

The Buddha Prince



AT THE CENTER

The Buddha Prince

Outdoor "walking" play takes audience on journey through the extraordinary life of the Dalai Lama, in support of Center's new Arts and Healing initiative.

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The University of Minnesota's **Center for Spirituality & Healing** enriches health and well-being by providing high-quality interdisciplinary education, conducting rigorous research, and delivering innovative programs that advance integrative health and healing.



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Driven to DiscoverSM

Markell Kiefer

A LONG-BURNING PASSION FOR HEALING THROUGH THE ARTS

Sometimes the world converges in just such a way that paths cross and interests unite. Such was the case when the University of Minnesota's first lady, Susan Hagstrum, introduced Markell Kiefer to the Center. A fan of the Center herself, Hagstrum knew of Kiefer's interests and recommended she get to know the Center's work.

"I was on this lonely road, kind of on my own, and I felt so fortunate to have finally met others with similar passions," Kiefer remembers. "My first conversation with the Center lasted almost three hours and I remember being completely drained – in a good way – after the experience!"

One of the ideas that emerged from that first conversation was to revive what has come to represent Kiefer's life passion:

The Buddha Prince.

*The Center is co-presenting this production with TigerLion Arts, with public performances from **September 17-21, 2009** at Powderhorn Park in Minneapolis.*

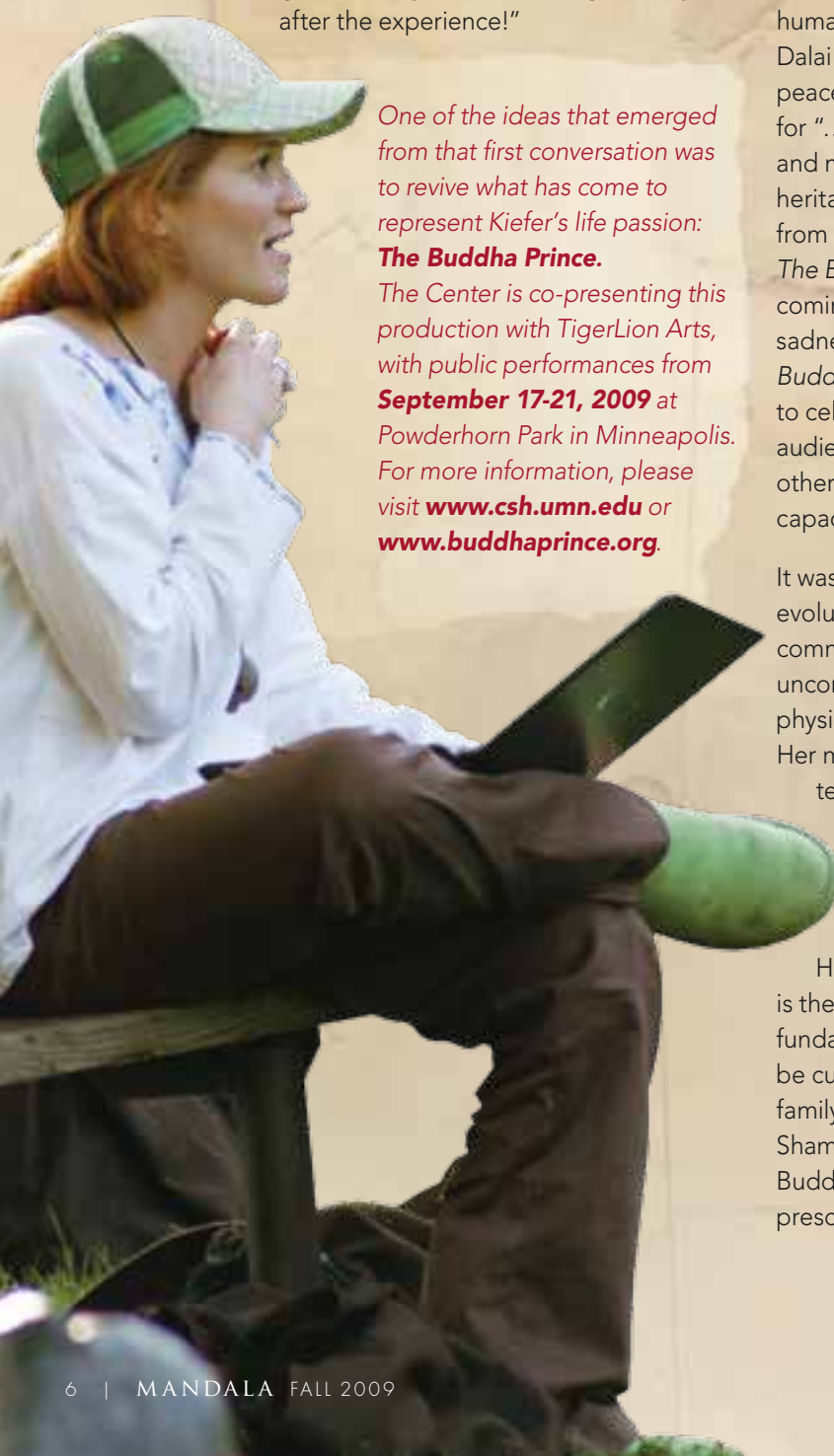
For more information, please visit www.csh.umn.edu or www.buddhaprince.org.

The Buddha Prince is a celebration of His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama, and of an extraordinary life spent in the practice of peace. The uncommon 'walking play' is also a celebration of Tibetan culture, heritage and healing. Kiefer points out that before the Chinese invasion and occupancy of Tibet, 50 years ago this year, the culture was not well-known to the international community. "The occupation has given the Tibetan people an opportunity to talk in the world, to share their message. *The Buddha Prince* is part of that message."

The mission of the play is to celebrate the good humanness, precious life, and universal teachings of the Dalai Lama, and to promote his worldwide efforts for peace. (The Dalai Lama won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 for "...advocating peaceful solutions based on tolerance and mutual respect to preserve the historical and cultural heritage of the Tibetan people.") Narrated with excerpts from His Holiness' own teachings and autobiographies, *The Buddha Prince* offers a personal point of view of his coming of age, precious life lessons, and the tremendous sadness he absorbed for his people. Above all, *The Buddha Prince* is meant to invoke peace in the world and to celebrate the inherent goodness of human beings. The audience is encouraged to laugh out loud, cry with each other, and leave the experience inspired by the profound capacity of the human heart.

It was Kiefer's own journey that informed the creation and evolution of *The Buddha Prince*. Raised in the Shambhala community of Boulder, CO, she had a decidedly unconventional early life. Her father, Tom Kiefer, is a physician with Park Nicollet and lives in the Twin Cities. Her mother, Marlow Brooks, has a healing practice and teaches workshops in five-element healing and plant spirit medicine in Boulder. Shuttling between Colorado and Minnesota as a child, Kiefer became a student of the world, influenced by both her parents' professional interests and inner circles.

Her Shambhala upbringing largely defined her. It is the Shambhala view that every human being has a fundamental nature of inherent goodness. This nature can be cultivated through meditation, so that it radiates out to family, friends, community, and ultimately society. While Shambhala is rooted in the contemplative teachings of Buddhism, it is available – and practiced – by many who prescribe to other traditions or spiritualities.





“My religion is very simple.
My religion is kindness.”

– HIS HOLINESS, THE DALAI LAMA

When she turned 18, Kiefer briefly questioned whether she wanted to be a Buddhist. So she deferred college for a year to explore her spirituality at Karne Choling, a Vermont retreat center. After that experience, she decided Buddhism was the right fit for her – and she never looked back.

While attending Middlebury College, she found herself gravitating toward the study of religions. “Like many students that age, I found myself exploring all types of spirituality. Eventually I came to my own conclusion: all religions, at the most profound level, overlap in their core meanings and messages. In my opinion, that ‘intersection’ usually points to universal ideals that each of us seek: to become a better human being and to do good in the world.”

“At the same time that I was exploring my belief system, I was consciously connecting to nature. You couldn’t keep me inside! I find a deep sense of spirituality and peace in nature. But I also started realizing how disconnected many of us are to nature. And I felt passionate about helping others get closer to nature.”

It was also at Middlebury that Kiefer had a life-defining experience. “I met Steven Rockefeller, now Professor Emeritus of Religion at the College. In 1991, Steven had started a symposium series, later to become a book: *Spirit and Nature – Why the Environment Is a Religious Issue: An Interfaith Dialogue*. In getting to know him and discussing our shared interests, a bit of a roadmap finally began to emerge for how I could connect my passion for religion and the environment into my life’s work.”

“Meanwhile, I’d always been interested in theatre, but I had steered clear of that scene during my college days. To be honest, I was too intimidated by many of the actors’ bold, self confidence and guess I wasn’t ready to put myself out there... Many times I wondered, ‘How in the world can I pull all of this together?’”

Kiefer first moved to Twin Cities in 2000 for an apprenticeship with the Children’s Theatre in Minneapolis. It was at a planning meeting for the Dalai Lama’s Minnesota visit that Kiefer first had the idea for *The Buddha Prince*. It debuted at Lake Harriet Peace Garden in May, 2001. A cast of children from local Tibetan, Zen and Shambhala Buddhist communities, along with members of the Jewish and

Quaker communities, shared the stage with actors from the Children’s Theatre Company. It was an unqualified success but *The Buddha Prince* remained far from finished, at least in its creator’s mind.



Kiefer rehearses with
The Buddha Prince cast.

After September 11, 2001, Kiefer moved back to Boulder to begin a Master’s program in Lecoq-based, physical theatre at Naropa University. “This program gave me the confidence to be a director. It really taught me how to be a creative professional.” With newfound confidence and at the urging of her co-writer, Michael French, Kiefer decided to return to *The Buddha Prince* with a fresh perspective, determined to take it to the next level.

The Buddha Prince was revised with a new script and musical score for the Dalai Lama’s 2004 U.S. visit. Later that year after meeting her future husband, Tyson Forbes, the couple moved back to Minneapolis. “Tyson’s also an actor and a creative being and we were both inspired by the Twin Cities’ theatre scene. This time, Minneapolis felt like home.”

Renewed and inspired, Kiefer started planning for performances of *The Buddha Prince* in Minneapolis and New York the following year. “The performances just kept evolving,” Kiefer says. “This is growing, living art and has always been an opportunity for me to connect with the Dalai Lama’s teachings and to practice my own spiritual path while connecting with others in nature and theatre.”

To mark the 50th anniversary of the Tibetan displacement, Kiefer asked the Center to join her to present *The Buddha Prince* once again. “This play’s principle message is one of peace. Peace that each of us can manifest and create in the world. I believe it is an incredible medium to change the world and a perfect fit with the Center’s work.”

“The fact that this is a free play is very intentional. I want to celebrate the life of this special person, the 14th Dalai Lama, and the values he holds so dear. I want to give the Twin Cities’ community the chance to share in this.”

“The connections between spirituality, healing and the arts are what I am most passionate about. I see it as my purpose in life,” offers Kiefer. “I am so excited to discover, with the Center, how we can work together to bring healing through the arts center stage!”