

# 'Lintel' an intimate evening at Riverside Theatre

By Barbara Yoresh  
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The beauty of Riverside Theatre is there are live performances for every taste.

While the current main stage musical "Crazy for You" is wowing audiences, another award-winning play opened Jan. 27 on the Waxlax Stage and will likely win similar accolades.

"Underneath the Lintel" is a dramatically compelling adventure written by Glen Berger and starring James VanValen in a one-man tour-de-force directed by Riverside Theatre's CEO/Producing Artistic Director Allen Cornell.

Imagine an introverted, overly dutiful Dutch librarian finding one morning in his book return drop box a battered volume, 113 years overdue. Surely the guidebook's original borrower is long gone, but the miscreant returning the long-lost book is certainly deserving of a whopping fine, the librarian be-

lieves.

After studying the book for clues, the librarian is off on a life-changing, globe-trotting adventure to London, China, Australia and New York - all the while discovering the answers to ancient mysteries as well as insights into his own, heretofore circumspect ways.

The metamorphosis of the librarian told through his investigative research and travels reaches unquestionably global proportions. And yet that sometimes funny, sometimes poignant journey is simply told through the playwright's carefully crafted words and through fine acting.

## Two worlds

It is, according to Cornell, one of his favorite types of theatrical productions.

"There are so many other choices available that live in the world of contemporary theatre (beyond big Broadway shows)," he says.

"I'm always looking for pieces driven by the



PHOTOS PROVIDED

Riverside Theatre CEO/Producing Artistic Director Allen Cornell is directing 'Underneath the Lintel' which runs through Feb. 8.

text versus the physical demands of a large production. As a solo performance, "Underneath the

Lintel" is one of the best one-actor pieces I've ever read and I had an actor in mind. It's always about the quality of acting and the written word."

Unlike the visual and auditory splendor of "Crazy for You," Cornell noted "Underneath the Lintel" is a way to "experience theater in a very basic, most simplistic form: one actor, some props and great writing."

Being able to bring both types of productions to the stage concurrently is rewarding, he said.

"I'm always happiest when I can introduce a play like this while "Crazy for You" is also playing," Cornell said.

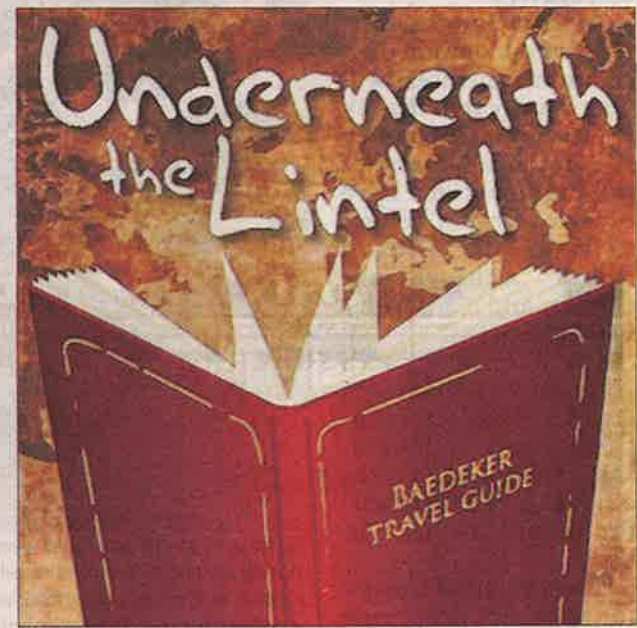
## One-on-one

Cornell expressed his desire to have the play's "words resonate with the audience and then have them determine what it means to them," rather than to give a synopsis of the play's plot or conclusion.

"It's very intimate - one-on-one - while "Crazy for You" is very spontaneous and immediately accessible theatre. This play works in a very profound manner and poses very large philosophical questions having to do with the meaning of our



James VanValen stars in the one-man show.



lives," Cornell said.

Cornell noted that some big production shows might be termed "escapist" theater in which an audience can just sit back, be entertained - even be taken into a realm of fantasy. Plays such as "Underneath the Lintel" seek what Cornell terms an "engaged" audience who will find intellectual and emotional factors in the material that may even be challenging.

## Storyteller

Berger is, according to Cornell, "a special writer who clearly knows how to tell a story."

"This is a play for people who like to engage in

how the excellent use of language and ideas can make us think beyond what we might have perceived something to be originally," Cornell said.

Such "cerebral" material encourages and challenges the audience "to think and feel purely through the words and skill of the actors. This play is about getting beneath the surface of our lives and searching for answers."

## Balance

Clearly, there are audiences who prefer either an escape from everyday life when they enter a theater or those who wish to delve deeper into life's many mysteries. Others still enjoy a balance of both.

Cornell noted Riverside Theatre's mission is to provide those performance options.

"If you walk out feeling the time spent here lit up your life in an unexpected way then we've done our job. Theatre is a celebration of our lives and that it's nice to be human.

"Take this journey ("Underneath the Lintel"). It's an hour and 10 minutes -- no intermission. There is a unique and special experience available to you in Vero Beach," Cornell said.

"Underneath the Lintel" performs through Feb. 8. For more information, call the box office at 772-231-6990. Riverside Theatre is located in beachside Vero Beach

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