

A couple of years ago, Michael Rubinoff, the Associate Dean overseeing the musical theatre program at Toronto's Sheridan College, invited us to develop a show with his students. We considered a number of our works-in-progress but really wanted to write something new, although we had no idea what it could be.

At the same time, we happened to be at the University of Oklahoma working on our adaptation of Ray Bradbury's *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, a piece in which every character is over 50 or under 13.

The average age of our cast was 20.

Now, it's a fact of life that in every college musical theatre program some poor student will have to play Tevye or Aunt Eller or Madame Armfeldt, but we wondered if there might be a way to cater to this age group more specifically—to write something college students can directly relate to.

It seemed that the Sheridan College invitation might be the perfect opportunity to do just that.

Of course, we didn't dare to presume to know what goes on in the heads and hearts of today's millennials. So, we invited the *Something Wicked* cast out for pizza and asked them to tell us what was on their minds. (We quickly learned that if you feed students, they will happily talk.) Since these were musical theatre students, we braced ourselves for stories of show tunes and Broadway dreams. We got a refreshing surprise instead. The students shared with us endlessly captivating tales of family, fear, love, loss, and the need for human connection—and in their stories was an incredible individuality and an astounding commonality.

Inspired by that pizza-fuelled conversation, we started crafting a song and text "cycle" (an overused word but we can't think of anything better) specifically for and about college students with Neil supplying the music and lyrics and

Brian writing connecting material, scenes, and monologues. Within a year, the first draft of *The Theory of Relativity* was ready for a reading with the talented Sheridan College students as part of the Canadian Music Theatre Project. This was the perfect way to begin development of the show and the wildly talented students leapt in with both feet.

Since that presentation, many others have jumped on board. Penn State, Baldwin Wallace University, and the University of Michigan have all worked on material from the show. There was even a gorgeous production in London. Along the way, we've picked up new inspiration for stories and songs and with each presentation of the piece, we've tweaked, adjusted, and rewritten in an effort to find the most effective arrangement of the puzzle pieces.

In 2014, Goodspeed invited us to present *The Theory of Relativity* as part of their Festival of New Musicals. Of course, we said yes. We love it here and it felt like the perfect next step. It was during that presentation that we learned that audiences beyond the intended 20-somethings seemed to relate to these stories. Many audience members told us "My grandchildren are going through the same thing" or "We've all been that age." Our surprise at the depth of feeling expressed in the students' stories was equaled by our surprise that the show might actually resonate beyond that demographic.

As a small side note, we've just returned from rehearsing and presenting *The Theory of Relativity* at the University of Oklahoma with many of the same students who inspired us over pizza only a few years ago. Full circle.

And now, here we are back at Goodspeed, which is fast becoming our second home, to tweak and revise and rewrite with another group of extraordinary young actors. We look forward to sharing this version of *The Theory of Relativity with you*. We hope you enjoy yourselves and maybe even find a little of yourselves in these stories.



The cast of *The Theory of Relativity*
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