

# 'Runestone! A Rock Musical' to be presented by History Theatre in St. Paul

For information about tickets and performances, call 651-292-4323 or visit [www.historytheatre.com](http://www.historytheatre.com).



A promotional image for "Runestone! A Rock Musical," which will be performed by History Theatre in St. Paul from May 7-29.

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ST. PAUL — The story of the Kensington Runestone has been told many times since the stone was discovered in 1898, but now it's being told in a way that's entirely new.

As a musical.

A rock musical, to be precise.

From May 7-29, History Theatre in St. Paul will present "Runestone! A Rock Musical," which was written by Mark Jensen, with music and additional lyrics by Gary Rue.

"It's all about Olof Ohman and his family's experiences with the Runestone," Jensen said. "We follow their story from their perspective, and the people who came to town to try to prove if the stone was hoax or history."

A native of the Kensington area, Jensen was familiar with the Runestone and had a personal connection to it, as well.

"My grandfather knew Olof," Jensen said. "He was a young farmer when Olof was an old farmer. He always told me that Olof was honest."

Jensen also used to sing at the nursing home where Arthur, Ohman's youngest son, lived. He said the group was always told never to ask Arthur about the Runestone.

"I was kind of intrigued by why we weren't supposed to ask about that, and in the course of the research I found out why," Jensen said.

Jensen has been working on the show since 2002, when it began as a straightforward play. After several readings that took place over several years, Ron Peluso, artistic director of History Theatre, suggested turning it into a musical.

"That's where Gary Rue comes in," Jensen said. "Gary's such a great collaborator. He's a music library."

Rue said that initially, the score was dictated by the scenes of the play, with multiple different styles being used.

"The music was all over the place," Rue said.

Then Peluso had another suggestion.

"He said, 'This is a rock after all. Why don't you just make it a rock musical? You can do that, right?'" Rue said. "We threw out most of the music that we'd written up to that point, and we just started playing '70s and '80s rock-influenced music."



The family of Olof Ohman, circa 1893.  
Contributed photo

Rue cited bands such as The Police, Boston and Queen as inspirations. He also drew on his experience playing with his own band, Rue Nouveau, in the 1980s.

"I just kind of dove in," he said. "We took these songs ... and we just kind of worked together on style and feel and things like tempo and instrumentation and moved ahead with it. ...

"I haven't had an opportunity to write like this since the late '80s, and it's been wonderful for me to rediscover this" he said.

The show starts in 1562 and goes forward from there, Jensen said.

"The musical really goes through what it was like when the Runestone was first discovered, and then all of the controversy of Olof being suspected of carving it, and just explores that whole concept," he said.

While Rue had heard of the Runestone, he didn't have the knowledge of it that Jensen did, so they took a trip to Kensington and Alexandria, where they drove to the Ohman's farmstead and saw the Runestone at the museum.

"It's an exciting story," Rue said. "What you want to do is automatically dive in and say it's real or a hoax, but the point is, it is real. It just depends on who made it. That's what the controversy is. Whoever did it, it's excellent."

Jensen said the story of the Runestone felt like something he should write.

"It's a big piece of our community, and a big piece of our cultural fabric," he said. "I really wanted to explore that, and I was just kind of curious. I was curious as to why it was considered a hoax and why it was considered a piece of history as well.

"I spent a lot of time on both sides of this issue and learned a lot about how people make choices about something, and how information can be used to push an agenda, one way or another," he said. "As I was working on the story in recent years, that aspect of it took on a bigger legacy."

Rue echoed this statement, saying, "It's as dividing as the tribalism we're seeing now. It's relevant."

Jensen closed by expressing his thanks to everybody who is involved in the production.

"This is really a terrific group of people," he said.

Both men said they are excited the show is finally ready to be performed for an audience.

"I hope, first and foremost, they're entertained, and secondly ... educated and moved on some emotional level about the drama the family went through," Rue said.

Jensen said, "Twenty years of work to get to this point is really, really satisfying."

"Runestone! A Rock Musical" is directed by Tyler Michaels King and features Sasha Andreev, Ivory Doublette, Ryan London Levin, Kiko Laureano, Eric Morris, Wesley Mouri, Jon Andrew Hegge and Adam Qualls.

The band will include Brian Pekol, Gary Rue, Colby Hansen and David Rapheal.

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