

THE GRADUATE MUSICAL THEATRE REWRITING PROGRAM

SUMMER 2017 NEWSLETTER

Alum, Adjunct and Associate Producer: An Interview with Rob Hartmann



Rob Hartmann, alum of The Graduate Musical Theatre Writing Program (Cycle 5) and adjunct faculty member, was recently named Associate Producer at the Fredericia Theatre in Denmark. Rob has had a lot of different adventures on his path which has led him to his current position as Associate Producer. He has also helped and worked with a lot of other GMTWP alums along the way. We had the chance to discuss his journey with him.

Congratulations on your new position as Associate Producer at the Fredericia Theatre in Denmark! Can you describe your journey from being a graduate of the Graduate Musical Theatre Writing Program to your current position at this major European theatre?

I think what I've learned over time is that you can never predict or even plan any path -- one opportunity leads to the next in surprising ways.

This is the saga of the track from GMTWP to Denmark:

When I first moved to NYC, before entering the program, I worked as an assistant in a design firm – I describe it as my "Devil Wears Prada" job – it was all about managing schedules, getting on the phone and finding things out, and basically keeping people's lives organized. All of those skills came in handy in every job I've had since. The firm did "brand identity" which meant packaging design and communicating the essence of a product succinctly and powerfully. Learning about that also helped me a lot in writing and in helping other writers refine their vision.

I went to GMTWP and afterward was very lucky that I had friends in different parts of the country who were starting theatres and needed shows to put up – so I had a lot of experience doing shows in 99-seat theatres in a lot of different cities. Small productions, but full productions. This was another way of learning the nuts and bolts of producing – basically you're making lists and getting things done.

I ended up coming back to GMTWP as adjunct faculty; besides being a thesis advisor, I also took on a lot of the producing/organizing responsibility. If we were doing a showcase somewhere, I was probably pulling it together, because I enjoyed it.

As the department grew, Marie needed someone to share the casting responsibilities for thesis readings, and I very happily stepped in to help. This gave me a lot of experience with actors: seeing an actor's potential very quickly, getting an instinctive sense of how they might best be used, and generally learning how to be a matchmaker between writer and actor.

During my time as an adjunct, I was also getting involved in starting some businesses – with my former partner, I helped open and manage an eco-focused retail store, and a worker-owned cafe. (As a side note, I am very proud to say that the cafe was in the forefront of the push toward paying livable wages and insurance – and in recognition of that, we were visited by President Obama.)

These business ventures taught me that, in a way, everything is theatre: it's all about creating an experience. Not just for your audience/customers, either -- you are creating a world for your employees as well. My goal was always to create an environment in which everyone can grow, and feel like they are gaining something by being there (employees, actors, everyone.)

After a number of years at GMTWP, I was invited by Cycle 10's Jenifer Toksvig to join her in starting a new MA in Writing Musicals at a theatre school in London. While that turned out to be just a one-year project, it exposed me to all the various writing workshops and new works programs in the UK. And here's where the Denmark connection came in: Jen has strong ties to Denmark (her father was a well-known broadcast journalist there.) She was working on a project with the Fredericia Theatre; they were planning to do a reading in New York. I offered to do the casting, since I had all my contacts from my time casting thesis readings – and because I just love casting. So, Søren Møller, the head of the theatre ("teaterchef" as they say in Denmark) got to see a little of how I worked – my spreadsheets and so on.

Then – after the London program came to an end, I woke up one day with a realization that I wanted to put teaching to the side for a bit, and focus on producing, since I'd been doing it all along. The very next day, some

of my London students called me because they had lost a producer on a project they were doing at an off-West End theatre. So I stepped in.

And not long after that, Katie Kring of Cycle 15 had seen the job listing for Fredericia Theatre and forwarded it to me. I knew in my gut that that was going to be my next job. Of course there was an application and interview process – I did my research on the theatre, and on Denmark. And now here I am.

In a great full-circle demonstration that this is exactly where I should be, the first production I worked on once I made the move to Denmark was *The Trouble With Doug* (in Danish known as *Problemet Med Douglas*), which started life as the thesis project of Cycle 16's Daniel Maté and Will Aronson.

What will your new role as Associate Producer entail and what are some of the goals you have in this capacity?

The position is new at the theatre, so we are still defining what my role is. Right now it is, "whatever needs to be done", which I love. Every day it's a set of puzzles thrown at me to solve, which is very satisfying.

The major reason they created the position is that the theatre has been growing rapidly in the last few years. When you're a small company, you can just shout across the hall to your colleague in the next room. When you all of a sudden have 40 people in different departments spread across multiple buildings, communication systems change.

In many of my jobs, I've been brought in to organizations whose systems need fine-tuning -- improving communication flow, working on planning, and trying to build a system that works for everyone so we are not reinventing the wheel with every show. I've been getting to know all the departments here and watching their work process. I approach it like -- how would things work ideally, and how are they working in reality. Then it's a case of finding small ways in which you can move the reality closer to the ideal.

Søren Møller, the head of the theatre, is a real visionary in the Hal Prince mode. He has worked tirelessly to get the theatre internationally recognized. We are doing the world premiere of *Prince of Egypt* in the spring, which is a culmination of his work over many years in building relationships with writers, directors, composers, and major producing entities like DreamWorks, NBCUniversal, Disney and so on. As more of his time has to be turned to sustaining those relationships and building new ones, I will be keeping the wheels turning back at home. And I love doing that.

You have worn so many different hats in your artistic career up to this point and you continue to deeply affect and help shape so many other younger artists along the way. How do you balance your life as an artist, writer, educator, freelancer, producer, etc.?

I am learning the importance of time management, that's for sure. I love talking with fellow writers about their projects and serving as a sounding board – trying to help someone distill their own vision and connect more deeply to what they are trying to create is very, very satisfying to me.

Right now I am in a steep part of the learning curve, so I've had to put some of my own projects on hold for a bit -- but everything feeds into everything else, so I feel like I haven't changed the essence of what I do at all. I'm still helping people manifest their work -- just with a different title and set of resources.

How does your experience as a writer of new musicals affect your role as Associate Producer?

I think, for one, it has allowed writers and composers that we're working with to have some trust that I understand what they are going through when we are in the midst of production.

Also, having been on all sides of the experience of getting a new musical up, I think it makes me sensitive to what everyone in the endeavor needs.

I have to say it has also given me some perspective as a writer. I think it's very easy for us to get lost in detail – which is important at a certain point in creation, certainly. But I am reminded all the time about the importance of clarity of vision. How can your creative vision be powerfully distilled and focused, to become more evocative? It's usually about finding the clear, simple, strong gesture. This resonates through everything -- the writing, the staging, the design, the marketing, the audience experience.

How has your experience and time living in Europe and participating in European theatre and theatre education shaped you as an artist?

I went through a period of culture shock when I was living in London – everyone tells you it's going to happen, but as mentally prepared as I thought I was, it still was disorienting for a while. It does give you a sense of perspective about how culture is inescapably entwined with the art that is created in a particular society. In London, learning how British musicals are deeply different from American musicals, right down to their core, has been a fascinating process (still ongoing.) And now I'm learning about Danish culture and how it expresses itself in musical theatre – I've only been here six months, but every day I discover a bit more.

To make broad generalizations -- there is an outward restraint in Danish culture, but there is a core of deeply felt emotion. They have incredible soul.

I am lucky right now to be working with an amazing cast – I am overseeing our production of *Hunchback* (in Danish, 'Klokkeren Fra Notre Dame') which is running at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen. What strikes me about this company – and other Danish actors I have met – is that they have interests and awareness about many things outside theatre. There isn't a "show bizzy" feeling, where people are consumed by "the business." The Danes place great importance on a humane work/life balance, and it shows in their art. It reminds me of a Barbara Cook quote, when an actor asked how to be a good singer – she said, essentially, 'pick up a newspaper and become an interesting person, and it will naturally come through in your singing.' That's what I feel here – there are fully dimensional women and men who are emotionally open to one another, who don't feel the pressure to be a certain way, who can have a full private life away from the theatre, who bring deep, deep feeling to the performances. I hear it in their voices -- there is none of that thing you hear in New York sometimes where someone is layering on the sound they think they need to have. Here, everyone's voice is individual, full and resonant and deeply expressive.

What's on the horizon for you as a writer and as an artist in general? What should we look for next from you?

I am working on a few new projects although it is a test of my time management skills!

I'm also keeping a toe in the London scene, putting together an evening of new works (in collaboration with Victoria Saxton of *Cycle 19*) at The Other Place, Andrew Lloyd Webber's theatre run by the brilliant Paul Taylor Mills.

I've been also wanting to start up some kind of international bookwriting discussion group – like a monthly conference call kind of thing – to keep in contact with the bookwriters that I met and worked with a bit in London. My focus and interest has become much more book & structure oriented (I'm working as bookwriter on some projects, and composer on others – which very happily stretches all sides of my brain.)

And as a writer, I'm happy to say that my show *Vanishing Point*, written with Scott Keys of Cycle 5 and Liv Cummins of Cycle 8, will be performed in Seattle early next year. Incidentally, this project came about because of Cristin Hubbard, a brilliant actor who has been in one bajillion thesis readings. She has been instrumental in the development process of the show – readings and demos and more readings. When she relocated to Seattle, she went out and pitched the show to a theatre. It's those kind of relationships that end up taking you places – you can't plan for them, they just evolve and grow.

ROB HARTMANN is currently Associate Producer at the Fredericia Theatre in Denmark, one of the foremost producers of new musical theatre in Europe. He is also a composer lyricist bookwriter; before accepting the position in Denmark, he was based in London, where he co founded and taught the Master of Arts course in Writing Musicals at Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts. While in London he was a guest speaker at the National Student Drama Festival, Mercury Musical Developments, the BML (Book Music Lyrics) Workshop, and Scenic Route Theatre. In collaboration with Mercury Musical Developments, he produced an evening of excerpts of new British musicals at Andrew Lloyd Webber's theatre, The Other Palace. Rob received his MFA from New York University's Graduate Musical Theater Writing Program, where he was a member of the faculty for fifteen years. His musicals have been produced around the country, including New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Seattle, Nashville, Sarasota and Minneapolis. Most produced works include *Macabaret*, which has had over 30 productions worldwide; *Vanishing Point*, which has played across the US and in Spain, with an upcoming production in Seattle; and *Stay On The Line*, a rock musical currently being adapted into a web series. Other productions include *Two Weeks With The Queen*, a musical adaptation of the award winning Australian novel; *Aliens: A Puppet Musical*, a sci fi parody; and *Wild Blue*, commissioned by the Human Race Theatre Company as part of the centennial celebration of the Wright Brothers' flight. Educational productions include two musicals commissioned by the Monterey Bay Aquarium, an outdoor history pageant commissioned by the Mission at San Juan Capistrano, and a glam rock musical, *Kelly the Destroyer vs the Springfield Cobras*, written for high school theater groups. Rob is a recipient of a Jonathan Larson Foundation Award; he received a 2003 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. His choral work has been heard in Carnegie Hall and Avery Fisher Hall in New York. He has worked with a number of mens choruses across the US, including the New York Gay Men's Chorus, Cincinnati Mens Chorus, the San Diego Gay Men's Chorus, and Men Alive! in Orange County, California. Rob is also a theatre scholar and historian: he has written more than a dozen articles on theater for the Encyclopedia Americana, including the revision and expansion of Ethan Mordden's history of musical theater. He has given lectures on musical theater history in venues from Lincoln Center to Radisson Cruise Lines. He conducted photo and document research for Meryle Secrest's biographies of Stephen Sondheim and Richard Rodgers. He also wrote initial episode treatments and conducted photo research for the PBS documentary *Broadway: The American Musical*. Rob was commissioned to write study guides for a number of Broadway productions, including *Wicked*, *The Color Purple*, *Titanic*, *1776*, *Kiss Me Kate*, *Amadeus*, *Aida*, *Jane Eyre*, *42nd Street*, *Copenhagen*, *Into the Woods* and *Hairspray*. He has also worked with the Rodgers and Hammerstein Organization on adapting their major works for young performers.

Bubbly, Bella Take Bows Off-Broadway: Discussing the Shows of Kirsten Childs



2016 & 2017 were fantastic years for composer-lyricist-bookwriter Kirsten Childs (Cycle 4 and Adjunct Faculty). Her semi-autobiographical musical *The Bubbly Black Girl Sheds Her Chameleon Skin* had its European premiere at London's Theatre Royal Stratford East in February followed up by a concert revival in New York City Center's *Encores!* series. Her newest musical, *Bella: An American Tall Tale* was seen by audiences at the Dallas Theater Center in the Fall of 2016 and made its way to New York City's Playwrights Horizons this last summer. Featuring strong female protagonists and casts of color, infectious and versatile scores, witty lyrics, and fantastical yet poignant plots, Childs' musicals, which have a voice all of their own, left audiences entertained and enlightened.

You've had quite a wonderful year! Congratulations! What has your overall experience been having *Bella: An American Tall Tale* and *The Bubbly Black Girl Sheds Her Chameleon Skin* in front of so many different audiences?

I think the most wonderful thing I discovered this year about *Bella* and *Bubbly* is that their central ideas resonate with audiences of color. Happily, those ideas also resonate with white theatergoers. But I'm glad to have provided at least one way for audiences of color --- whose experiences are not often reflected on stage in musicals, especially as lead characters --- to see themselves on stage in situations that are recognizable, meaningful and fun to them.

Bubbly has had quite a journey. The original production at Playwrights Horizons in 2000, the production in the United Kingdom, and the most recent production at City Center (to name just a few). How did each production differ from one another?

Playwrights Horizons 2000: The thrill of La Chanze actually asking me questions about the character, and trying to do what I told her because she actually believed I knew what I was talking about. The oh-my-God-I-can't-say-that-hell-yeah-I'm-writing-it-down-ness of it all. The giggling in rehearsal with director Wilfredo Medina and musical director slash fellow alum Fred Carl. The realization after the show opened, that all the work done before opening night was the most incredible time of my life.

U.K. Theatre Royal Stratford East 2017: The terrific choice that director Josette Bushell-Mingo made to have two actors play Viveca - one, the Los Angeles child and the other, the New York City adult. The gloriously diverse U.K. audience who didn't quite understand who Harriet Tubman or the four little girls in Birmingham were, but had their own British equivalents to make the story meaningful to them. The little known fact I discovered after every show --- there are many British Bubbly Black Girls, ranging from their early teens to their late eighties.

City Center Encores! Off Broadway 2017: The jaw dropping experience of watching Nikki James come up with new layers of depth and complexity to her Viveca character every day. The joy of being in the room with wunderkind director Robert O'Hara and the joy of seeing choreographer Byron Easley's thrilling storytelling through dance.

How does the show (Bubbly) resonate with audiences of today versus the audiences of the original production in 2000?

Sadly, the show is all too current. Church assassinations of black people are still happening, racial profiling, even when proven to be wrongful by videotaped documentation, continues with a vengeance. What's interesting to me is that the critics seem to have caught up with what the show's about. Back in 2000, *The Bubbly Black Girl* did get a rave review from The NY Times, but some critics were absolutely not on board with it, and for reasons that would raise eyebrows today. One (white male) reviewer lamented that watching a black woman grappling with internal and external racism onstage was a tired and unoriginal premise. I would have agreed with him one hundred percent if he was talking about how tired and unoriginal it is for a black woman to deal with racism when she's *not* onstage. Another critic didn't think it was fair that a black woman writer could spoof a Valley Girl turned Black Nationalist and get "comfortable guffaws", since a white writer doing the same thing would be criticized. Thankfully, whatever issues a reviewer might have with the work at present, they're not those types of issues. And the audiences are just as appreciative of Bubbly's journey today as they were "back in the day." When I was recently in the U.K., the audiences were predominantly people of color. They went bonkers for *Bubbly* and I'm happy to say, it was a "date night"/"girl's night out"/"mom and daughter" show. At City Center Encores Off-Bway, there was a seriously integrated audience, which was a truly beautiful thing to see. People were laughing and cheering and crying and dancing in their seats and having a good time. That's the way things should be at a musical.



GMTWP alums and Kirsten Childs at the production of *The Bubbly Black Girl Sheds Her Chameleon Skin* at City Center in New York City.

Bubbly is a semi-autobiographical piece and portrays such a wonderfully unique voice. How would you describe your voice and how do you feel your experiences and life have shaped your voice as a writer?

I don't know how to describe my voice, and I suspect that if I did know how to describe it, it would no longer be mine. In terms of my writing, I continue to strive for clarity and brevity. I think I've gotten better at it. I will say that I've been a day dreamer for a long time. I remember watching the movie *Billy Budd* on television when I was a little girl. I was extremely upset that cute-even-with-dyed-blond-hair Terence Stamp was going to have to hang for accidentally killing mean old nasty ha-ha-I-got-you-to-kill-me Robert Ryan. And so I imagined myself a stowaway in the ship's hold. The noose around Billy Budd's/Terence Stamp's neck broke and he fell, unconscious, into the briny deep. I jumped out of the porthole, grabbed Billy/Terence and dogpaddled to a nearby Tahitian island, where we lived happily ever after on breadfruit, suckling pig and coconut milk. I don't know if such imaginings were a coping mechanism for enduring my real world, but they've definitely kept me from despair a time or two. Not to mention, they were fun to dream up.

Your shows feature strong, female leads of color. Can you speak about what inspires you in the creation of your main characters?

For so long, the role of black women in musical theater has defaulted to "sassy", "strong", "sexually aware", "brash", "no nonsense, tell it like it is." The notion of a sweet innocent young black girl is so far removed from the American musical theater consciousness - wait, let me go even further. The notion of a sweet innocent young black girl is so far removed from American consciousness as to be thought of as anomaly. I remember being an undergrad and a young white man who was interested in my white college roommate begged me to watch over her, to make sure she suffered no loss to her innocence. He was absolutely convinced that I, like all black girls, had experienced sexual activity way earlier than our white counterparts. Which was news to me, as I was still a virgin and my roommate was decidedly (and happily) not. His complete comfort in explaining this to me opened my eyes to how America perceived me, and girls like me. It also made me resolve that someday, somehow, I would be a part of changing that viewpoint. Whether they're feisty and stubborn, whether they're sweet and shy, whether they're straight up guilty as hell, all my black heroines begin their journeys as an embodiment of the innocence that the world is trying to deny them. How they succeed or fail at holding onto their decency is an important part of the story I'm interested in telling. And it's gotta be done with fabulous singing and dancing.

How do you approach writing male characters?

I have a wonderful brother, and I had a great dad. Where I grew up in Los Angeles (a blue collar/middle class neighborhood) most of the kids (of color and white) had dads. All the little boys were pests, but they were good kids. I should mention, all the little girls were pests too. Yes, that includes me. When my family would visit relatives back in the South (North Carolina), all the adults --- men and women --- were loving, wonderful vibrant support systems for the children. So, the male characters in my stories are my way of honoring that love - to show black men with dignity, courage, humor. With a strong understanding of responsibility, and with big hearts, capable of deep love. I haven't written a musical where the main character is a man, but if I did, I'd try my best to make folks fall in love with him.

What do you hope audiences of today will take away from your work?

I hope audiences have a good time, and part of their ability to have a good time might depend on their willingness to look at issues that might be out of their comfort zones. I'd love for the musical to be a conversation starter, a uniter of people with different points of view. And if none of that turns out to be possible, I hope folks will at least want to learn how to do "The Skate"!

What is on the horizon for you? What should we look for next?

Right now I'm working on a movie adaptation with bookwriter/director Gordon Greenberg (we worked on a Disney cruise line show together and had a blast). I'll let you know more when I know more!

KIRSTEN CHILDS (book, music, lyrics), is the award winning writer of the musicals *The Bubbly Black Girl Sheds Her Chameleon Skin*, *Miracle Brothers*, *Fly* (with Rajiv Joseph and Bill Sherman), *Funked Up Fairy Tales*, and *Bella: An American Tall Tale* (directed by Robert O'Hara). *Bella: An American Tall Tale* received its world premiere in the 2016 2017 season at Dallas Theater Center, with a co production at Playwrights Horizons, NYC. *Bubbly Black Girl* was recently produced at Theatre Royal Stratford East in the U.K. and at City Centers Encores! Off Broadway. For her work Kirsten's received Obie, Kleban, Larson, Richard Rodgers, Audelco, and Gilman/Gonzalez Falla awards, as well as Lortel and Drama Desk nominations. She's currently working on a commissioned project for The New Group with writer/director Gordon Greenberg. Kirsten has written for Disney Theatricals, the American Songbook series at Lincoln Center, the New Electric Company, City Center Encores!, Works and Process @ Guggenheim Museum, and Premieres/Inner Voices under the producership of Paulette Haupt, Artistic Director of the O'Neill National Music Theater Conference. She's an adjunct professor in NYU's Graduate Musical Theater Writing Program, and a member of the Dramatists Guild Council.

Talking About TREVOR: An Interview with Julianne Wick Davis & Dan Collins



GMTWP Alums and writing team Dan Collins & Julianne Wick Davis (both Cycle 16) have embarked on a timely new musical inspired and adapted from the Academy Award-winning short film *Trevor* about a high-school boy who realizes he is homosexual and faces prejudice from his parents and peers. The musical, which shares the same name as the short film, has been mounted at The Writer's Theatre in Chicago. Collins (words) and Wick Davis (music), who are no strangers to writing stories about intolerance, such as their musical *Southern Comfort* which ran at The Public Theater (NY Times Critics' Pick), discussed with us their experiences in working on the show in Chicago.

How did you get involved with the project?

JWD: Four years ago Dan and I went through an audition process to be the writing team for TREVOR. URock Productions had obtained the stage rights to the film short that won the Academy Award in 1994 which then became the inspiration for the Trevor Project (the first 24-hour suicide hotline for LGBTQ youth). We were asked to audition and went through several rounds of writing songs for various moments in the show. In the last round we were one of three teams to present three songs to the URock producers as well as to James Lecesne, the writer of the film, and Peggy Rajski, the director. We were fortunate to be chosen after that last round. Marc Bruni came on as our director two years later and Josh Prince joined us as choreographer soon after that.

What have been some of the challenges in adapting the film into a musical?

DC: The main challenge is, of course, creating a full-length musical from a 16-minute gem while trying to retain the spirit and resonance of that gem but also making a piece that is distinct unto itself. We've mined those 16 minutes for the characters, scenarios and emotions it presents to us, as well as those it suggests or implies, and we've worked to grow and explore each of those beats. Accordingly, there are numerous differences between the musical and the film, including characters, new plot lines and an expanded relationship between Trevor and Diana Ross (the object of his admiration, inspiration and atomically glowing affection).

JWD: Since the character Trevor has an obsession with Diana Ross, the producers wanted to include a few of her iconic songs when it was appropriate for the storytelling, just as they do in the film. At first, I wasn't sure if I was interested in the challenge but it made sense dramatically and was also a big part of adapting the story. We ended up weaving short quotes of three Diana Ross songs into original material and then using two songs almost in their entirety as part of some of the fantasy moments. Actually, weaving those few iconic songs into the original musical material was a fun exercise, but I can't deny that it was a different kind of challenge to make the rest of the score cohesive when it came to using a couple of songs almost in their entirety. Neither I nor the producers were interested in me doing a 1980's pastiche score. I mean, there are times in the story where Trevor is dealing with danger and devastation and it was important to me to portray those moments honestly. So, I wrote music that made sense to me dramatically, always remembering that my music was sitting alongside some beloved existing material.

From what sources have you found inspiration in the creation of the music, words, and storytelling?

DC: The film was my main source of inspiration in expanding on the character of Trevor and those around him. I also drew on my own experiences which, while not identical to Trevor's, certainly had their parallel moments. The film and story are so specific but universal at the same time that I felt it was important to continue to find the specificity in each moment and marry those moments with the details and memories that it personally evoked for me.

JWD: My inspiration? Dan's book and lyrics. Every single time.

What have been your experiences working and writing out of town?

JWD: The Writer's Theatre has been incredibly supportive throughout the process. Although we did not start our relationship with them until about a year ago, they have been so important to the development of the show. We were able to do a writer's retreat and a workshop reading, where we made some significant changes before having the opportunity for this full production. Since this is the first production of TREVOR, we have been making changes daily, so I've been going from my living quarters to the theatre and then post-rehearsal meetings and then back to the living quarters to do rewrites...then rinse and repeat. But we have been taken care of in a way that has given me more time to focus on the rewrites than if I was at home.

What do you hope audiences will take away from this musical?

DC: Empathy and respect for one another, as well as a reminder of how critical it is to be strong not only for yourself, but for those around you who cannot have a voice or are too afraid to be their own voice. In 1981, and even today, this might have been a young LGBTQ person without the ability or resources to articulate their struggle. But it could truly be anyone, for any reason, and it's so important to look around and ask ourselves: "are there 'Trevors' in my life? And what I can I do to help them?"

JWD: We all have probably experienced some version of this story, whether you were a "Trevor", or a bully, or a passive observer, or even a parent of an LGBTQ child. Someone asked us if we thought this story was too outdated since the film was created in 1994 and it takes place in 1981. In March of this year, The Trevor Project recorded their highest call volume ever from LGBTQ youth who were considering suicide. The young teen actors who have been a part of the development process have told us that they are experiencing the same things Trevor experiences in the show. Headlines every day are showing us a rise in intolerance of all kinds. So, we hope people will walk away from this musical remembering it's never outdated to be kind to one another.

Dan Collins (librettist/lyricist): With composer Julianne Wick Davis, Dan wrote book and lyrics for: SOUTHERN COMFORT (Jonathan Larson Grant and GLADD Media Award winner; Lucille Lortel, Outer Critics Circle and Drama Desk nominee); THE PEN (Drama Desk nominee); TREVOR (currently playing at The Writers Theater in Chicago); WOOD (NYMF '08); and book to Julianne's music/lyrics for WHEN WE MET (CAP 21 Theatre Company). Dan received his M.F.A in Musical Theater Writing at Tisch School of the Arts, NYU and his B.F.A. in Playwriting at The Theater School of DePaul University.

Julianne Wick Davis (composer/lyricist) received the 2012 Jonathan Larson Award for SOUTHERN COMFORT (music) with Dan Collins (book & lyrics) based on the Sundance award winning documentary by Kate Davis; The Public Theatre, 2016 (NY Times Critic's Pick, Lortel and Outer Critics Circle Nomination for Outstanding Musical); Barrington Stage Company 2013; NAMT 2012 Festival of New Musicals; developmental reading at Playwrights Horizons 2010; developmental production at CAP21 in 2011 received a GLAAD Media Award and was a TimeOut NYC and NY Times Critic's Pick. THE PEN for Inner Voices 2016 (Dan Collins, book & lyrics) was also a NY Times Critic's Pick, and will be expanded for Hartford Stage. Her musical TREVOR (music with Dan Collins, book & lyrics) for URock Productions based on the Oscar winning film short received a production at the Writer's Theatre, Chicago, Fall 2017. Julianne wrote music and lyrics for WHEN WE MET with Dan Collins (book), 2012 O'Neill Musical Theatre Conference, York NEO Development Series reading in 2013, developmental production at CAP21 in 2014, and featured musical in *Broadway Close Up* at Merkin Hall. She wrote "At the Met" (music and lyrics) for Lonny Price's *Lincoln Center Originals*, and "Wear You" and "Down a Thailand Drain" (words and music) for Shakina Nayfack's MANIFEST PUSSY, as well as "The Stillness of the Office" with Maggie Kate Coleman (lyrics) for Alexandra Silber's *After Anatevka* at Symphony Space. She's currently writing music and lyrics for a song cycle based on Jon Crispin's photographs of the Willard Asylum suitcases. Julianne is a 2011 Dramatist Guild Fellow, a York Theatre's NEO 9 emerging writer, and a 2015 Sundance Fellow at UCross. Julianne has an MFA from NYU's Tisch Graduate Musical Theatre Writing Program.

Journey of a Theatre Journalist: An Interview with Shoshana Greenberg



It wouldn't be inappropriate to call GMTWP alum Shoshana Greenberg (Cycle 16) a Renaissance Woman. A socially conscious blogger, journalist, musical theatre writer, event organizer, and advocate for women in the arts, Shoshana has written for prestigious publications such as *The Huffington Post* and *American Theatre Magazine*. We had the chance to interview her to discuss her work and writing.

How did you find your way into theatrical journalism?

I was a journalist before I was a musical theater writer. In college, I was the arts editor and then co-editor-in-chief of the weekly newsmagazine, and I almost went to journalism school, but the night before classes started I decided to defer for a year. In that year I learned about the Graduate Musical Theatre Writing Program, which seemed like a more appealing graduate school experience to me. After GMTWP, I started dipping my feet back into the journalism world, focusing on theater journalism. I wrote reviews and little features for really small websites that I don't think exist anymore. Ryan Scott Oliver, my classmate from cycle 16, asked me to write for his blog *Crazytown*, which I did weekly for a couple years. Through a posting on our forum digest, I got the opportunity to write blogs on *The Huffington Post*. All this time I was writing mostly for free or for very little money but I was also figuring myself out as a writer and practicing my craft. The more I wrote, the more opportunities came my way, like the site *Culturadar*, which I've been writing for since 2013, and then the sites *Women and Hollywood* and *The Interval*, and *American Theatre Magazine*. Almost all of those opportunities were through Twitter connections, actually. The theater journalism community is very active on Twitter.

How does the current social and political environment influence the things you write?

I'm still figuring it out. My main resolve in this current political and social environment is to think how I can make the world of musical theater a better place and how I can make the world a better place for musical theater. Within that large goal, I feel enormous power as a writer because that is my skill and where I have the most opportunity to contribute. Many of the musicals I'm writing now were started years ago, but everything has become more urgent in recent years, especially my musical with cycle 13 alum Hyeyoung Kim, *Days of Rage*, which is inspired by activities of The Weather Underground Organization and Black Panther Party in the late 60s and early 70s. That began as a historical piece, but the current environment gives it more relevance and gives us as writers more determination to push the piece forward. This environment makes me question everything I write and whether it has some kind of social or philosophical relevance—I have to be able to answer “why am I writing this?” as well as “what do I want this piece of writing to accomplish?”

You are a strong advocate for women and diversity in theatre. What are the messages you are trying to share in your writing and in your own work?

Musical theater—and theater in general—is still very white male, and one thing I can do to combat that with journalism is to feature the work of women, especially women of color. This past May I wrote two articles that fit right into that—my article on fellow alum and faculty member Kirsten Childs for *American Theatre Magazine* and my article for *The Interval* on the forgotten co-bookwriter of the musical *Raisin*, Charlotte Zaltzberg. An important general message is that women and people of color write musicals, but we don't see them getting many major productions. Besides being a woman writing musical theater applying for everything I possibly can, I can keep raising the issue and increase the visibility of other women and people of color who are writing. The more visible we are, the better it is for all of us, and musical theater desperately needs an explosion of musicals written by women and people of color.

How do you balance art and art criticism in the things you write (both as a musical theatre writer and a journalist)?

I do write both articles and musicals simultaneously, and I'm currently working on a few musicals and a few articles. That's usually how it is. They're different ways of writing, so it's nice to switch back and forth. Writing about theater keeps me aware of what's going on in NYC theater and across the country. I get to talk to great artists and artistic directors and learn more about them, their work, and their theaters, and those people get to know me a little as well. I think being a writer helps me talk to other writers and ask questions that other journalists may not necessarily think to ask. I guess it's always possible that people will then think of me as only a theater journalist and not a musical theater writer, but that is the challenge for anyone working in multiple overlapping worlds.

What are you currently working on? What should we look for next from you?

I'm also doing another installment of my popular (or so I'm told) 7 Women in Theatre History You Should Know series for *The Interval*, and I have other articles in the works as well. And as I mentioned, I'm writing a few musicals with my collaborators, and I'm doing a cabaret concert in October.

I'm also starting a podcast! I've been doing preliminary work on it this summer (thank you to fellow alum and *Something New* podcaster Joel B. New for all his help!) and hope to get it up and running in the fall. The idea is to talk about musicals analytically as a literary form and to encourage others out there to think and talk about them in that way. When I was in high school, I longed to talk about musicals in the way I talked about novels in English class. I think this kind of discussion often happens on Facebook among musical theatre writers, so this podcast will bring that type of discussion into a more public arena for everyone. Stay tuned!

Shoshana Greenberg's musicals include *Days of Rage* (New York Theatre Barn) and *Lightning Man* (Ars Nova ANT Fest), and her songs have been featured in concerts at Lincoln Center, The York Theatre, the Duplex, TriArts Sharon Playhouse, and The Laurie Beechman. Plays: *Lost Girl in Florida Swamp* (Fresh Produce'd) and *The Rapture of Our Teeth*, a ten minute parody play (ESPA's Detention Series, published on Indie Theatre Now). She earned her MFA from NYU's Graduate Musical Theater Writing Program after graduating from Barnard College. As a journalist, she has contributed to *American Theatre Magazine*, *The Interval*, *Women and Hollywood*, *The Huffington Post* and *Culturadar.com*. ShoshanaGreenberg.com; @vmarshmellow

Gun & Powder by Cycle 24 Alums Selected for SigWorks Musical Theater Lab



Cycle 24 Alums Ross Baum & Angelica Chéri

SigWorks: Musical Theater Lab, a new developmental workshop which promotes new theatrical work, has selected *Gun & Powder* for this year's lab. Written by Cycle 24 alums Ross Baum (music) and Angelica Chéri (words), and selected out of 170 submissions, the show follows the story of Mary and Martha Clarke, fair-skinned African-American twin sisters who passed for white, and who, according to family legend, were outlaws.

Baum & Chéri will spend two intensive weeks working with the artistic staff at the renowned Signature Theatre near Washington, D.C. to refine their work. The program will culminate with staged readings for the public.

Cycle 14 Alum Michael R. Jackson Announced as Writer in Residence at Lincoln Center Theater



GMTWP Cycle 14 alum Michael R. Jackson was announced as one of 5 New Writers in Residence at the prestigious Lincoln Center Theater. The residency provides the use of free office space and other resources throughout the course of the year to create new works in New York City, with no strings attached. The initiative, which began in 2016, is led by LCT3 artistic director Evan Cabnet and associate director Natasha Sinha.

The July 8th concert included new musicals written by Niko Tsakalacos (Cycle 17), EllaRose Chary & Brandon James Gwinn (Cycle 19), Brandon Michael Lowden (Cycle 20), Rona Siddiqui (Cycle 21), Teresa Lotz & Sarah Anne Rebell (Cycle 22), and James Ballard & Seth Christenfeld (Cycle 23).

GMTWP Alums Find Home at Feinstein's/54 Below in 'New Writers at 54' Series



A host of GMTWP alumni had songs and material featured at the prestigious Feinstein's/54 Below cabaret venue in midtown this summer. The lineup of alums included Julia Meinwald and Gordon Leary (both Cycle 16), Sam Salmond (Cycle 20), Eric Price (Cycle 18), Sukari Jones (Cycle 16), Timothy Huang (Cycle 11), and Rebekah Greer Melocik and Jacob Yandura (Cycle 20).

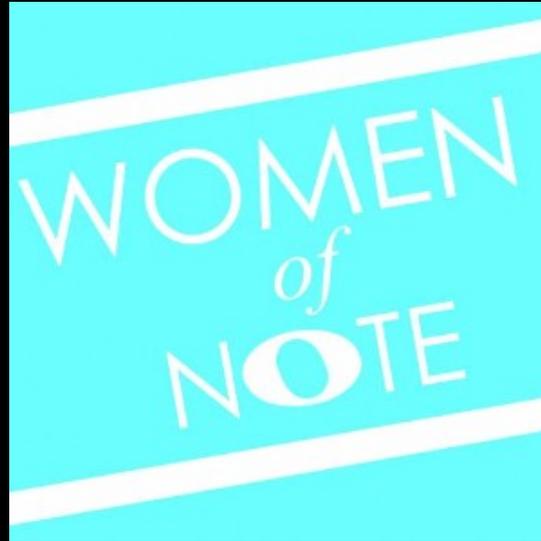
New Writers At 54! is a summer series at Feinstein's/54 Below showcasing exciting work by today's hottest emerging voices, curated by Creative and Programming Director Jennifer Ashley Tepper.

GMTWP Alums Selected to Participate in 2017 Rhinebeck Writers Retreat



Several GMTWP alums were selected to participate in the 2017 Rhinebeck Writers Retreat. Founded by Executive Director Kathy Evans, the retreat hosts weeklong residencies during the summer in the Hudson Valley. Participating writers spend the time working on their new musicals. Among this year's selected writers were Chris Miller & Nathan Tysen (Cycle 10), Jenny Giering (Cycle 6), and Cycle 21 alum Ben Bonnema.

Women of Note Concert Features Work by GMTWP Alums



'Women of Note', a NYMF-Produced concert series which celebrates female, queer, and trans artists who are changing the landscape of musical theater, featured the work of a number of GMTWP alums. This year's lineup included work by: Mindi Dickstein (Cycle 5 & Adjunct Faculty), Georgia Stitt (Cycle 7), Carmel Dean (Cycle 12), Sukari Jones (Cycle 16), Maggie-Kate Coleman, Anna Jacobs, and Erato Kremmyda (all Cycle 17), Diana Oh (Cycle 19), Scotty Arnold and Jenny Stafford (Cycle 20), Ronna Siddiqui (Cycle 22), Ty Defoe and Tidtaya Sinutoke (Cycle 24), Jonathan Fadner and Kathleen Wrinn (Cycle 24), and Janet Noh (Cycle 25).

The concert took place on Monday, July 24th at the Peter Jay Sharp Theater in New York City.

GMTWP Alums Present New Musicals at Festival of New Musicals at Village Theatre



GMTWP alumni writing teams Michelle Elliott & Danny Larsen (both Cycle 14) and Nikko Benson and Benjamin James Halstead (both Cycle 22) will have their work featured in the 2017 Festival of New Musicals at The Village Theatre in Issaquah, Washington. Elliott & Larsen will present their new musical *Hart Island* and Benson and Halstead will present their show *Nikola Tesla Drops the Beat*

With about 50 artists, a dozen directors, and authors from across the country, the festival, which will take place on August 11-13, will present five new musicals as staged readings.

Honors & Events

GMTWP alums Len Schiff (Cycle 7), David Mallamud (Cycle 13), & Michael R. Jackson (Cycle 14) will present original work at the Dramatists Guild Fund Annual Fellows Presentation on Monday, September 18th at Playwrights Horizons. The three alums were selected last year to participate in the Fellows program where they were paired with artist mentors and have met regularly over the past nine months with experienced theater professionals and as a community to discuss their work.

Cycle 22 alum Nolan Doran has been named Associate Director for Michael Mayer for the upcoming Broadway show *The Terms of My Surrender* which will start Michael Moore at the Belasco Theatre.

Cycle 22 alums Nolan Doran and Avi Amon co-wrote the music for Ayodele Casel's "While I Have the Floor" which had its world premiere at the Spoleto Festival this year. Doran also worked with Ayo last year while assistant directing *Jamboree* at City Center and the Hillary Fundraise on Broadway.

GMTWP alums Carmel Dean (Cycle 12) and Ty Defoe & Tidtaya Sinutoke (Cycle 22) had work featured in Rattlestick Theatre's 'New Songs Now' series which took place from the 23rd thru the 27th of July. The unplugged concert series featured the work of different songwriters in an open-studio environment.

Cycle 25 alum Lee Summers had a concert version of his new musical *The Funkentine Rapture* at Feinstein's/54 Below on June 19th. Featuring the talents of Tony Winner James Monroe Iglehart and Tony Winner Lillias White, the show is described as 'a soulful 70s musical celebration of funk'.

Cycle 26 alum David Lancelle and Cycle 27 current student Patrick Thompson featured a sampling of their new music in "A Flight of Songs" as part of the Angelo's Cabaret Series at Angelo's Piano Lounge in Milwaukee on July 9th. Lyrics were provided by other GMTWP alums and current students.

Cycle 15 alum Sean Mahoney and collaborator Patricia Noonan had songs from their new musical *Sweetwater* featured at Feinstein's/54 Below cabaret venue on July 17th. The new musical tells the original, true story of the Women's Air Force Service pilots of World War II.

Several GMTWP Alums participated and had their work featured in MuseMatch 10.0 at Feinstein's/54 Below cabaret venue on July 28th. Described as a "Musical Theater Blind Date", MuseMatch pairs composers with singers they don't know and are asked to share themselves authentically leading to daring, bold new material. Spencer Robelen (Cycle 26), Emily Rose (Cycle 25), Brett Macias (Cycle 14), Brandon Michael Lowden (Cycle 20), and Rona Siddiqui (Cycle 21) were among the participating composers.

Cycle 16 alum Ryan Scott Oliver and Cycle 22 alums Ty Defoe and Tidtaya Sinutoke had their work featured in "How the Light Gets In: An Evening of New American Micro-Musical Works" at the 2017 New York Musical Festival.

Productions, Workshops & Readings & Other Announcements

Cycle 22 alums, Nolan Doran and John Carden had a reading of their show *Woody: A New Fairytale* at the New York Musical Theatre Festival in June. The musical is a quirky fairy tale adventure about a young man looking to find connection in a world that's becoming increasingly disconnected. Loosely based on Collodi's classic tale *Pinocchio*.

GMTWP alums Salomon Lerner (Cycle 21) and Len Schiff (Cycle 7) had a reading of their new musical *The Golem of Havana* in Red Bank, NJ on Sunday, August 6th as part of Two River Theatre Company's Crossing Borders Festival, which celebrates new plays by Latino writers.

Cycle 24 alums Jonathan Fadner (music) and John Blaylock's (book) new musical *Northanger Abbey* received a production at the Main Street Theatre and Dance Alliance on Roosevelt Island on Sunday, August 6th. The show was produced by the theatre company Common Man Musicals, which commits to producing new works of musical theatre that are relevant, relatable and affordable.

Cycle 14 alum Rachel Peters was featured on the Indie Opera Podcast to chat about various operatic matters. Peters discussed the female composer Ethel Smythe, whose "Der Wald" was the first opera by a woman composer to be performed at the Metropolitan Opera. To listen to the podcast visit: <http://indieopera.com/podcast-40-rachel-j-peters/>

Cycle 22 alums Nikko Benson and Benjamin Halstead received a production of their new electronic pop musical *Nikola Tesla Drops the Beat* at the Adirondack Theatre Festival in June and July. The show tells the story of one of history's greatest inventors.

GMTWP alums Katherine Brann Fredricks (Cycle 16) and Oriente Lopez (Cycle 9) presented their musical *Occasion for Sin* at the Planet Connections Festivity in June and July. The show weaves together the lives of the royal Incas; the court of Spain, where 13-year old Prince Felipe is torn between a bastard Priest and the corrupt Regent of Spain; and the woman whose determination to demonstrate God's power in the world led her to become the Patron Saint of Spain, Teresa of Avila. Together, these passionate adversaries confront the timeless conflict of waging war for peace.

Cycle 19 alums EllaRose Chary & Brandon James Gwinn received a production of their show *TL; DR: Thelma Louise; Dyke Remix* as part of The Tank NYC 2017 PrideFest. The show is a parody sequel, queer rock musical that asks the question "why do strong female characters always gotta die?"

Cycle 13 alum Michael Cooper and collaborator Anton Dudley received the world premiere of their new musical *Second to Nun* at the American Dream Theater located in Virginia Beach. Starring critically acclaimed singer, actor and entertainer Molly Pope, the one woman musical is about the power of faith, the persistence of invention, and the importance of staying true to your calling, even when you're the only one who hears it.

Cycle 25 alums Mark Burns (words) & Boram Han (music) had a workshop production of their musical *Cora and The Great Beyond* in July as part of the Collaborative Development Production series at The Graduate Musical Theatre writing Program.

Cycle 27 current student David Kornfeld had a production of his new musical *Number Nerds* at the 2017 New York Musical Festival in July. With lyrics by Alex Higgin-Houser, book by Laura Stratford, a story by Larry Little, and music by Kornfeld (with additional music by Dylan MarcAurele), the show is "a story of girls becoming women, conquering both anxiety and rivalry, finding a way to affirm themselves both as individuals and as team-members, so they can win at math... and at life!"

Josh Freilich (Cycle 20) and Kate Chadwick (Cycle 24) had a reading of their new musical *Butterflies* at Barrington Stage Company in July. Featuring Tony Award-winner Donna McKechnie, directed by Tony Award nominee Graciela Daniele, and music direction by Cycle 26 recent alum Benji Goldsmith, *Butterflies* is a show about two days: the day a former dancer stopped dancing, and the day she remembers how to dance again.

Cycle 24 alums Marella Martin (words) and Casey O'Neil (music) had a reading of their musical *Danny and the Rocket* at the Pocono Mountains Music Festival on August 4th at the Smith McFarland Theater at East Stroudsburg University. The show was selected to be featured as part of the festival.

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