

Director's Vision

By Gabriel Barre



*Gabriel Barre at the first day of rehearsals for Goodspeed's Billy Elliot.
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Billy Elliot The Musical is based on the 2000 movie of the same name, written by British writer Lee Hall, who also wrote the book and lyrics for this show. The score was written by pop songwriter and icon Elton John. Lee's influences were the books [The Stars Look Down](#) by A. J. Cronin and photographer Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen's [Step by Step](#). The musical premiered in 2005 in London and closed in April of 2016; the Broadway production played on Broadway from 2008 to 2012. The show has been seen all over the world—including Mexico, where I directed the premiere of the show in Mexico City; it opened in 2017 and ran for over a year.



One of the photographs from Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen's [Step By Step](#).

The story of *Billy Elliot* is a story of passion, finding your purpose, and summoning the courage necessary to follow your dreams and create your own destiny. It is also a father and son story that deals with loss, tolerance, and

forgiveness, using the dramatic circumstances of the real 1984 Miners Strike in northern England as a backdrop for this family struggle. The story teaches us that change, enlightenment, and harmony are possible and that beauty can be found in the most unlikely of places. Billy is a flower in the sidewalk, and, in a way, we all are—looking for a way, and the right way, to grow and to discover our purpose for the brief time we are all here.

One of the main reasons I was excited about directing this production at Goodspeed Musicals was that we are not doing a replica production of the show, but creating our own set design, costume design, lighting design, and especially, all new choreography by Marc Kimmelman. Together, as a creative team, we started with the beautiful gem of a theatre—the Goodspeed Opera House—and quickly remembered that the theatre used to serve as a civic town hall. So, our approach takes that fact and treats the Opera House as a town hall, but one in Easington, England in the early months of 1984. Our approach to the



Walt Spangler's "black box" style set model.

stage itself was an attempt to suggest the hard and bitter life of the industrial northern England mining towns and the mines themselves. I think of the stage as a magic black box, or mine shaft, from which any essential ingredients for the story telling emerge and are manipulated by the cast and crew, all as members of that community. And it is, of course, Billy who will emerge from this world and into a far bigger—and more hopeful—one at the end of our show!

It has been a joy to once again work on the main stage at Goodspeed and to collaborate with this phenomenal cast, crew, staff, and creative team on this beautiful story.