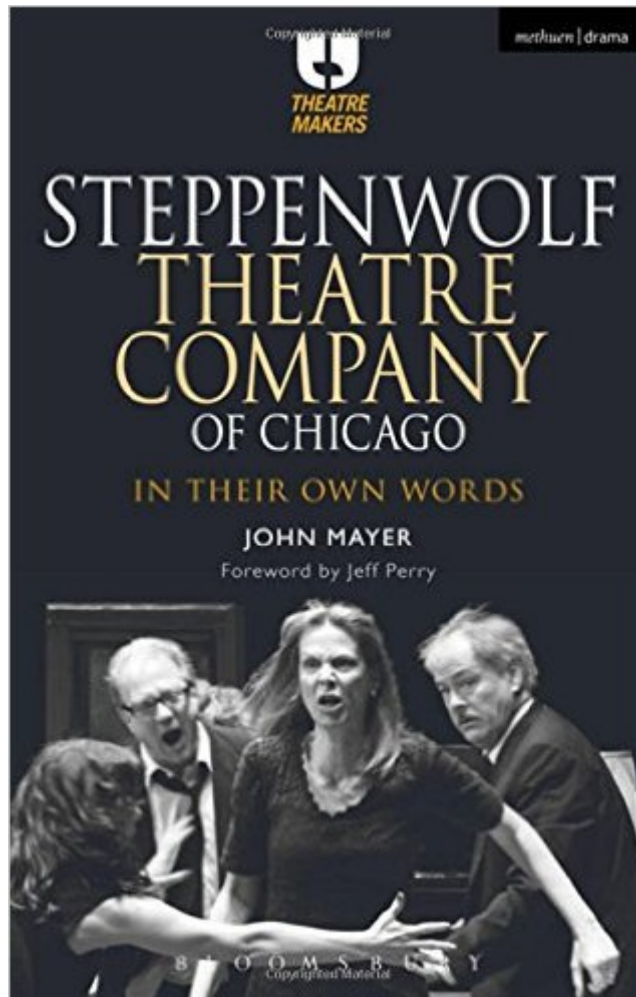


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# Steppenwolf Theatre Company Of Chicago: In Their Own Words (Theatre Makers)



## Synopsis

In 1974, a group of determined, young high school actors started doing plays under the name of Steppenwolf Theatre Company, eventually taking residence in the basement of a church in Highland Park, a suburb of Chicago. Thus began their unlikely journey to become one of the most prominent theatre companies in the world. Steppenwolf Theatre Company has changed the face of American Theatre with its innovative approach that blends dynamic ensemble performance, honest, straightforward acting, and bold, thought-provoking stories to create compelling theatre. This is the first book to chronicle this iconic theatre company, offering an account of its early years and development, its work, and the methodologies that have made it one of the most influential ensemble theatres today. Through extensive, in-depth interviews conducted by the author with ensemble members, this book reveals the story of Steppenwolf's miraculous rise from basement to Broadway and beyond. Interviewees include co-founders Jeff Perry, Gary Sinise and Terry Kinney, along a myriad of ensemble, staff, board members and others.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Chicago's Steppenwolf Theater did some of its best work long before it became even a local name, much less a world-class legend. I know this because I worked with this crew during this period. At a time when their core audience was tiny, the ambitious Steppenwolf artists mounted stellar productions of such plays as Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker* and Tennessee Williams's *TM*

The Glass Menagerie. Fortunately, among that handful of early admirers was John Mayer. A high school buddy of Gary Sinise and Jeff Perry, Mayer acted in some of the shows, and took part in the intensely exciting work of their early years. Mayer, now Chair of the Theatre Department at California State University, Stanislaus in Turlock, CA, returns to the scene with a book, *Steppenwolf Theatre Company of Chicago: In Their Own Words*, published by Bloomsbury Methuen Drama. It splendidly displays the author's dual powers of perspective as both a firsthand witness to Steppenwolf's early years and as a deeply informed scholar providing the long view about the theatre's history. Mayer organizes his book around three pivotal productions, beginning with *Balm In Gilead*, which took both the Chicago and New York theatre worlds by storm. The second was an historic stage adaptation of *The Grapes of Wrath*, which won great acclaim even as it pushed company members to the brink. The third was a sensational world premiere of an in-house work, *August: Osage County*, by ensemble member Tracy Letts and directed by current artistic director Anna Shapiro. It was a triumph shared by some of the oldest and some of the newest members of Steppenwolf. This text is interspersed with chapters done in the oral history style, in which ensemble members speak directly on such themes as the essence of Steppenwolf.

As a professional classical musician and adjunct professor at a university, I'm always looking for inspiring reads not only for myself but to share with colleagues and students. While reading this book, I easily recommended it to about a dozen colleagues, all of my students, and then came back to and bought two more copies as gifts. *The Steppenwolf Theatre of Chicago, In Their Own Words* is an inspiring, insightful read, and much more. I loved the journey, learning the history of Steppenwolf, their humble beginnings in the basement of a grade school in Highland Park, and highlights from the past 40 years, chronicling some of their most notable productions. John Mayer does a beautiful job sharing all of this, along with the words of many of the ensemble members artfully woven throughout the book. His is a unique perspective, having been a part of this group of brilliantly gifted actors during the early years of the company. Mayer's writing is eloquent, thoughtful and honest, and his story telling is conversational - almost as if you're sitting down in your living room, hearing the stories in person. Being taken on this rich historical ride made me wish I had seen *Balm in Gilead*, *Grapes of Wrath*, or *August: Osage County* - and in fact, makes me want to buy a ticket to see ANY thing Steppenwolf is presenting the next time I'm in Chicago. It's remarkable how similar the life and career of a stage actor is to that of a classical orchestral musician. The basic principle of it being all about the ensemble, not just one or two stand out super stars, and always working together as a team, never as individuals. Unfortunately, this is not always

the case in the orchestral world. There is much we can learn from Steppenwolf.

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