



FROM PAGE TO STAGE:

LET THE RIGHT ONE IN

By Skyler Gray

The Alley Theatre has a rich history of producing plays and musicals based on novels. Frank Wildhorn and Leslie Bricusse brought *Jekyll And Hyde* to life from Robert Louis Stevenson's novel *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* in 1990, Ken Ludwig then adapted Stevenson's swashbuckling *Treasure Island* in 2007, and just last season Jules Verne's *Around The World In 80 Days* flew into the Hubbard Theatre with Mark Brown's joyous adaptation. This season in the Hubbard Theatre we have Tom Kitt, Brian Yorkey and Bridget Carpenter's new musical based on Mary Rodgers' classic *Freaky Friday*, and Jack Thorne's chilling adaptation of John Ajvide Lindqvist's *Let The Right One In*. Each of these novels have inspired film, television, and stage adaptations since their publication, but none of them has caught fire quite as quickly as Lindqvist's *Let The Right One In*.

Lucy Mangan in *Let The Right One In*.

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WORKS BY JOHN AJVIDE LINDQVIST

Let The Right One In (2004)
Handling the Undead (2005)
Paper Walls (2006)
Harbour (2008)
Little Star (2010)
Let The Old Dreams Die –
a sequel to *Let The Right One In* (2011)
Tjärven (2011)
Himmelstrand (2014) –
English Translation: *I Am Behind You* (2016)
Rörelsen (2015)
Our Skin, Our Blood, Our Bones (2016)



Cristian Ortega

Let The Right One In by John Ajvide Lindqvist was originally published in Sweden, the author's home country, in 2004. Since its first publication, the novel has been translated into several different languages, as well as been adapted into a Swedish film, American film, play, comic book, and upcoming television series.

Lindqvist grew up in Blackeberg, a suburb of Stockholm, which is where he chose to set his first novel *Let The Right One In*, or *Låt den rätte komma* in Swedish. A comedian and magician by day, Lindqvist was an aspiring writer who wanted to compose a story about "something terrible from the other side [coming] to Blackeberg." A great lover of the horror genre since he was a kid, the basis for most of his work comes from his own fears and experiences. His approach to writing about the "monstrosity of humans and the humanity of monsters" not only inspired *Let The Right One In*, but reinvented the limits of the horror genre.

When *Let The Right One In* was first published, it was universally praised by critics and readers alike. The novel was such a success that numerous directors and producers immediately fought for the movie rights. Tomas Alfredson—a Swedish director who later went on to direct Hollywood's *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*—proved to be Lindqvist's top choice. Lindqvist was now tasked with adapting his novel for the screen, initially structuring the screenplay to unfold over the course of two separate movies. The first draft of the screenplay was over 250 pages, but it quickly became clear that adapting the story into two different films would be impossible. Restructuring the screenplay to fit a single film forced Lindqvist to cut the screenplay down to 90 pages. The film was released in 2008 and was celebrated for its heartfelt portrayal of Oskar and Eli, as well as, as one critic put it, "giving the vampire story back something it has been missing for a long time: the ability to really frighten us."

TELEVISION

As Eli and Oskar take the stage at the Alley, it appears that Lindqvist's story is set to live on in another format: television. Jeff Davis, of *Teen Wolf* fame, is creating the pilot of the television series set to premiere on TNT later this year.

Around the same time that the Swedish film was being released, an American version was beginning to take shape. Matt Reeves, who shot onto the horror/sci-fi scene with his movie *Cloverfield* in 2008, was brought on to direct and write the film. The American adaptation was retitled *Let Me In* and moved the setting of the story from Blackeberg to New Mexico. The American film was developed to be a "more universal and accessible version of the novel"—even changing Oskar and Eli's names to Owen and Abby—though many would argue that the original story is universal regardless of setting. The film premiered in 2010 and was once again a critical success. A comic book prequel series was also developed by Reeves, though this venture was not approved by Lindqvist who was vocal about his objections to the idea.

A fan of the Swedish film, producer Marla Rubin approached director John Tiffany with the idea to adapt *Let The Right One In* for the stage. John Tiffany, who was the National Theatre of Scotland's Associate Director at the time, reached out to writer Jack Thorne whom he had met at Cambridge when Thorne was an undergraduate. Thorne said that Tiffany wanted someone who understood lonely, weird boys and girls, so "he decided I was lonely and weird enough to do it." The pair was joined by designer Christine Jones and choreographer Steven Hoggett, a frequent collaborator of Tiffany's, to reimagine the acclaimed novel for the theatre.

As Thorne started writing the piece, Tiffany told him to not think of the play as simply a project confined to the stage, but rather a limitless canvas of possibility. Much like Lindqvist did when adapting his novel for film, Tiffany and Thorne chose to focus on Eli and Oskar's relationship with the action unfolding around the neighborhood playground. Being an admirer of the novel before signing on to write the play, Thorne went beat by beat through Lindqvist's book to make sure he left no stone unturned in his adaptation. For Thorne, the beauty of the story is these "two people who don't know they fit together discovering that they can."



Lucy Mangan and David Mara

The stage adaptation of *Let The Right One In* premiered at Dundee Rep Theatre in Scotland in June of 2013. The co-production between the National Theatre of Scotland, Marla Rubin Productions Ltd and Bill Kenwright was a hit which prompted a move to the Royal Court Theatre in London. The production's cathartic movement, cinematic score, dazzling special effects, and bold storytelling were celebrated by critics, and the production moved to the West End later that year. The stage adaptation was able to capture the intimacy and complexities of the novel, while at the same time shedding new light on the story by bringing the audience deeper into the world of Eli and Oskar. Recently, Thorne and Tiffany joined forces

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again—with JK Rowling, no less—on the record-breaking West End hit *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*.

It is *Let The Right One In*'s intersection of horror and deep connection that makes Lindqvist's story a classic, thus inspiring numerous adaptations including the chilling stage play you are about to see. In many ways *Let The Right One In* is a coming of age story for the ageless, and a timeless love story that resonates for everyone—human, monster, and everything in-between.

CONNECTION TO MORRISSEY

In the preface to *Let The Right One In*, Lindqvist includes a quote from Morrissey's *The Last Famous International Playboy*. The title to Lindqvist's novel is not only inspired by the myth that vampire's must be invited into a human home, but from Morrissey's song *Let the Right One Slip In*.

Let the right one slip in/ And when at last it does/
I'd say you were within your rights to bite/ The right one and say,/ What kept you so long?

-MORRISSEY

TIFFANY AND THORNE

Tiffany and Thorne's relationship began with *Let The Right One In*, and the pair has continued to collaborate since then. In 2014 Tiffany directed Thorne's play *Hope* at the Royal Court Theatre in London. Soon after that they got to work on creating *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* with JK Rowling. Once again, choreographer Steven Hoggett and designer Christine Jones were brought on board to bring the wizarding world of Harry Potter to the stage. The production is currently running to record-breaking houses in London, and there are plans for the show to open in New York next season.



Lucy Mangan and Cristian Ortega
Photos by Lawrence Peart