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TOP STORY

## ISU's 'Waiting for Lefty' highlights labor, human rights

**Sierra Henry**

Sep 23, 2021



Cast members of the Illinois State University School of Theater and Dance's production of "Waiting for Lefty" practice their performance at the ISU Center for the Performing Arts. The production is the first in-person performance in 18 months.

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**NORMAL** — Sanhawich Meateanuwat has two goals with his upcoming production of the 1935 play "Waiting for Lefty": to promote empathy and inspire courage.

A 28-year-old Illinois State University MFA directing student, Meateanuwat proposed the play after drawing similarities between its message and recent human rights protests in Thailand and globally.

"There are people in this play talking about how they are treated unfairly, so they have to speak up to claim their rights and have a better life," said Meateanuwat. "That's happening all over the world."

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Originally written by American playwright Clifford Odets, "Waiting for Lefty" tells the story of a New York driver's union meeting as members are on the verge of striking. The union's leader, Harry Fatt, attempts to discourage the protest while other union leaders begin searching for missing left-leaning advocate Lefty Costello.

Audience members hear four heart-wrenching tales of cab drivers leading up to one member taking the stage to demand immediate action.

Meateanuwat, who earned his Bachelor of Arts from Bangkok University, proposed the play as political unrest and protests sharply rose in Thailand. Now in his second year of his graduate program, he hopes to bring awareness about human rights as a global issue.

"My people got hit by police cars, they got rubber bullets to the face, hosed with water cannons; they got arrested, kidnapped, some put in jail," said Meateanuwat, adding that he hopes to "encourage people who have to live in unjust systems to speak up and let them know that they have some people by them, and to have some people who understand them."

Meateanuwat's upcoming project, a stage reading of his own adaption of "Walking to the Star," touches on similar themes. It is an adaption of a contemporary Thai children's book mirroring the current human rights movement in Thailand.

This weekend "Waiting for Lefty" will kick off the fall performance schedule for the ISU School of Theatre and Dance, as well as its first in-person production in 18 months.

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Meateanuwat said he is excited to be back in the theater with a live audience. Similar to other production agencies, the school adapted to coronavirus restrictions during the pandemic, holding virtual performances.

"It's really refreshing," said Meateanuwat. "It's so good to be back and work with people again. I'm so excited for how they will participate with the audience and have that interaction back and forth. I really missed theater, and I think it's going to be heartwarming for everyone."

Performances for "Waiting for Lefty" are 7:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday, and 2 p.m. Saturday and Sunday at the ISU Center for Performing Arts, 351 S. School St., Normal.



Sanhawich Meateanuwat

Sierra Henry

Tickets can be purchased at the ISU Center for Performing Arts box office Monday through Friday between 11 a.m. and 5 p.m., or online at **Ticketmaster**. Masks are required in the theater.

Other upcoming productions include "Bulrusher" by Eisa Davis and directed by Britannia Howe, Oct. 1-3; "Good Kids" by Naomi Lizuka and directed by Maria Amenabar Farias, Oct. 22-24; and "Sueno" by Pedro Calderón de la Barca, translated and adapted by José Rivera and directed by Paul Christopher, Nov. 5-7.

*Editor's note: This story has been updated to reflect that the name of the play is "Waiting for Lefty."*

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