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'Plow' forges ahead with new director

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David Burke | Posted: Sunday, March 27, 2011 5:09 pm | **110 Comments Posted**

It's a scenario likely never before seen in a Quad-City theater endeavor:

The director has to quit the show 10 days before rehearsals begin.

Because he's got a job.

On Broadway.

Trying to salvage the most expensive musical ever.

That's what was faced by the Curtainbox Theatre Company when director Philip William McKinley had to back out of directing David Mamet's "Speed-the-Plow."

The Avon, Ill., native, who moved into a home in the Village of East Davenport with his partner this past fall, is taking over "Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark," an adaptation of the comic book hero story with music by the members of U2. Plagued by everything from injury-producing accidents to the cast and stuntmen to atrocious reviews, the show is being retooled under McKinley and scheduled for a June opening.

Meanwhile, the Curtainbox plows ahead.

"That left me with no director," company founder Kimberly Furness said. "Although I was very excited for him and for us — the exposure he's getting is huge for him and we're so proud of him — we had to make the decision over who was going to direct it."

McKinley became a company member after directing "Wit" this past fall, and Furness said he is still a close friend of the Curtainbox and herself.

So the question remained about who the new director would be. Furness said that after mulling several options, she nominated herself to take over.



Contributed The Curtainbox Theatre Company will present "Speed the Plow" at the Village Theater in the Village of East Davenport. [Buy this photo](#)



IF YOU GO

What: "Speed-the-Plow" by Curtainbox Theatre Company

When: 7:30 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays-Saturdays and 3 p.m. Sundays, from Sunday, April 10, to Saturday, April 23

Where: Village Theatre, 2113 E. 11th St., Village of East Davenport

How much: \$20 for adults, \$15 for senior citizens, \$12 for students

Information: (563) 650-8121 or TheCurtainbox.com

Preview: 7:30 p.m. Friday, April 8; tickets are \$10

Benefit: 7:30 p.m. Saturday, April 9; tickets are \$20, benefits the Edwin A. Motto, M.D., Renal Dialysis Center at Genesis Medical Center, Davenport. (Motto, a longtime physician, was the great-uncle of theater company founder Kimberly Furness.)

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"That is one of the perks in having your own theater company," she said with a laugh.

She has appeared in six of the nine shows that Curtainbox has produced (including two in Los Angeles), but never had the inclination to direct them.

"If I chose a show for the Curtainbox, it was usually one I wanted to be in or because I was interested in learning the producing end of things," she said.

Although all of her professional experience has been in children's or educational theater, she did direct "Speed-the-Plow" during her senior year at St. Ambrose University in Davenport in 1996. She also filled the lone female role in the three-character play.

"I know the story very well," said Furness, a fan of Mamet.

McKinley had already approved the set and costumes, and Furness will take it from there with the rehearsals and the actors.

"I knew what his vision was, I knew what his ideas were," she said. "I loved them all, they were great."

Furness herself had to back out of a directing gig to concentrate on "Speed-the-Plow." She was set to helm "Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day" as a children's show for Circa '21 Dinner Playhouse in Rock Island. She suggested that Tyson Danner, the assistant director on her show, for that job, and he was hired.

"Speed-the-Plow" is about a Hollywood studio executive (played by Mike Schulz), his friend and subordinate (Daniel Hernandez) and the secretary (Erin Churchill) he's attempting to seduce.

Furness said her perspective of Hollywood and its people from the seven years she lived in Los Angeles is helping shape the newest version.

Her Hollywood agent, for example, told her to always answer any questions about her age with "29."

But Midwesterners can relate to the story as well, she said.

"With the film industry fiasco that has been in the state of Iowa for the last couple of years, there's some relevance," she said. "We've had all this craziness.

"It's a different reality, really, the film industry and the film world. Not like the one we live in."

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Posted in [Theatre](#) on *Sunday, March 27, 2011 2:00 am Updated: 5:09 pm.* | Tags: [Spider-man](#), [St. Ambrose University](#), [Tyson Danner](#), [Kimberly Furness](#), [Philip William McKinley](#), [Curtainbox Theatre Company](#), [Speed-the-plow](#), [Village Of East Davenport](#), [David Mamet](#), [Spider-man Turn Off The Dark](#), [Daniel Hernandez](#), [Erin Churchill](#), [Mike Schulz](#)