

'Leaves of Grass: Illuminated': One-man show coming to Holmes breathes new life into Whitman's poetry

By [Vicki Gerdes](#) on Jan 23, 2019 at 7:00 p.m.

Actor and writer Patrick Scully performs "Leaves of Grass-Illuminated" The story of poet Walt Whitman's personal life and motivation will be presented at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, Feb. 5 in Detroit Lakes' Historic Holmes Theatre. There is no admission fee, but free will donations will be accepted. A man ahead of his time: This is how Minnesota actor Patrick Scully describes Walt Whitman, the iconic character he he portrays in the one-man show coming to Detroit Lakes' Historic Holmes Theatre on



Tuesday, Feb. 5.

In "Leaves of Grass: Illuminated," Scully has created an intimate portrait of one of America's most expressive, celebrated — and controversial — poets.

"The original version of this show had two actors and 18 dancers," Scully said in a telephone interview earlier this week. "But I created the show on that big scale to start out with because I knew I ultimately wanted to do it as a one-man show that would be easier to tour."

So, why Walt Whitman?

"One of the things that intrigued me was that he (Whitman) was a man that was way ahead of his time, on several fronts," Scully said. "Aesthetically, as an artist... a lot of people objected to his poetry because it didn't rhyme or have predictable meters. He was also working class — they were used to poets being from a wealthier class."

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One of the lesser known aspects of his life was that Whitman was "a man who loved men" — in a time when the terminology used to describe such men (and women) was "a Latin phrase that meant 'the sin so horrible that Christians do not speak its name.'"

Yes, Whitman was a homosexual — though that term was not one that was part of American culture in the 19th century. And his sexual orientation was not something that he referred to overtly in his work.

"Whitman was determined as an artist to write truthfully about his life but also to write about it in a way that would survive and not just be thrown in the trash heap," Scully said. "He created intentional strategies to communicate honestly, but still receive some degree of acceptance... to reveal things, and yet hide them at the same time."

The reason for this, Scully says, is that Whitman believed his writing had "a cosmic message that was meant for all humanity," and at the same time, a very specific message for other artists.

"I was really drawn by that complexity," said Scully, noting that there are many layers to Whitman's work.

In addition to his public presentation at 7 p.m. on Feb. 5, which is free and open to the public, Scully will also be working with American literature students at Detroit Lakes High School during the day — something he says was a natural extension of creating his original theatrical work on Whitman's life.

"I first encountered Whitman as I think many Americans do; when I was a high school student," he said. "It's a way to broaden the impact that (this show) can have... often when we read someone's poetry, the words are beautiful, but if we know more about the person who wrote that poem, it adds layers of depth and meaning."

Scully says about half of the text in his one-man show comes directly from the words of Whitman himself — not just his poetry, but his correspondence and other writings.

"My hope is after seeing this show, people might be motivated to go to their local library and check out 'Leaves of Grass,' and dive more deeply into his poetry," Scully said. "Whitman lived in very politically troubled times... the centerpiece of politics in his life would have been the Civil War, and countries don't get much more divided than to be in the midst of a civil war. But he had a vision for getting beyond that, a vision for democracy that transcended it and allowed people to embrace each other's humanity."

"I doubt that there are many artists in American history who have had a more worldwide impact than Whitman, and I think it would help people to understand what America's contribution to the world can be, by seeing what Whitman's contribution to the world has been," he added.

There is no admission fee for this show, which is being offered, in part, through a grant from the Minnesota State Arts Board. Free will donations will, however, be gratefully accepted. Please note: This show does contain mature content, so it may not be suitable for young children. For more information about this show, please visit the Holmes Theatre's website at www.dlccc.org/holmes.html, or call the box office at 218-844-7469.