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# One-man play ‘Vincent’ provides more complex portrait of artist Van Gogh

By Michael J. Solender

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His paintings are some of the most recognizable masterpieces of the post-Impressionist period. Yet their creator, Vincent van Gogh, is perhaps best known as a mentally unstable artist who famously cut off his own ear.

James Briggs, founder and artistic director of the Massachusetts-based Starry Night Theater Company, is bringing Charlotte audiences a different and more compassionate side of the artist. He stars in Leonard Nimoy’s “Vincent,” a one-act, one-man show that opens Thursday at Blumenthal’s Stage Door Theater and runs for five performances only.

The play’s showings overlap with the final days of the blockbuster “Van Gogh Alive” multimedia experience, hosted at Discovery Place through June 1.

Some may remember that Nimoy (of “Star Trek”/Mr. Spock fame) starred in his own adaptation of Phillip Stevens’ 1979 play “Van Gogh,” which also had a live performance televised in 1981.

Briggs, who has more than 40 performances under his belt in the past 18 months, formed Starry Night in 2012 as a vehicle to bring this play to new audiences.

The story unfolds in 1890, about two weeks after Van Gogh’s death at his own hand. His brother Theo, the play’s main character, was so emotionally distraught immediately after Vincent’s death, he literally could not speak. Theo has gathered a group of friends and colleagues to share his intimate thoughts and feelings about his brother.

“I fell in love with the script immediately upon reading it,” Briggs said. “The play deals with themes such as

- PREVIEW

‘Vincent’

by Leonard Nimoy

**WHEN:** 8 p.m. May 29-May 31 and 2 p.m. May 31 and June 1.

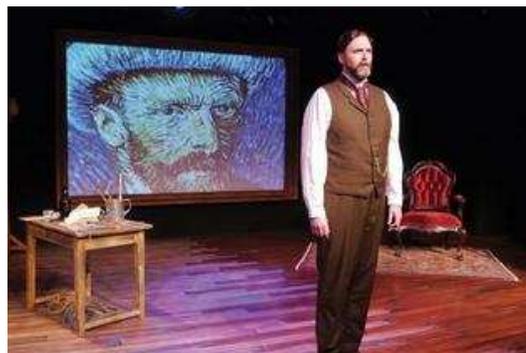
**WHERE:** Stage Door Theater, 150 N. College St.

**TICKETS:** \$24, or \$20 for students and seniors.

**DETAILS:** 704-372-1000; [www.carolinatix.org](http://www.carolinatix.org).

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bullying, mental illness and the treatment of people who are different. Van Gogh and his brother were prodigious letter writers, and much of the play comes to us in the form of reading the actual transcripts of these letters.”

Briggs noted that while Theo is the main character of the play, audiences will get to experience his portrayal of Vincent in the performance.

Audiences learn that Vincent’s younger brother enjoyed a special bond with Vincent and took a custodial-type role in seeing to his care and treatment for his mental instability, diagnosed as epilepsy at the time. Many historians question this diagnosis, and his documented symptoms and behaviors have been thought to be more indicative of bipolar disorder.

Through the sharing of both Van Goghs’ intimate thoughts, a portrait of a passionate, humanistic and deeply caring Vincent emerges and a more complete picture of the man who arguably became one of post-Impressionism’s most legendary figures emerges.

During the play, a high-definition projector displays more than 100 high-definition images of Van Gogh’s work, including rare sketches and early work not often seen.

“I’ve worked hard to create a show that is historical not only in terms of the man,” Briggs said, “but it’s also a good entertaining evening of theater. It’s a drama, but there are humorous anecdotes. This show reveals a more complete picture of who this important man was.”



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