

# NORTHLIGHT THEATRE



## STUDY GUIDE

**Featuring bluegrass favorites and the foot-stomping, hand-clapping finest of American roots music.**

A young classical violinist and her song collector boyfriend flee from the confines of their Brooklyn apartment to the mountains of North Carolina on a quest for musical authenticity and inspiration. Their search leads biracial Mira back to her old family home, where she reconnects with an estranged grandfather she never mentioned. An unexpected combination of joy and discovery along with past pain and prejudice comes to light in this story of an Appalachian family's varied roots and the music that binds them together.



[Click here for a full show synopsis!](#)



[Click to find an article and learn more.](#)



[Click to watch a video and expand learning.](#)



[Find discussion questions to ask students.](#)

**Created by Northlight Theatre Staff and High School Job Shadows; Madison Greer, Lizzy Xakellis, Scythe Malone, & Caroline Graettinger**

# Meet the Artists

**DIRECTOR/CONCEIVER/CO-WRITER: Sherry Lutken**



**Rick Sims**  
Sound Design



**Mara Zinky**  
Scenic Design



**Katie Klemme**  
Stage Manager



**Lindsey Lyddan**  
Lighting Design



**Christine Mok**  
Dramaturg



**Gregory Graham**  
Costume Design

## ACTORS/CO-WRITERS



**Lisa Helmi Johanson**  
Mira



**Morgan Morse**  
Beckett



**David M. Lutken**  
Edgar



**BONUS!** [Click here to read the full artist team bios](#)



# The World of the Play

## The Setting

### Appalachia

Appalachia is a region stretching north to south along the Appalachian mountains. It stretches from the Southern Tier of New York State all the way to northern Alabama and Georgia. Appalachia is a primarily white rural region that is known for its mountain terrain and scenery. The community struggles with poverty, with twenty percent of its residents living in poverty. Music, country and folk specifically, are a big part of the culture of Appalachia. Appalachian music can be seen in many genres such as bluegrass, folk, ballad singing, blues, early country music, gospel, mountain swing, and old-time.

### The Region by Numbers....

**206,000**

Square Miles

**423**

Counties

**13**

States

**8**

Native American Tribal Communities

**26,100,000**

Residents

**1,000+**

Plant Species

**6,684 ft**

Elevation of Mt Mitchell  
(Highest Mountain Peak in the Region)



**BONUS! Watch a video about the geography of the Appalachia region**

\*Includes an art activity for a Mountain range collage



### Discussion Questions



In the play Mira is back in her childhood home of Appalachia after moving to Brooklyn, NY....

- How might life in the rural Appalachian region be different then life in a major city like Chicago or New York City?
- Would you prefer living in a rural area like the Appalachian region or an urban area like Brooklyn? Why?



# Music of the Play

## The Role of Music in the Play

Folk music is found throughout the play and is a prominent part of this story. The Porch on Windy Hill is "a new play with old music" meaning unlike a typical new musical, this play takes old music (in this case bluegrass/folk music) and makes it part of a new story.

**BONUS!** [Listen to a Folk Music Playlist](#) 

### Key Term

#### FOLK MUSIC

Folk Music is a musical genre that encompasses traditional and contemporary music from specific regions around the world. The word folk stems from the German 'volk' meaning 'the people'. Therefore folk music is thought of as the music belonging to 'the people', rather than one sole artist. It is traditionally passed down through oral tradition of communities gathering to share music (just like with folk tales) rather than being written down and credited to one artist. The instrumentation is typically acoustic like the violin/fiddle, guitar, and banjo, and may also include the harmonica, flute, and accordion.



## Discussion Questions



In the play, music connects the characters to home.

- What style of music reminds you of home? Are there songs that remind you of particular people in your life?
- What sounds do you associate with you home? If you were to go to your home and listen, what would you hear?

## Instruments of the Play

### GUITAR



### FIDDLE



### ERHU



**BONUS!**



[Learn about the history of this Chinese Instrument](#)

### MANDOLIN



### BANJO



### DULCIMER



### HARMONICA



**BONUS!**



[Check out a jam session between two of the artists!](#)



# Themes of the Play

## In ‘The Porch on Windy Hill,’ music helps heal a family rift

Excerpts from an article by Myrna Petlicki for Pioneer Press



It has been said that music has the power to heal.

It may even help forge a reconciliation between a biracial classical violinist and her long-estranged grandfather in “The Porch on Windy Hill: a new play with old music” April 13-May 14 at Northlight Theatre.

Sherry Lutken conceived and is directing the show. Her husband David M. Lutken is the music director and also plays the role of the grandfather, Edgar.

Sherry said that the play “grew out of the pandemic. At the time, my husband and I were hiding out in Louisiana. We were in the middle of nowhere so we would drive back and forth to the grocery store every three weeks and spend a lot of time in the car and talk about what we were going to do when we got to do something again.”

**“The cultural climate at the time — up to and including the murder of six Asian women in Atlanta — stirred us to try to write a small play that would confront some of this,” David said.**

“We wrote the show together and my input was mostly the music,” David said. “It’s a very small family drama about a biracial young woman, her grandfather, and the woman’s boyfriend and their chance meeting. The music is a part of the play in that at the beginning it fills the gaps in their conversation because they’re having trouble talking together.”

**Sherry concluded that the play is “about family, about race, about how do we all communicate, how do we heal, how do we reach out to each other?”**

## Discussion Questions



In the play, characters heal and connect through music while navigating a heavy history of racial conflict and family estrangement.

- What other strategies can people use to communicate through difficult topics?
- How can people reconnect or make amends after harm has been done?



[Click for images of the Stop Asian Hate Protests](#)

# Creation of the Play

In a new play development process, shows make lots of stops along the road. Plays go through readings, workshops, and productions to try out the show, see what's working, and make changes. At each theatre the writers (who in this show are also the actors) collaborate to make edits.



Keep up with the production and see where it goes next at [www.theporchonwindyhill.com](http://www.theporchonwindyhill.com)



## *An Interview with the Director and Conceiver of The Porch on Windy Hill:*

**Sherry Lutken**

Conducted by Northlight's  
Artistic Director, BJ Jones

BJ: How did the idea of Porch come about?

Sherry: "The idea grew out of the pandemic, the current events swirling around us, and the desire to tell a story that reflected what was happening in our country. The Ivoryton Playhouse had been unable, due to financial fallout on the theater from the pandemic, to produce a larger show that I was scheduled to direct, and we were presented with an extraordinary chance to create something completely original for their fall production. Our "play with music", The Porch on Windy Hill, resulted from that opportunity.

David and I were 'quarantine/isolating' in a very remote area down south, and I came up with the idea — and a basic outline of the story — on one of our long journeys to the grocery store to load up on a few weeks' worth of food and supplies. Lisa Helmi Johanson and Morgan Morse immediately came to mind, and they jumped on board and our collaborative process began!"

BJ: Music seems to be a healing bridge in the journey of the play. What else do you hope our audience takes away from the experience?

Sherry: "I hope that what audiences will take away is the understanding that there is always a way forward, and however imperfect or tentative, you have to try. I'd like for them to see that 'we're all in this together', and that taking the time to really listen to one another is the path to forgiveness, compassion, true understanding and acceptance. I'm hoping they will be inspired by Mira's quest to call out — and to face — past wrongs, and find her own way to prevail."

## Road to Northlight Theatre



Essex, Connecticut  
Fall, 2021



Watch a promo for the  
[World Premier](#)



NY, New York  
Winter, 2022

**NEW  
OHIO  
theatre**



Lowell, Massachusetts  
Winter, 2023

**MERRIMACK  
REPERTORY  
MRT THEATRE**



Skokie, Illinois  
Spring, 2023

**NORTHLIGHT  
THEATRE**



Weston, Vermont  
Summer, 2023

**weston  
THEATER  
COMPANY**

# Activities

## Folk Tale Telephone

Folk music is like folktales. They are passed down by oral tradition, rather than being written down. In this activity, you will explore how a story can change as it is passed along.

### Step 1:

Independently, think of a story from your life where you faced a challenge. Consider what characters are part of it, how the problem was solved or not solved, and any lessons that were learned.

### Step 2:

Break into pairs. Each person should take 1-2 minutes to tell their story to their partner. The listener should focus on listening to the story and should not ask questions.

### Step 3:

Find a new partner! With your new partner, each tell the story you just heard from your previous partner to the best of your ability. Do not share who your last partner was, tell the story like it belongs to you.

### Step 4:

Repeat Step 3 with another new partner. Tell the story you heard from your most recent partner.

### Bonus Challenge:

Continue the chain of stories being retold even more times!

### Step 5:

As a full group have volunteers share the story they most recently heard. Have fun with sharing the story, like you are gathered around a campfire! After each sharing discuss:



- Can the original storyteller identify this as their story?
- What changes happened over the retellings?
- What was it like telling someone else's story?

### BONUS!



[Click to read about the social emotional and academic benefits of oral storytelling](#)



## Inventing Instruments

Communities of Appalachia invented their own instruments out of ordinary household objects such as spoons, washboards, buckets, and wooden toys.

**What objects in your classroom could become an instrument?**

### Step 1:

Find objects in the classroom and experiment with what sounds you can make with them. Pick your favorite, this will be your instrument.

### Step 2:

Gather in small groups and combine the sounds of your instruments to make a beat.

### Step 3:

Share back your music for a full class jam session!

### BONUS!



[Watch a "limberjack" instrument demonstration](#)



### BONUS!



[Click to read more about the instruments of Appalachia](#)



# Activities

## Letter Writing

**"You are a white man. You are allowed to be angry. People listen to you when you get angry. I have to prove I have a right to be angry before anyone even pays attention." - Mira**

In the play, Mira feels like her voice is not being listened to. Think of a time you felt like you were not being heard. Write a letter to who you believe needs to listen to your voice (this could be a person you know, a group of people, or even a stranger). Use your letter as an opportunity to express your voice in an unfiltered and honest way. When you're done you can keep it, crumple it up, or use it to spark a conversation.

## Poster Design

Here you will see the show artwork for three different versions of The Porch on Windy Hill. Consider the different images and what they each convey about the show. Now, imagine you are the designer for the next theatre company the show travels to. Create a poster for your imaginary theatre company's production of The Porch on Windy Hill.

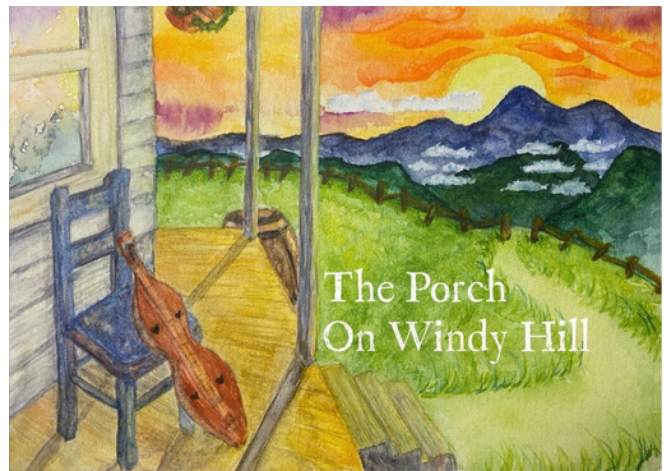
### Weston Theater Company



### Northlight Theatre



### New Ohio Theatre



## BONUS!

Host a class marketing meeting for your imagined theatre company and workshop your designs together. Break off into teams to combine designs and collaborate to create second and final drafts for your poster.

Teacher Note: Posters can be a done through drawing, collage, photography, graphic design, or a combination of artistic mediums.



# Resources

## ***Northlight Theatre & The Porch on Windy Hill***

[The Porch on Windy Hill Northlight Production](#)

[Full Synopsis of The Porch on Windy Hill](#)

[The Porch on Windy Hill Production History Website](#)

[Ivorytown World Premier Promo Video](#)

[The Porch On Windy Hill musicians jam Video](#)

[The Porch on Windy Hill Pioneer Press Article](#) by Myrna Petlicki

## **Folk Music**

[What is folk music? Article](#)

[An introduction to: Folk music Article](#)

[Folk Music](#) by Bruno Nettl

[Appalachian Instruments Article](#)

[Folk Music Playlist](#)

[An Introduction to the Erhu Video](#)

[Limberjack Percussion Toys - as demonstrated by Randy Cato Video](#)

## **Appalachia**

[About the Appalachian Region](#)

[30 Fascinating Facts About the Appalachian Mountains for Trivia Buffs](#) by Jonathon Engels

[Biodiversity of Appalachia Article](#)

[Conserving the Appalachians](#)

## **Themes**

[Oral storytelling is important for reading, writing and social wellbeing Article](#)

[Stop Asian Hate Photo Story](#) by Washington Post