longing beneath.

Given the emotional effect of this play, I and the artistic team chose to work in the style of expressionism. Expressionism focuses on the emotional experience of the characters. We pulled far into abstract expressionism in the scenic, lighting and sound design, while reflecting it more subtly in the costume design. My staging and work with the actors has remained "spiritually under the domination of the sea", the only way it could be in the world of this play.

Wangel: Ellida – I feel something behind this.

Ellida: Yes. You can feel the undertow.

Wangel: The undertow --?

Ellida: That man is like the sea.

*Lady from the Sea* demands that we ask of our own lives: what pulls us under, what sweeps us away, what carries us to adventure, and, most importantly, what sets us free?

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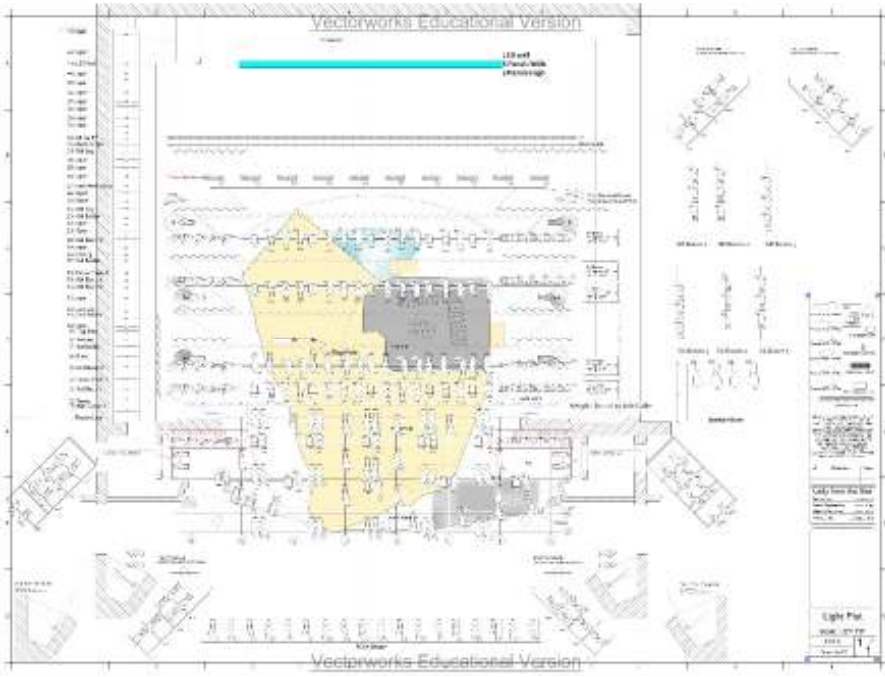
## APPENDIX A: CAST LIST

Ellida	Emelia Pinamang Asiedu
Dr. Wangel	William Goblirsch
Bolette	Niki Charisse Franco
Hilda	Miriam Randolph
Arnholm	Miles Gattrell
Lyngstrand	William Callan
Ballested	Gregory Walker
Stranger	Eli Jolley
Ensemble	Aurora Green, Erica Eiben, Jason Grobstich, Lily Larsen, Anna Tonsfeldt, Nicholas Wang

## APPENDIX B: SCENIC RENDERING



## APPENDIX C: LIGHT PLOT



## APPENDIX D: COSTUME SKETCHES



# Emelia Asiedu – Ellida Wangel



# Emelia Asiedu – Ellida Wangel



# Emelia Asiedu – Ellida Wangel



# Will Goblirsch – Dr. Wangel



# Niki Franco - Bolette



# Miriam Randolph - Hilda



# Miles Gatrell - Arnholm



# Will Callan - Lyngstrand





# Greg Walker - Ballested



# Eli Jolley – The Stranger



## APPENDIX E: LANDSCAPE RESEARCH







## APPENDIX F: FINAL POSTER DESIGN

# LADY FROM THE SEA

By **Henrik Ibsen**

Translated by **Rolf Fjelde**

Directed by **Nina Morrison**

April 15, 16, 21, 22, 23 at 8:00 p.m.  
April 17, 24 at 2:00 p.m.

**Mabie Theatre, UI Theatre Building**

"...a profound poetic dramatist, the best since Shakespeare."  
—Richard Hornby, *Ibsen Triumphant*

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*Lady from the Sea, The* (Fjelde, trans.) is presented by special arrangement with SAMUEL FRENCH, INC.

*Lady from the Sea* is intended for mature audiences.

Individuals with disabilities are encouraged to attend all University of Iowa sponsored events. If you are a person with a disability who requires a reasonable accommodation in order to participate in this program, please contact the Hancher Box Office in advance at 319.335.1158.

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