



AUTHOR'S NOTES

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Writer & Director
Cutman: a boxing musical

When we endeavored to write *Cutman*, I didn't know a thing about boxing.

It was the summer of '06. Reality TV was in its prime. My best friend and co-writer, Cory Grant, called me and said, "You gotta start watching *The Contender*. It's heart-breaking." So I did, and it was. It was my first real empathetic moment for boxers. Watching these men sacrifice their lives and their bodies brutally battling for success, hoping to provide for their families when they become superstars. Ah...The American Dream. Work hard. Be great at what you do. Have success. Support your family. Live your dream. I can relate.

I knew I wanted to write a play about a boxer. And if we were going to write a musical about boxing, we knew that one of us would have to learn how to box. So I started boxing.

That's when I met my Haitian Harlem trainer, JR "All-Day-Every-Day" Fiote at the PrintingHouse Gym (RIP). He is my cornerman and now one of my best friends. He saw me hitting an uppercut bag and stopped me: "You gotta hit with your knuckles...otherwise, you just slappin' that bag." The first of many lessons. Now JR and I spar regularly at Trinity Boxing in Manhattan with the likes of the Guzman brothers, Hector and Jennifer Santiago, and the amazing Ronson Frank (16-0 (8)). I've been through 14 pairs of gloves. I started to learn how to box five years ago so I could write this play, and now boxing is an integral and inseparable part of who I am and who I will be for the rest of life.

Boxing is also a huge and inseparable part of Jewish-American history. Past and present. When immigrant Jews arrived on these shores, they were poor. They had nothing. Fighting was their way to fortune... and fame. Barney Ross, Benny Leonard, Max Baer, Leech Cross, just to name a few. Even today we have Dmitriy "Star-of-David" Salita and Yuri Foreman, both former World Champions. All three writers (myself, Drew, Cory) happen to be Jewish. A collision of something we were very familiar with (Judaism) and something we were not at the time (boxing) became the perfect foundation for a story about pursuing your dreams when tradition and faith interfere.

Cutman was written during our late twenties and in many ways is all about that—the years when boys become men, before they become fathers. It's a period in life, regardless of gender, where our dreams are the height of possibility. But there are so many things that get in the way of making that journey an easy one. *The Contender* made that clear. The history of Jewish boxers also pointed to this. Boxers are poor. They have families to feed, they have communities to make proud, but, above all, they have a dream. A dream of being the best. Winning means the fulfillment of that dream, a dream that will complete them—personally, professionally, and spiritually.

What would you sacrifice for your dream? Would you break a man's nose? Would you break your mother's heart? Would you throw away all of your money? Would you turn a blind eye on the things you once held dear? Would you betray the traditions of your faith? Would you betray your God? These are just some of the questions we ask and explore in *Cutman*.



Cutman is a completely original musical—a fact that Cory, Drew, and I are very proud of. As writers, we want to create new music and new stories for the American Theater. This is important to us, and it's important to Goodspeed. Thank you for allowing us to create and be creative here in Chester. It is an honor and a pleasure for *Cutman* to receive its world premiere here at Goodspeed's Norma Terris Theatre. We welcome a discussion of the thoughts and feelings that arise from your experience of the play.