



Robert Schenkkan

THE 12

A NEW MUSICAL

WRITERS' NOTES

BY ROBERT SCHENKKAN (Book & Lyrics) & NEIL BERG (Music & Lyrics)



Neil Berg

A group of fugitives huddles terrified in a room in an abandoned building. Outside, the searching police grow nearer. Inside, there is fear, anger, and despair. We could be in NYC today, or Jerusalem two thousand years ago. One of the group begins to tell a story, an amazing story, a story of miracles and betrayals and hope. *The 12*.

Neil and I met years ago, introduced by mutual friends. I love musical theater and had been eager to work in that arena. Neil had an interesting idea. Musicals have a famously difficult birth, but from that day to our residency at Goodspeed, it has been a much longer journey than either of us imagined! What was originally a rock song cycle in concert is now a full book musical with a much more natural and nuanced approach to the story.

An early version had a very successful production at the Denver Theater Center where it won the Henry Award for Best Musical, but we were still unsatisfied. And so, we turned to John Doyle, the multiple Tony Award-winning Director, to join us. Early in his life, John was considering the priesthood; then he discovered the Theater. As someone intimately familiar with miracles, religious and secular, there could hardly be a better match of director and material. So, where we were once two, now we were three.

Despite Covid, a challenging but very satisfying development process ensued in which the central conceit was again revised, and half a dozen new songs written, followed by two workshops in NYC. And now, at last, here we are at Goodspeed!

The 12 takes a small, rarely dramatized part of the Passion story. The main characters are now off-stage—Jesus and Judas are dead—and in the terror and chaos that followed, the remaining followers have fled to the Upper Room. These were blue collar men and women and what little they had, each had given it all up to follow this movement. Only days before, they arrived in Jerusalem as heroes! And now, their leader is dead, betrayed by one of their own, and they all expect to die next. Two days later they will leave the room and go out prepared to preach and die for a revolutionary idea. What happened in the room?

It's hard not to look at this event with the weight of 2,000 years of bitterly contested theology. We are trying to strip all of that away and focus on the human story. Imagine if you were one of these ordinary people and this charismatic individual came to you and said, "Follow me."

And for reasons that are still not clear, you put down what you're

doing, and you follow. Even now, it is almost unfathomable.

Oftentimes when modern dramatists have dealt with issues of faith, it's hard not to feel some condescension. Here, we have tried very seriously to get at this fundamental question of Belief, and a commitment to something which cannot be proved in rational, scientific terms. To us, that is an incredibly exciting, dramatic proposition. How do we get there? And when that dies, when that belief falters or is betrayed, how do we go on? We have all experienced a dark night of the soul. That terrible moment where our foundational belief, whether it is a religion, a marriage, a political party, etc. fails us. In that moment, how do we find a way to go forward?

That's the heart of our exploration. And it's why we hope that our audience—members of all faith-based communities and non-believers alike—will find this story not only accessible and respectful, but also profoundly moving.