

Penny Remsen
ARTIST'S STATEMENT

I discovered theater as a young child, watching the television broadcast of the magical Broadway production of *Peter Pan*. A few years later my grandparents took my sister and me to see the touring production of *The Sound of Music* during its successful run in Chicago. My sister and I spent the summer putting on backyard productions of the musical. Clearly my early experiences of watching theater happen drew me into a world that would shape my life and career. By the time I reached high school, I knew that theater would be my life's work. What I had not anticipated was the direction it would take. Like many young theater hopefuls, I saw myself as an actor, racking up a list of plays, talent shows and musicals by my high school graduation.

In my undergraduate program in college, however, I was required to work on a lighting crew as part of my major. It changed my life. I was creatively galvanized by the idea that I could use the tools of lighting to affect the way people not only saw, but interpreted, the action on stage. Illuminating the darkness, literally and metaphorically, left acting in the dust, and has been my obsession ever since. I have never stopped being excited by the opportunity to use my creative skills to help human beings connect to each other through the art of theater.

Just as those early musicals sparked my childhood imagination, I became inspired as a lighting designer when I saw a production of Ntozake Shange's *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Isn't Enuf* in Chicago. Experiencing this production made it clear to me just how powerful lighting design can be. Jennifer Tipton's masterful design for that piece expanded my perceptions of what light could do. Her use of color, direction, and, importantly, shadow, articulated the poetic and lyrical qualities of the play in the unique way that lighting, at its best, always does.

Lighting designers have not been my only inspiration, however. I am passionate about being a part of an artistic team, working collaboratively to create the emotional, intellectual, entertaining experience we call theater. I feel very strongly about the human aspect of theater, and I am drawn to the way artists can enhance each others' work on a production to help tell the story more effectively. As we worked collaboratively to tell a story, I have found myself inspired by the work of actors, directors, and other designers. My contribution has been to balance visibility with the powerful, three-dimensional, sculptural quality of light.

My recent work with director Ed Golden on David Lindsay-Abaire's *Rabbit Hole* effectively illustrates my approach to lighting. For the beginning of the play, set in a naturalistic world, I used cold, flat tones to emphasize the disconnect and lack of warmth between the bereaved husband and wife at its center. As the play progresses and the couple begin to take tentative steps in the direction of

healing, the lighting becomes warmer and textured in a way that parallels their uncertain path toward hope and new connection.