

# DIRECTOR'S VISION BY DON STEPHENSON



Director Don Stephenson in rehearsal. ©Diane Sobolewski

*The Roar of the Greasepaint—The Smell of the Crowd* is ultimately a story of hope. In the aftermath of an event that has upended society, an absurd union is formed. It's a makeshift family of sorts; dysfunctional at best, often cruel, mostly ridiculous. This band of survivors operates under a self-imposed system of rules that separates them, creating a tiny universe of have and have-nots. Ultimately, this scrappy and eccentric trio of survivors finds hope from the unlikelyst of sources...each other.

When originally produced, the show was imagined as an allegory of the British class system. The characters enacted their squabbles, battles, and reconciliations on an abstract setting that resembled a game board. For the current production, we have reframed the show to promote accessibility into the emotionality of the piece and into the humanity of the characters. The setting is instantly recognizable to contemporary audiences: a world that is real, concrete, and at the same time unknown—a ruined landscape created by a cataclysmic event of unknown origin. Our characters have grouped together in an effort to survive.

What draws me to *Greasepaint* is my interest in exploring the following oddity of human behavior: why is it that human beings act in ways that are contrary to their self-interest? In *Greasepaint*, the characters have recreated a hierarchy amongst

themselves. It is a structure that is familiar to them from their past. But in this new world, it is a system that no longer serves their purposes. They cling to this structure, despite its unfairness and cruelty, because it is what they know. Without it, they are lost.

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In presenting *Greasepaint*, the greatest challenge is to capture the humanity of these flawed characters and highlight the humor of their situation. The glorious score of Leslie Bricusse and Anthony Newley provides a tremendous assist in this endeavor, with melodies that invite the audience to share the hopes and dreams of the players and with lyrics that convey a sharply witty and ironic tone. It's a contemporary look at the show intended to facilitate access to the humanity of our characters, always highlighting their moments of redemption.