

From book to play: Of course, a play is not a book.
~ Jacob Stockinger

Nobody knows the challenges of stage adaptations better than Jeffrey Hatcher, the Minneapolis-based playwright, who adapted the play with [Mitch] Albom's help.

"The particular challenge is that I was working with one of the characters," he says, "and you're not going to bump into that circumstance very often."

In short, he faced a dilemma.

"Most of it had to do with how we would present the Mitch character, who changes during the story. That's dicey to take on, it's so self-revelatory," Hatcher recalls.

"Sometimes I'd turn to Mitch and say 'He's not a very likable guy.' Yet here I was, talking to the guy I'm saying isn't likable. One had to be diplomatic, but also very honest. Eventually it worked out very well. But it was a new experience for me. I'd never worked with a living author before and with an author who was a character in his own book."

Another challenge was the book's huge popularity.

"It's so well known, there aren't too many surprises you can throw to the audience," Hatcher says. "And there's not a lot of suspense because we all know that Morrie dies in the end. If there is suspense, it's whether Mitch finds salvation before Morrie passes away. So there is a ticking clock on his evolution."

But this particular adaptation called on all Hatcher's skills.

"I always enjoy doing adaptations, and I've done a lot," Hatcher says. "This one was more difficult than many, but in the long run we're all very happy with it. It's a piece that affects a lot of people on a deep level."

"People bring their own history to the play, things they wished they had said to someone they've lost. In part, we discovered that the audience was the third character in the play. Once we realized that, we were all very happy with what we were able to achieve."

Still, he tried to make it a drama.



“One of the things we were most pleased about is that we were able to dramatize so many things that were laid out in the book. There are little secrets and cliffhangers in the play that weren’t in the book.”

The two men listened to tapes of Morrie.

“Some of the things Mitch didn’t put in the book we put in the play,” Hatcher recalls. “It was fun to work those into the script. That could be a surprise for people who know the book very, very well.”

Hatcher is also not sure the play will ever be as popular as the book.

“It’s a lot easier to walk into a book store and pick up a copy than finding a stage production to go to,” he quips. “But we’re seeing a lot of productions around right now, including some in Canada and South America. So there’s already an amazing audience out there—and it is already primed for us.”



See Mitch Albom’s *Tuesdays with Morrie* at City Theatre through December 18.

Call 412.431.CITY for tickets and performance times or visit CityTheatreCompany.org