



Bruce Norris, whose Pulitzer Prize-winning play *Clybourne Park* had its Chicago premiere at Steppenwolf in 2011 before transferring to Broadway, brings his new work, *Downstate*, to Chicago this fall.

## Time SERVED

Playwright Bruce Norris talks creative control and forgiving unlikable characters.

BY JENNA ZIZZO-KLEMIS

"Theater is just more fun," says Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Bruce Norris. "It's live, it's constantly changeable and you can't stream it on any stupid little device."

Norris, a Steppenwolf Theatre Company ensemble member, admits that part of his preference for the stage arises from the writer's ability to maintain control over subject matter—an advantage he appreciates as he prepares his new play, *Downstate*, which opens Steppenwolf's 43rd season. A co-commission and co-production of the National Theatre, *Downstate* will transfer to London in the spring of 2019.

Set in downstate Illinois, the play centers around four sex offenders living in a group home while they try to navigate a society that doesn't really want them. A touchy subject, of

course, but Norris angles *Downstate* toward the theme of compassion and forgiveness. The sensitivity and current volatility around the subject of sexual abuse doesn't faze Norris.

"I'm interested in the topic of forgiveness and under what circumstances we're willing to grant it to someone," he says. "I decided to write a play about sex offenders and the system of justice they deal with."

As he pushes moral boundaries, Norris hopes *Downstate* will leave an impression on the audience.

"I asked myself," Norris says, "what would happen if an audience simply had to spend two hours with the people they consider the worst human beings on the planet." *Sept. 20–Nov. 11, tickets \$20–\$99, 1650 N. Halsted St., steppenwolf.org*