

A Novel Drama

Ina Marlowe's
read on
Sister Carrie



Director Ina Marlowe and adaptor Tom Creamer chose to extend the success of their dramatization of Mark Twain's *Roughing It* by selecting the work of another writer from the Midwest, Theodore Dreiser. *Sister Carrie*, Dreiser's first novel, is set in Chicago and draws on the author's exposure to the city in the 1890s.

"Tom and I kept reading classics until we found one that we liked," notes Marlowe. "We read Melville and Poe and Henry James and even Jack Kerouac. We finally settled on *Sister Carrie* because Tom wanted to tackle something American and specifically Chicago. It's a great story with great characters, and so much is happening! There are chorus numbers, singing, there's a riot, labor turmoil, and a passionate love story spanning two cities."

Marlowe adds that *Sister Carrie*—the play as well as the novel—considers the effect of the city on men and women during the first decades of pell-mell industrialization in the U.S. The urban world, she says, is characterized by "pitfalls" and "corruption"—but also by opportunities unavailable in late-nineteenth century rural America.

"What fascinated me about the novel is that the characters are put down in very real what-they-do terms," Marlowe notes. "Dreiser never says, 'Don't be like Carrie or Drouet or Hurstwood.' He just documents their lives in a tremendously exciting plot and lets them make choices."

"The reader has to draw his own conclusions, and in the play we have taken the same tack—we're trying to give a clear picture of the characters while letting the audience decide for itself."

—David Cohen