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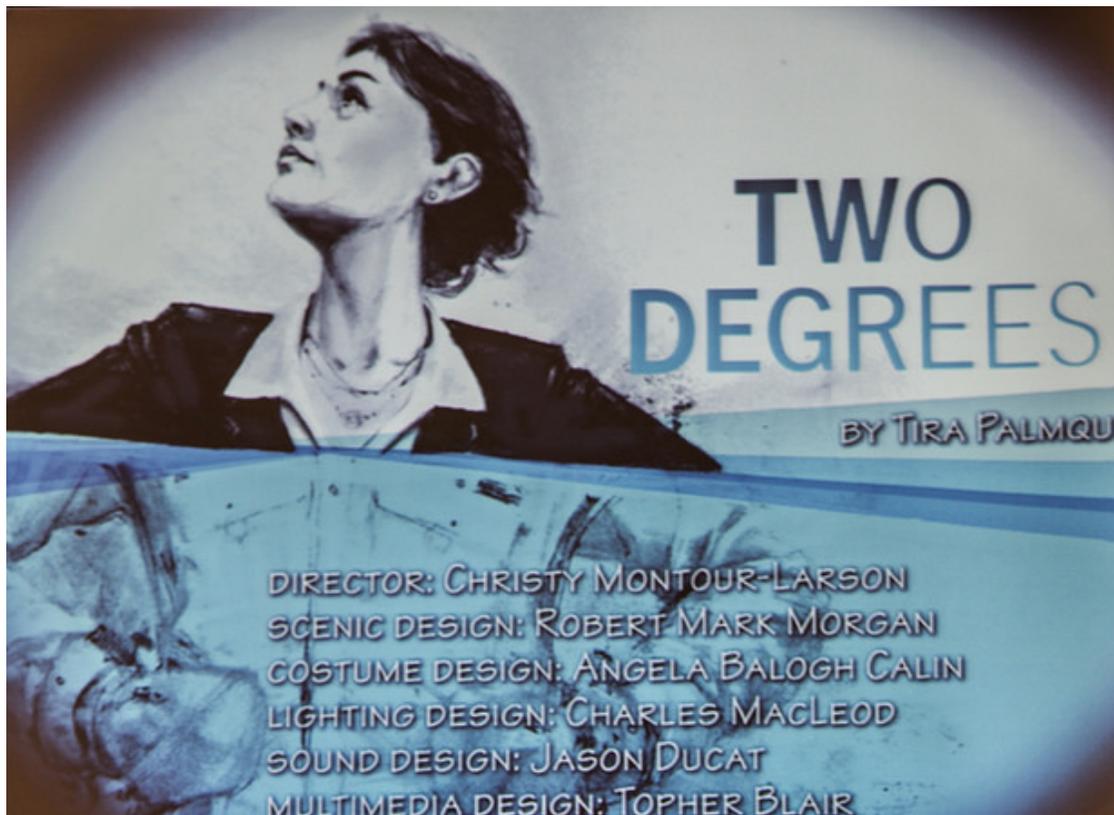
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## 'Two Degrees': Five things we learned at first rehearsal

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by John Moore | Jan 06, 2017

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Photos from the first rehearsal of Tira Palmquist's play 'Two Degrees' by the DCPA Theatre Company. To see more, click the forward arrow on the image above. Click again to download. All photos by John Moore for the DCPA NewsCenter.

When Director Christy Montour-Larson went looking for the key to unlock Tira Palmquist's new play *Two Degrees*, she looked no further than her own pocket.

"All I had to do is pull out my own house key, because when I read this play for the first time, I felt like I was home," said Montour-Larson, who will direct the upcoming world premiere for the DCPA Theatre Company opening Feb. 3.

*Two Degrees* is about a woman - and a planet - in crisis. Emma is scientist who has been called to Washington to testify to a congressional committee on climate legislation. And it's the anniversary of her husband's death.

"I love this play because it is *about* something," Montour-Larson said on the first day of rehearsal. "Climate change isn't just another issue in a world proliferating with other issues. Climate change is the one issue that, left unchecked, will swamp all other issues."



New calculations from *Scientific American* magazine indicate that if the world continues to burn fossil fuels at the current rate, the average temperature of the

Earth will rise 2 degrees Celsius by 2036, crossing a threshold that will devastate human civilization, Montour-Larson said.

"We are the first generation in the history of humanity to feel the effects of climate change," she said, "and we are the last generation who can do anything about it."

And if you are a playwright, the thing you do about it is write a play about it.

"For me, as a playwright, the personal is political, and the political is personal," said Palmquist, who wrote *Two Degrees* as opportunity to write roles for women older than 45, and also as an opportunity to talk about climate change. For her, that's as political - and as personal - as it gets.

"Humans aren't the first species to alter the atmosphere," added *Two Degrees* Dramaturg Heather Helinsky, quoting Elizabeth Kolbert's book *Field Notes from a Catastrophe*. That distinction belongs to early bacteria, which invented photosynthesis 2 two billion years ago. "But we are the first species to be in a position to understand what we are doing."

And that's why, Lighting Designer Charles MacLeod said, "This is a play we have to do. And not 20 years from now - we have to do it now."

*(Pictured above and right: 'Two Degrees' Director Christy Montour-Larson and Playwright Tira Palmquist. Photo by John Moore for the DCPA NewsCenter.)*

Here are five things we learned at that first rehearsal for *Two Degrees*, opening Feb. 3 in the Jones Theatre:

# 1

**It's melting!** That's right. Scenic Designer Robert Mark Morgan has fashioned a series of hanging painted panels that will look like different forms of ice. But look closely, because about six of them are going to be literally made out of ice that will slowly melt throughout the performance. The idea: The world of the play is the world of our world.

"Our hope is that maybe 50 percent of the audience will say afterward, 'Hey, wasn't it really cool that part of the set melted?' And the other 50 percent will say, 'I didn't see that,'" said Montour-Larson, adding to laughs: "And then you can say to that person: 'Yeah, and that's why you are part of the problem! You didn't notice!'"

## Five things we learned at first rehearsal for *The Book of Will*

# 2

**Credit is due.** A small local collective called The Athena Project is responsible for *Two Degrees* coming to the attention of DCPA Producing Artistic Director Kent Thompson. Montour-Larson directed a reading of the play as part of the Athena Project's 2015 new-play festival, then handed the script over to Thompson, who shouted out

founder Angela Astle and her 3-year-old company at the first rehearsal. "Athena envisions a world where women's voices are powerfully expressed and recognized for their artistic merit in the community," Thompson said.

## Five things we learned at first rehearsal for *The Christians*

# 3

**Mr. Jones and you.** *Two Degrees* will be the first play the DCPA Theatre Company presents in the Jones Theatre as a mainstage production since David Mamet's *A Boston Marriage* in 2004. At 200 seats, The Jones is the Denver Center's smallest theatre. "It's just perfect for *Two*

*Degrees* because it's so intimate, and the audience is going to be right there with us as we tell the story," Montour-Larson said.

## More Colorado theatre coverage on the DCPA NewsCenter

# 4

**The sound of ice.** Sound Designer Jason Ducat (*right*) promises to replicate the sound of real, cracking ice at key points of the story. He and fellow DCPA soundman Craig Breitenbach embedded microphones into real ice and

then recorded the sound as it broke up. "We're going to have speakers underneath the seats so the audience will really be able to feel that rumble," said Ducat, who grew up in Bowling Green, Ohio, hometown of Olympic figure-skating champion Scott Hamilton. "For about 15 years of my life, I pretty much lived on a sheet of ice. It is one of the most peaceful things you can ever experience," Ducat said. But the sound ice cracking also can be terrifying. I know this because when I was young, I was really stupid and I would see how far out on the ice I could get before it started to crack - and then I would have to fly back in to try to beat it. But when I think of the character of Emma, I think she really wants to be on that ice. So I wanted to create that as the soundscape of the play."



# 5

**Do I know you?** Montour-Larson met Palmquist at the 2012 *Seven Devils Playwrights Conference* in McCall, Idaho. They got to talking and soon learned they both grew up in Minnesota. Then they figured out that they both had performed in a summer repertory theatre program in Duluth, Minn., decades before. So Montour-Larson asked Palmquist

what shows she was in, and Palmquist answered, "Oh a few, like, *Dames at Sea* and *Play it Again Sam*." And Montour-Larson dead-panned: "I was in all those shows with you." Everyone talks about six degrees of separation, but in Palmquist's play every character has, appropriately enough, just two degrees of separation. "And here we discovered that Tira and I had two degrees of separation, because we already knew each other through our younger selves," said Montour-Larson.

**Bonus:** There will be some Greenlandic spoken during the play. That is all.

*John Moore was named one of the 12 most influential theater critics in the U.S by American Theatre Magazine in 2011. He has since taken a groundbreaking position as the Denver Center's Senior Arts Journalist.*

**[Video bonus: Spotlight on \*Two Degrees\*](#)**

## Colorado New Play Summit Spotlight: Tira Palmq...



### **Two Degrees: Cast list**

Written by Tira Palmquist

Directed by Christy Montour-Larson

- **Jason Delane** (*One Night in Miami*) as Clay Simpson
- **Kathleen McCall** (*The Glass Menagerie*) as Emma Phelps
- **Robert Montano** (Colorado New Play Summit) as Jeffrey Phelps/Eric Wilson/Malik Peterson
- **Kim Staunton** (*Fences*) as Louise Allen

### **Two Degrees: Ticket information**

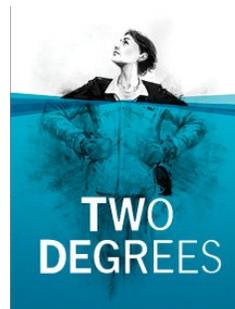
Emma, a climate change scientist, is invited to share her findings at a Senate hearing that could define her career and her cause. But if she can't overcome her tumultuous inner struggle, her dedication and sacrifices may not be enough. *Two Degrees* was developed at the 2016 Colorado New Play Summit.

Feb. 3-March 12

Jones Theatre

ASL and Audio-Described matinee at 1:30 p.m. Sunday, March 5

303-893-4100 or **BUY ONLINE**





*First rehearsal for the upcoming 'Two Degrees': Kathleen McCall and Robert Montano. Photo by John Moore for the DCPA NewsCenter.*

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## ABOUT THE EDITOR



**John Moore**

Award-winning arts journalist John Moore has recently taken a groundbreaking new position as the DCPA's Senior Arts Journalist. With The Denver Post, he was named one of the 12 most influential theater critics in the US

by American Theatre Magazine. He is the founder of the **Denver Actors Fund**, a nonprofit that raises money for local artists in medical need. John is a native of Arvada and attended Regis Jesuit High School and the University of Colorado at Boulder. Follow him on Twitter [@moorejohn](#).

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