

The Goodspeed Musicals
production of

Billy Elliot

the musical

Book and lyrics by Lee Hall Music by Elton John Originally directed by Stephen Daldry

GOODSPEED MUSICALS
STUDENT GUIDE

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Billy Elliot

the musical

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THE GOODSPEED

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Synopsis

SHORT TAKE: The spoiler-free synopsis

It's 1984 in a coal-mining town in England. With a government closing mines and challenging the unions, the miners decide to go on strike. Billy Elliot, the eleven-year-old son of a miner, lives at home with his father Jackie, brother and grandmother after the death of his mother. One day, tasked with returning a set of keys to the next teacher after his boxing class, Billy accidentally ends up in a ballet class and, to his surprise, likes it. As the strike rages on and tensions rise, Billy attends ballet classes. When Jackie finds out, he forbids Billy from taking the class, but Billy's teacher Mrs. Wilkinson persuades Billy to meet in secret to make a special dance as an audition for the Royal Ballet School. On the day of the audition, there's a violent clash between the strikers and the police, and Billy's brother Tony is injured. When Billy's family learns about the audition, they confront Mrs. Wilkinson, and Billy misses his chance.

Months later, the community is struggling as the strike looms on. Billy is no longer taking ballet classes, but Jackie sees him dancing by himself one day. Moved, Jackie finds Mrs. Wilkinson, who confirms Billy's talent

but tells Jackie he would have to take Billy to London to catch the next audition. She offers to help with the expense, but Jackie's pride prevents him from accepting it. Instead, he crosses the picket line to work in the mines again, which horrifies Tony and the other strikers. When Jackie reveals this is the only way he can help Billy, the striking miners all pitch in to help him get to the audition. It's not enough, until the workers who have already crossed the picket line come in and add their contribution. Jackie takes the money, putting Billy over his pride.

At the posh Royal Ballet School, Jackie and Billy feel wildly out of place, and Billy starts a fight with another boy. Both Jackie and Billy are called in for the final audition panel. It's not going well until one of the panelists asks Billy what it feels like when he dances, which prompts Billy to put all his feelings into a dance.

Back at home, the community eagerly awaits news of Billy's future. When the letter comes in from the Royal Ballet School, news also comes from the strike—both of which will change the lives of the Elliot family forever.

FULLY SYNOPSIS: SPOILER ALERT! Read the short take above for no spoilers.

ACT ONE

It's 1984 in County Durham, England, where coal mines are a large source of employment and pride. But with Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher attempting to shut down the mines and take power away from the unions, times are hard for the coal miners. At a local hall, the announcement is made—the coal miners are going on strike. Two sons of miners, Billy Elliot and his best friend Michael, don't understand the politics, but say they'll see each other at their boxing class later.

At Billy's house, his coal miner father Jackie tries to keep it all together. Between Billy, Billy's hotheaded older brother Tony, and his slightly dotty grandma, there's chaos and an unspoken awareness that things were much easier before Billy's mother died. She still appears to Billy, helping him through the day.

After another comically unsuccessful boxing class (Billy and Michael just don't see the point of punching each other, infuriating their tough miner teacher), Billy is left to deliver keys to the next class in the room—ballet. While trying to get the keys to the teacher, Mrs. Wilkinson, Billy becomes part of the dance. She tells him she'll see him next week,

but Billy is unconvinced—boys don't dance ballet.

At home, Billy finds his grandmother a bit confused, and he helps her. She sings about her husband, whom she hated but loved to dance with.

Having been assured by another student in the class that not all male ballet dancers are gay, Billy returns to class. As the weeks pass, Billy learns the basics of ballet, while the police and striking miners clash at the picket line. The movement of the two groups interacts and overlaps. Jackie learns that Billy hasn't been going to boxing and shows up at ballet, livid. He bans Billy from ballet classes.

Undaunted by this, Mrs. Wilkinson tells Billy that auditions for the Royal Ballet School are in a few weeks and that he should audition. Billy is skeptical and heads to Michael's house, where he finds Michael wearing a dress. While Michael dresses Billy up too, Billy tells Michael about the ballet classes and the audition. Michael thinks Billy's nuts, but as they sing a song celebrating being who you are, he changes his mind.

While tensions between Jackie and Tony increase over

Synopsis

Tony's desire to fight back at the picket line, Billy brings some personal items to Mrs. Wilkinson to make a dance for the audition. One of them is the letter his mother wrote to him, which Billy can recite by heart—a beautiful message telling Billy to be himself and that she will always be with him. Mrs. Wilkinson explains that dance is about releasing your feelings as much as technique. He gets it, and soon enough it's time for the audition.

As Billy tries to sneak out, he runs into his father and Tony, who has been injured in the increasingly violent clashes between strikers and police. Jackie forbids Billy from leaving the house. Mrs. Wilkinson comes in and tells Jackie about the audition and the private lessons she has been giving to Billy. She says that Billy is exceptionally talented. The miners don't understand, and Tony confronts her, but their fight is interrupted by news that the police are coming. The miners run, and Mrs. Wilkinson tells Billy she's sorry but that he has no hope of pursuing dance with a family like this. He channels his anger into a dance as a riot begins outside.

ACT TWO

Act two begins at the miners' Christmas show. After a jaunty tune of hatred for Margaret Thatcher, Jackie sings an old folk song that was a favorite of his wife's. While drinking a beer outside, Michael tells Billy he would have missed him if we went away to ballet school and kisses him. Billy gently rebuffs Michael and tells him he isn't gay but promises to keep Michael's secret. Left alone, Billy dances by himself, and Jackie sees him.

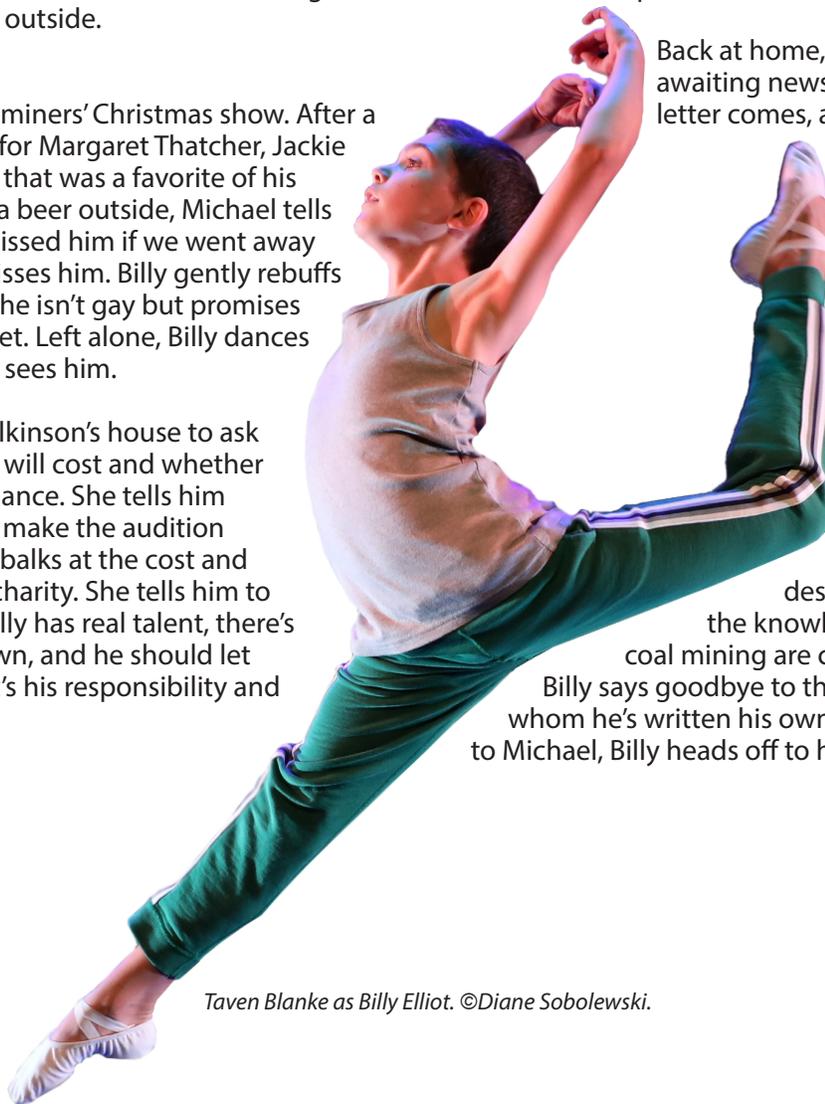
Jackie goes to Mrs. Wilkinson's house to ask how much the school will cost and whether Billy has missed his chance. She tells him they might be able to make the audition in London, but Jackie balks at the cost and says he won't accept charity. She tells him to get over his pride—Billy has real talent, there's nothing left in this town, and he should let her help. Jackie says it's his responsibility and leaves.

At the picket line, the "scabs" - miners who are willing to break the strike to work—have a new addition: Jackie. Tony and the other miners are horrified, but Jackie tells them that he has to do this for Billy. A fight ensues, and Billy is knocked down. The miners realize they've lost sight of what's important, and they all give money to Jackie for Billy's trip to London. It's not enough, though, until a scab comes in with a stack of bills for Billy. Tony angrily refuses the money, but Jackie accepts it.

As they wait in the fancy London school, Billy and Jackie feel hugely out of place. Jackie encounters a masculine Scottish dancer who tells Jackie to support his son, as his own father never did. Meanwhile, Billy, frustrated by the speed of the audition, starts a fight with another boy. Jackie and Billy are called before the final audition panel, and Billy is curt and surly with his answers, while Jackie tries to support him. Finally, one of the panelists asks Billy what it feels like when he's dancing, and Billy's explanation becomes a dance.

Back at home, everyone is eagerly awaiting news from the school. Finally a letter comes, and Billy tells his nervous family he got in. They're thrilled, but it doesn't last long, as news comes in that the strike is over and the miners have lost.

Billy goes back to ballet class to thank Mrs. Wilkinson and to say that he'll visit. She tells him to leave the town and not to look back—he is very special. Billy packs his suitcase as the miners descend into the ground, with the knowledge that the days of British coal mining are coming to an end. Finally, Billy says goodbye to the ghost of his mother, to whom he's written his own letter. With a last goodbye to Michael, Billy heads off to his new life.



Taven Blanke as Billy Elliot. ©Diane Sobolewski.

Characters

BILLY ELLIOT: An eleven-year-old boy who lives in a Northern England mining town and discovers that he loves to dance. Though the people in Billy's life, especially his father, disprove of his dancing, he pursues it anyway because it makes him feel free.

MICHAEL CAFFREY: Billy's best friend, who likes wearing women's clothing and encourages Billy to express himself.

DEBBIE WILKINSON: Billy's friend, classmate at his dance classes, and the teacher's daughter.

DAD: Jackie Elliot, Billy's dad. He shares the traditional values of the mining community that the Elliot family is a part of, and does not support Billy's dancing.

MRS. WILKINSON: Billy's dancing teacher. She is tough on him but only because she recognizes how talented he is.

TONY ELLIOT: Billy's older brother. He is very invested in the strike and is frustrated when Billy's dancing distracts from it.

GRANDMA ELLIOT: Billy's grandma, who is getting on in years and can be very forgetful.

GEORGE: Billy's boxing coach. He doesn't like how Billy avoids classes and thinks that boys shouldn't dance.

BILLY'S MUM: Though she died when he was younger, Billy has a letter from her, which helps him feel like she is still there to support him.

MINERS: Striking against Margaret Thatcher's policy to privatize coal mining, which would close mines down and prevent the miners from getting higher wages and better workplace safety.

BALLET GIRLS: Billy's classmates in Mrs. Wilkinson's class.

MR. BRAITHWAITE: Mrs. Wilkinson's assistant.



*Liam Vincent Hutt as Billy Elliot with Amy Button, Camiel Warren-Taylor, Erica Parks, Margo Anderson-Song, and Tess Santasiero.
©Diane Sobolewski.*

Meet The Writers



ELTON JOHN (*Music*) was born Reginald Kenneth Dwight on March 25, 1947 in Pinner, Middlesex, England. At four years old, he taught himself to play the piano and quickly developed a passion for music. As a child, John often felt like an outcast. His parents divorced when he was a teenager; like Billy Elliot, John had a

strained relationship with his father, Royal Air Force leader Stanley Dwight, who didn't understand John's fascination with rock and roll music. On the other hand, John's mother Sheila Dwight helped shape his love of music by introducing John to rock records. At the age of eleven, Elton John's musical talent won him a junior scholarship to attend the Royal Academy of Music in London. He studied there for five years, but dropped out two weeks before graduation to pursue a music career.

John worked for a music publishing company and spent nights and weekends playing piano in bars. He joined a group called Bluesology, creating his stage name by combining the names of two other members of the band. In 1967, John met lyricist Bernie Taupin through a songwriting job at Liberty Records. They quickly formed what would become an iconic, longtime writing duo and produced John's first album, *Empty Sky*. Though his first album proved to be a commercial failure, John's self-titled second album contained the chart-topping song "Your Song" which rose to fame in both the United States and the UK. John enjoyed further success with later number one hits such as: "Rocket Man," "Crocodile Rock," "Bennie and the Jets," and "Island Girl." In 1973, he launched his own record label, Rocket Records. During this time, he released a series of popular albums including *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road* (1973) and *Rock of the Westies* (1975).

John became well-known for his extravagant live performances in which he donned flamboyant outfits and oversized glasses. His over-the-top lifestyle was comprised of expensive cars, large houses, and excessive shopping sprees. John expanded his career to acting when he starred in the 1975 film of the rock opera *Tommy*.

Elton John's popularity took a nosedive in the 1980s with a series of unsuccessful albums coupled with drug abuse issues, drinking problems, depression, and coming out as homosexual. Following his 1984 marriage to recording-studio worker Renate Blauel, he received additional negative attention from the British press. John experienced a downward spiral in mental health, and his performance quality declined. In the 1990s, John sought out treatment for alcoholism, drug abuse, and bulimia.

After strengthening his physical and mental health, Elton John focused much of his attention on philanthropic work, specifically for those affected by the AIDS epidemic. He

established the Elton John AIDS Foundation which has raised over \$300 million in its 29 years of existence. In 1997, he performed a new version of "Candle in the Wind" at the funeral of his friend Diana, Princess of Wales. The single sold more than thirty million copies and is still the best-selling single of all time in the US and UK. John donated more than \$47 million (all of the song's profits) to the charity established in Diana's name. In 1998, Queen Elizabeth II knighted him for his musical achievements and charitable services.

John continued to broaden his horizons and take on new challenges. He collaborated on music with writers such as Tim Rice and Lee Hall to write songs for Broadway's *The Lion King*, *Aida*, *Billy Elliot The Musical*, and *Lestat*. In 2012, he published the book [Love Is The Cure – On Life, Loss and the end of AIDS](#) to educate others on the battle against AIDS. That same year, he started the company Rocket Sports Management to support young athletes in their sports careers. This joined Rocket Music, Rocket Pictures, and Rocket Stage under John's Rocket Entertainment Group. In 2019, *Rocketman*, a biopic about his life was produced by Paramount Pictures. He has also announced that his first autobiography will be released October 2019.

John continues to participate in impactful, charitable work through The Elton John Charitable Trust, among his other foundations. He's showed support by performing for various fundraisers including the Breast Cancer Research Foundation, the Rainforest Foundation, and the Robin Hood Foundation. He serves as an Ambassador to 23 charities and is a part of the Executive Advisory Boards of four charities. He also endows music scholarship funds at The Royal Academy of Music and the Juilliard School of Music.

Today, Sir Elton John is recognized as a record-breaking legend and one of the most enduringly successful artists in pop music. With more than 300 million records sold, John is the most successful solo male artist in the history of US music charts and the third most successful artist altogether. Throughout his acclaimed career, he has received a staggering number of honors and awards, including five Grammy Awards, one Grammy Legend Award, five Brit Awards, an Academy Award, a Golden Globe Award, a Tony Award, a Disney Legends award, induction to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and the Kennedy Center Honor. He continues to play for millions of fans across the world on his three-year farewell tour, Farewell Yellow Brick Road, as well as work on various stage, screen, and music projects.



DISCUSSION QUESTION

Elton John is primarily known as an artist who composes and performs pop music. How might his experience in this genre influence his musical theatre writing style?

Meet The Writers



production of *The Tempest* and being fascinated with the characters, language, and storytelling. He participated in his local theatre and played accordion. From a young age, he was exposed to the miseries of the 1984-1985 miner's strike. He watched his father, a self-employed carpet cleaner, get turned away from work due to his Geordie accent and its connection to the mining

industry's strike. The mining strike would inspire Hall to create an "art house" film that would eventually grow to be the Academy Award-nominated film, *Billy Elliot*.

Hall earned a scholarship to attend Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge, majoring in English literature. Like *Billy Elliot*, his parents could not understand why he wanted to go to university, especially for writing. After graduating, he worked at a youth theatre in Newcastle and the Gate Theatre in London. In 1997, Hall's radio play, *Spoonface Steinberg*, was met with much positive response when it was broadcast on BBC Radio 4. The play follows a young Jewish, autistic woman in her battle with cancer and was voted one of the top ten radio dramas of all time by *Radio Times* magazine readers. In 1999, *Spoonface Steinberg*, was adapted as a television play and produced as a one-woman show which transferred in January 2000 to the West End's Ambassador's Theatre for a sold-out, limited run. During this time, Hall's plays *Cooking with Elvis* (1995) and *I Luv You Jimmy Spud* (1995) were also broadcast over the radio. Similar to *Spoonface Steinberg*, both were adapted as stage plays and the latter also became the 2001 film, *Gabriel and Me*, starring Billy Connolly and Iain Glen. Among his original works, Hall published translations for *Mr Puntilla and His Man Matti* by Bertolt Brecht (1998), *A Servant to Two Masters* by Carlo Goldoni (1999), *Mother Courage and Her Children* by Bertolt Brecht (2000), and *The Good Hope* by Herman Heijermans (2001). This was the beginning of Hall's successful playwriting career during which he became known for crafting specific stories about oppressed characters into universal, accessible plays.

After writing a number of less successful plays, Hall moved to the US with dreams of writing a "big, political play." While struggling to find inspiration, he coined the idea for *Billy*

Elliot by reflecting on his childhood. He collaborated with director Stephen Daldry to produce the independent 2000 film which starred Jamie Bell. After seeing the film, pop star Elton John approached Hall to transform the film for a stage production. After initial hesitation, Hall agreed and *Billy Elliot The Musical* opened on the West End in 2005. The production won four Laurence Olivier awards including Best Musical and played for over 4,600 performances, closing in April 2016. A similarly successful Broadway version of the musical ran from 2008 to 2012, winning ten Tony Awards including Best Musical.

Following the initial success of *Billy Elliot The Musical*, Hall wrote a number of screenplays for award-winning films like *Pride and Prejudice* (2005), *The Wind in the Willows* (2006), and *Toast* (2010). He also published a series of plays and a 2011 children's opera called *Beached*. He worked on the initial screenplay for Steven Spielberg's 2011 *War Horse* but was replaced by Richard Curtis. After the experience, he stopped pursuing American projects and returned to England where he wrote a number of additional scripts involving the mining industry. In 2008, he wrote *Pitmen Painters*, a play set in the 1930s that examined the lives of English miners which was inspired by art critic William Feaver's book of the same title. The production premiered at the Live Theatre in Newcastle, later transferring to London's National Theatre. The play won the 2008 Evening Standard Award for Best Play and enjoyed a Broadway run in 2010. Hall continued writing about mining when, in 2012, he updated Alan Plater's musical *Close the Coalhouse Door*, an adaptation of miner Sid Chaplin's stories. He has also been working on a play about Harold Larwood, a fast bowler who began as a miner.

Hall has received two Laurence Olivier Awards (*Billy Elliot The Musical*, *Our Ladies of Perpetual Succour*); a Tony Award (*Billy Elliot The Musical*); a Drama Desk Award (*Billy Elliot The Musical*); a Drama League Award; an Outer Critics Circle Award; an Evening Standard Award (*The Pitmen Painters*); a British Independent Film Award (*Billy Elliot*); and a Pearson Playwrights' Scheme Award. Most recently, Hall worked on the films *Victoria & Abdul* (2017), *Cats* (2019), and the Elton John biopic *Rocketman* (2019). He continues to pursue projects including a film version of George Orwell's novel [Down and Out in Paris and London](#), a screenplay about Queen Victoria, and a staged musical adaptation of Pink Floyd's *The Wall*.

Production History

Billy Elliot The Musical is based on the 2000 dance drama film of the same name. The idea for the musical emerged when singer-songwriter Elton John saw the indie film at a Cannes Festival screening and immediately fell in love with the story. He proposed a musical adaptation to screenplay writer Lee Hall, who initially thought it to be “the worst idea in the world.” John further shocked Hall by asking if he’d write the lyrics for the project. Hall finally agreed when the original film’s creative team joined the development process.

In adapting the film, the creators faced the challenge of effectively translating the gritty, raw tone of the original film to the stage without mocking the 1984 miners’ strike. Throughout the process, the creative team actively worked to present the political material honestly. Writer Lee Hall credited both ‘60s director Joan Littlewood and playwright John McGrath as inspirations in developing the heightened political aspects of the show. Their radical honesty in creating political theatre helped influence Hall to include topics in the musical that’d been cut from the original film such as Margaret Thatcher’s impact and a greater sense of Billy’s community in County Durham.

The first workshop version of *Billy Elliot The Musical* took place in 2003 at the Old Vic Theatre in London. Director Stephen Daldry and the rest of the creative team quickly recognized prominent casting challenges due to the strenuous nature of the role of Billy and child labor laws. After a year of searching, the original cast became complete with Liam Mower, James Lomas, and George Maguire sharing the title role, along with Haydn Gwynne as Mrs. Wilkinson and Tim Healy as Billy’s father.



A scene from the *Billy Elliot* film.



Elton John joins the cast on stage during the curtain call for the Broadway opening of *Billy Elliot The Musical* at the Imperial Theatre on November 13, 2008. (Source: Scott Winrow/Getty Images North America)

In 2005, *Billy Elliot The Musical* premiered at the Victoria Palace Theatre in London’s West End where it became a massive hit. The musical was directed by Stephen Daldry and choreographed by Peter Darling, as was the original film, and the producers were Working Title Films, Old Vic Productions Plc and David Furnish. The production garnered nine Laurence Olivier nominations, winning four awards including Best Musical. The West End musical played for an impressive eleven-year run, closing in April 2016 after over 4,600 performances. An equally successful 2008 Broadway production ran for four years, winning ten Tony Awards and ten Drama Desk Awards, each including Best Musical.

Since its premiere, *Billy Elliot The Musical* has become a modern classic, playing to nearly twelve million

people across five continents. The show has since seen additional productions in Australia, Korea, Norway, the Netherlands, Denmark, Estonia, Italy, Sweden, and Israel.

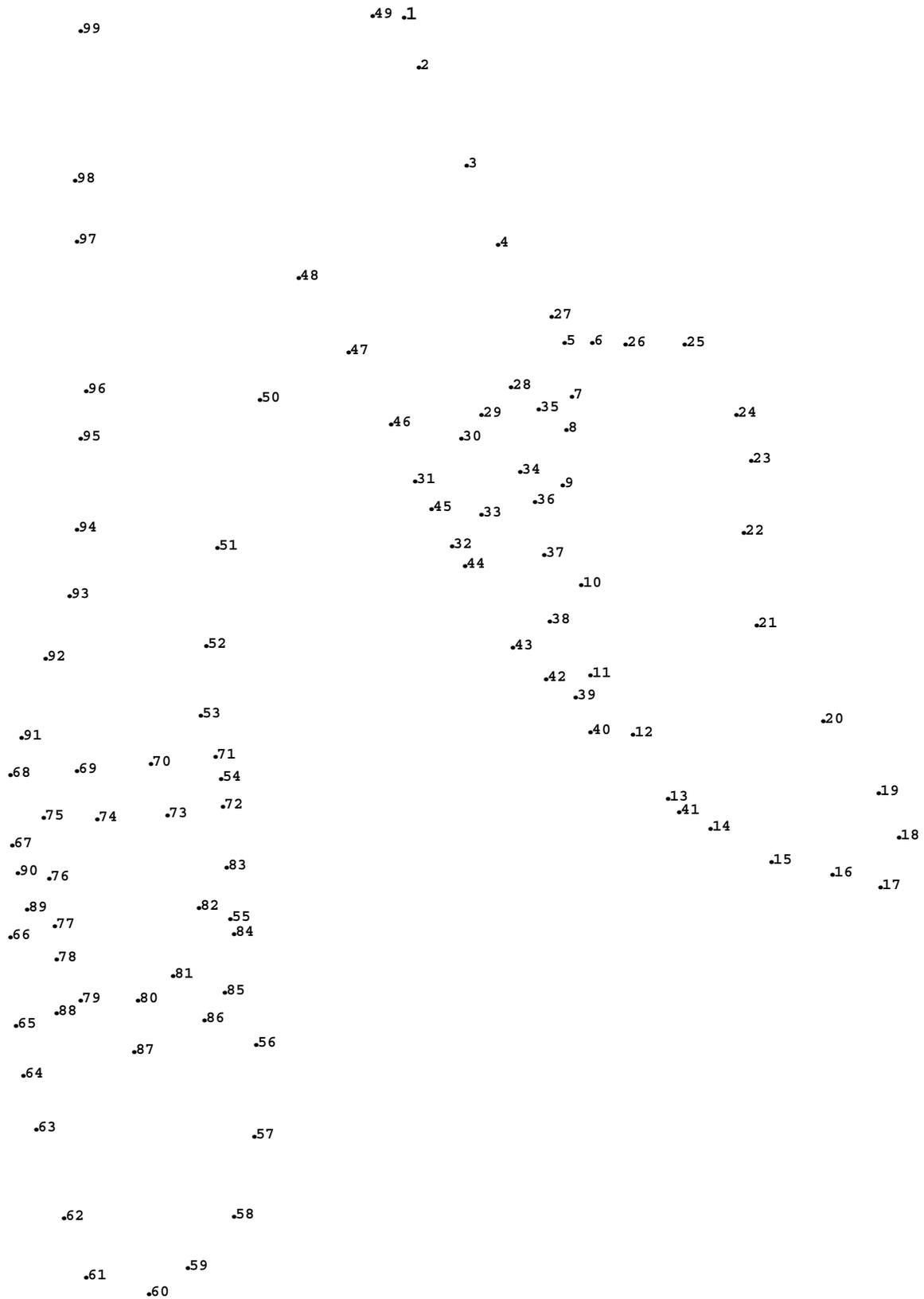
In 2014, a live recording of the show was broadcast to over 500 UK cinemas and, later, released on DVD and Blu-ray.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some challenges that a creative team could face when adapting a film for the stage?
2. In your opinion, why was *Billy Elliot* adapted into a musical and not a play?

Connect The Dots



Director's Vision

By Gabriel Barre



*Gabriel Barre at the first day of rehearsals for Goodspeed's Billy Elliot.
©Diane Sobolewski*

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 stage itself was an attempt to suggest the hard and bitter



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

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.



DISCUSSION QUESTION

After reading Gabriel Barre's Director's Vision, what do you expect to see in *Billy Elliot*?

— The 1984 British Miners Strike —

When audience members first meet the characters that populate the world of *Billy Elliot*, they are living in the midst of one of the most controversial moments in British history: the 1984 British Miners Strike. The son of a coal miner, Billy's life is intertwined with picket lines and protests as his father and brothers fight for their ability to keep their jobs in a profession that is quickly growing obsolete. The strike began in opposition to plans developed by the British government to begin widespread colliery, or coal mine, closures throughout the country. To those unfamiliar with the strike, however, a few questions remain: Why was it necessary for the mines to remain open? How did the strike begin? Were the miners' lives meaningfully impacted by this strike? What does this historical event have to do with a young boy taking ballet lessons? Read on for further information about the 1984 strike, its indelible mark on the country's history, and its impact on the coal mining industry and on families like the Elliots.

THE BEGINNING

The 1984 strike was not the first in the history of Britain's coal mining industry. As the demand for coal dwindles in the early 1970s, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) led two successful strikes against the government-run National Coal Board (NCB). This demonstrated the union's power as an industrial force, so much so that colliery employers risked employee walkouts if they employed non-union workers. For miners and their families, the union offered certain rights and benefits that they would not have been able to get otherwise: higher wages, safer working conditions, and the ability to have a voice in their employment.

As the NUM continued to gain power, however, members of the NCB began shutting down collieries due to the decrease in coal demand. Their efforts were spearheaded by then-Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who favored these mine closures because of her strongly held belief that the cost to run these collieries was preventing the growth of the British economy. In addition to this idea, the Conservative party wanted to reduce the power of trade unions like the NUM, whose leader, Arthur Scargill, was vehemently opposed to Thatcher's policies.



Arthur Scargill

Tensions between the NUM and the NCB eventually came to a head on March 6, 1984, with a walkout that took place at Cortonwood Colliery in Yorkshire. Led by Scargill and approved by a divided NUM, the protests began as news broke that Thatcher and the NCB planned to shut down over twenty collieries in the country, which would result in a loss of over 20,000 jobs. In many Northern English and Welsh communities, such closures would mean that entire towns would lose their primary source of income.

THE PICKET LINE

As the strike went underway, it was nearly universally observed in South Wales, Kent, Yorkshire, Scotland, and Northeast England. Instead of heading to the mines for work, miners and their families would hold protests outside of the mine entrances, wearing red carnations as a symbol of solidarity. They would hold picket signs in support of the union and their fellow community members, and chants would break out among the crowds.



A Colliery protest

Protesting at the picket line was not always a safe endeavor, however. Working in opposition to the strike, Thatcher called to mobilize police forces against the protestors, which only exacerbated acts of violence among the picket lines. Miners who attempted to return to work and cross the picket line were often referred to as "scabs" and criticized by other miners for disrupting the worker solidarity that was needed to continue the movement. Protests often turned violent as tensions rose. In Nottinghamshire, a county in England's East Midlands, picketing miners were accused of pelting scabs with rocks, buckets of paint, and even brake fluid. To this day, the strike remains the most violent in the country's history, with three people dying from strike-related violence.

THE AFTERMATH

Nearly a year after it began, the strike officially came to an end on March 3, 1985. The NCB and Margaret Thatcher emerged victorious and collieries were shut down

— The 1984 British Miners Strike —

across the country, resulting in enormous job loss for the miners. The end of the strike was an enormous victory for the Conservative party; as a result, strike activity in England plummeted after 1985 due to the NUM's catastrophic failure. Miners returned to work, but without guarantee of employment, as the NUM failed to negotiate such a term when bargaining with the NCB. The NUM had run out of funds by the end of the strike, meaning that many workers endured the last few months of the strike without pay, union benefits, or the certainty that their jobs would return.



Violence on the picket line

When Billy attempts to leave his town with Mrs. Wilkinson to attend an audition for the Royal Ballet School, his father is distraught, as he is leaving behind a future in the mining profession, which has been a tradition in his family for decades.

However, just as Billy's technique develops and improves over time, Billy's father comes to understand that this audition means that his son's opportunities will reach far beyond what a life coal mining in County Durham

could give him. His belief and genuine love for his son is so great, in fact, that he is willing to cross a picket line and sacrifice his personal safety and solidarity with other miners to provide that opportunity for Billy. By understanding the 1984 Miners Strike, it is possible to understand the stakes of these choices and the world in which Billy risks his family's wellbeing to follow his dreams.

CONNECTIONS TO BILLY ELLIOT

So, what does this strike have to do with Billy Elliot and his family? Everything, it turns out. One unique aspect of Billy Elliot's story is the fact that two conflicts are consistently at play throughout the musical: the conflict between Billy's love for ballet and his father's hesitation to embrace his son's new passion, and the yearlong conflict between miners like Billy's father and the NCB mine closures. The story takes place in the final months of the mine, when money for miners is extremely tight due to a lack of union funding. When Billy's father is giving Billy fifty pence to take boxing at the gym, he is sacrificing his own comfort and security to generate a hobby for his kid. Billy's taking of ballet completely is seen as a violation of trust and wasting of his hard-earned money.



DISCUSSION QUESTION

What challenges does Billy's dad face balancing his status as a prominent member of the mining community and as a father who wants to support his son's passions?



MARGARET THATCHER

The politician who would come to be known as the 'Iron Lady' was born Margaret Hilda Roberts in 1925 in Grantham, England, the daughter of a grocer. She attended Oxford University and became a research chemist, then a lawyer. She had always had political ambitions, and

she ran for parliament as a member of the Conservative party in 1950 but wasn't elected to a seat in the House of Commons until 1959. From there, she rose through the ranks of the party's power until she was named Prime Minister when the Conservative party took power in 1979. She was the first female Prime Minister in history.

Thatcher's reign lasted 11 years, and her political philosophy spawned its own term: "Thatcherism." This encompassed a move towards smaller government, deregulation (especially of the finance industry), the privatization of many industries (including mining), and legal restrictions on trade unions. It also referred to a fierce nationalism, moral absolutism, and an uncompromising, sometimes brutal, approach to achieving goals. This made her a highly controversial figure, with a complicated legacy that lasts to this day. While some see her as ushering in a new era of British strength, many others see her as the person who destroyed Britain's manufacturing industry and the way of life that went with it. She died in 2013 of a stroke, having been made a lifetime member of the House of Lords in 1992 and named to the Order of the Garter, the highest British civil and military honor obtainable, in 1995.

A Billy Elliot Glossary

THE GEORDIE DIALECT

The characters that populate the world of *Billy Elliot* utilize the distinct Geordie dialect, a form of language whose roots lie in the Northeastern English city of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, an area known for its contributions to the Industrial Revolution. Considered to be the oldest regional dialect in Britain, many of its words are of Anglo Saxon origin, as opposed to the Latin-derived words of English. Geordie is more than just an accent, though; the dialect contains many words and turns of phrase that are completely unique to the region, making it nearly a language of its own. It is important to note, however, that the characters in *Billy Elliot* will be utilizing the West Durham dialect to reflect its setting in nearby County Durham. This dialect has its roots in true Geordie, but is considered to be gentler and easier for non-Geordie speakers to understand.

A GLOSSARY OF GEORDIE TERMS (as seen in *Billy Elliot*)

INSULTS:

Bent as a nine bob note: Extremely dishonest
Puff: A derogatory term for a homosexual person
Scab: A derogatory term for a strike-breaker
Wanker: Jerk
Corker: An amusing thing
Mank: Something that is disgusting

EXCLAMATIONS AND ADJECTIVES:

Bugger off: Go away
Sod you: Go away
Bollocks: An exclamation used to express annoyance
Bloody: An intensifier used to express surprise or anger
Bonny: A Scottish adjective meaning healthy and attractive

ITEMS:

Mince and faggots: A South Wales recipe of pig's heart, belly fat, liver, and bacon
Cumberland ring: A sausage coil typical of Cumberland made with pork belly and pork shoulder
Pasty: A pastry of meat and vegetables from Cornwall
Bairn: A Scottish term meaning "child"
Fifty Pee: Fifty pence (cents)
Trainers: Sneakers

MINING TERMS:

General Strike: The 1926 General Strike in the UK involved over a million miners striking for nine days in protest of wage cuts and terrible conditions.
Pits: Coal mines
Maggie's boot boys: Margaret Thatcher's policemen

TERMS ASSOCIATED WITH THE ROYAL BALLET SCHOOL:

Wayne Sleep: A dancer, choreographer and director who was a Principal Dancer with the Royal Ballet
Rudolf Nureyev: Royal Ballet Dancer
Margot Fonteyn: Renowned English ballerina of the Royal Ballet

PEOPLE AND POP CULTURE:

Kevin Keegan: A star soccer player for Newcastle United in the 1970s-1980s
Arthur Scargill: A president of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) miners' strike
Margaret Thatcher: Prime Minister of Great Britain May 1979 – Nov 1990
Shirley Bassey: A 1950s Welsh pop star
Camberwick Green: A British children's TV program made popular in the 1980s



DISCUSSION QUESTION

The Geordie dialect is often seen as a lower/middle class way of speaking in Britain. How does a person's speech impact their experience of the world and the world's perception of them? Is this fair?

Geordie Word Search

R Z P A S T Y R V Y N U I B Z
V S C C B X P F D D A S A K S
G D P F L A J T W W E C P M J
Q D N W O Z M A N K S C J Q F
B Q L A O V S M U B U Z S N I
O R B X D T K X Y O F A V T F
L E E B Y T R A I N E R S Z T
L L U W B Z W W T N X V R O Y
E W M D H D B A H Y S E M B P
B O T N N P P I A S K O B U E
I E B A I R N W C R O J U Z E
E L I U F E G N O Z A S H B H
M O M I D D L C D T F H E E Z
Q I K B P K N Y H R B Y K U E
N W V S L S I N N P E L S G M

BAIRN
CORKER
PASTY

BLOODY
FIFTYPEE
SCAB

BONNY
MANK
TRAINERS

The Royal Ballet School

In *Billy Elliot The Musical*, the crux of young Billy's future hangs on whether or not he auditions for The Royal Ballet School and, if he does audition, whether or not he is accepted into the prestigious school for classical ballet. Attending The Royal Ballet School would be a complete departure from the life Billy knows in his mining town in Northern England and would require moving to a new part of the country, living in a boardinghouse away from his family, and embarking on a strict academic and dance training regimen that could last up to 8 years.



The Royal Ballet School's White Lodge

WHAT IS THE ROYAL BALLET SCHOOL?

The Royal Ballet School is one of the world's premiere schools for classical ballet training, preparing generations of dancers for careers in professional ballet companies both in the United Kingdom, including The Royal Ballet itself, and around the world. Students are admitted as early as 11 years old, and admission is based solely on talent and potential as a ballet dancer, regardless of academic history or personal circumstances. In fact, 89% of students receive significant financial aid in order to attend the school and many are international students.

THE ROYAL BALLET SCHOOL SYSTEM OF TRAINING

If a student remains with the school until graduation, they will complete The Royal Ballet School System of Training. The 8-year training program has been developed over the years since the school's founding in 1926 (then called The Academy of Choreographic Art) by Ninette de Valois, who established a foundation of training based on the education she received from her teachers: Edouard Espinosa, Enrico Cecchetti, Nikolai Legat, and Olga Preobrajenska. The System of Training emphasizes artistry, musicality, purity of line, coordination, and a quality of movement that is free of mannerisms with the goal of preparing students to perform any classical ballet choreography.

FORMATIVE TRAINING AT WHITE LODGE

The first 5 years at The Royal Ballet School are spent at the White Lodge campus in Richmond Park. Approximately 125 young students between the ages of 11 and 16 are enrolled

in the school, and they live in boarding houses on White Lodge grounds. As with most traditional boarding schools, students adhere to a prescribed schedule of classes, mealtimes, bedtimes, and supervised homework. Every day, they rise at 7:00am, eat breakfast together, and prepare to begin classes at 8:30am. Their school days are comprised of 4 hours of academic lessons and 2 hours of ballet class, with all classes ending by 4:00 in the afternoon. Late afternoons and early evenings may involve additional dance classes, rehearsals for performances, or free time. Following dinner with their fellow students, they have a supervised homework hour at 7:15 each evening. Because of the school's connections with The Royal Ballet and Birmingham Royal Ballet, White Lodge students are frequently selected to perform the children's roles in *The Nutcracker*. Students at White Lodge also have opportunities to perform over the summer at Opera Holland Park and the Royal Opera House.

ADVANCING TO THE UPPER SCHOOL

In their final year at White Lodge, students are invited to audition for the Upper School in order to continue their training and education in classical ballet. The Upper School is a 3-year program for students aged 16 to 19 located in Covent Garden in a building connected to the Royal Opera House, the home of The Royal Ballet. During the first two years at the Upper School, the students continue their dual study of academic and dance curriculum, while the third and final year is dedicated to full-time ballet training. Just as at White Lodge, admission is based solely on talent, regardless of a student's academic history or personal circumstances; approximately 100 students attend each year, representing 17 different countries. While students continue to live in school-owned and supervised boarding houses, they are afforded more personal freedoms as they age and mature. As an Upper School student, the dance curriculum focuses more intensely on learning the repertoire of the Royal companies (The Royal Ballet and Birmingham Royal Ballet). Though choreographers continue to create new ballets all the time, there are heritage works that are essential for rising professional ballet dancers to know in order to succeed in a professional company. The Royal Ballet School helps students prepare by teaching them this choreography during their Upper School years.

DEGREE COURSE AND GRADUATING TO PROFESSIONAL BALLET COMPANIES

Since 2017, Upper School students have been enrolled in a Bachelor's Degree program for Classical Ballet and Dance Performance. This provides more opportunities and options for students beyond careers as professional dancers. In addition to classical ballet training, students in the degree program are also educated in dance history, health and wellness, and other employment options within the dance industry. For the past decade, 100% of graduating students have received contracts with professional ballet companies.

Royal Ballet School Word Scramble

Use the clues to unscramble the words below into Royal Ballet School terms.
Watch out—some might unscramble into two words!

1. eoprcrghoha _____

To design a dance

2. evisalod _____

Founder of the Royal Ballet School

3. pniioases _____

Teacher of the founder

4. ieweohdltg _____

First 5 years of Royal Ballet School are spent here

5. hpmdonckrrai _____

Neighborhood of the campus for formative training

6. ortlalbayel _____

Royal Ballet School frequently has students who perform with this company

7. nakurrcect _____

Younger students frequently play child roles in this ballet

8. pooshruclep _____

Once the students complete their formative training, they have the option to audition for this

9. bssllecaatl _____

Students will have two hours of this per day

10. niiduaot _____

Students must do this in order to be admitted to the school

Our *Billy Elliot* Stories

The *Billy Elliot* cast answers the question: "How did you discover your love for performing?"



Gabriel Barre (Director): "As a preacher's son, my family moved around quite a bit throughout New York and New England through my youth. I quickly learned that being funny was a good way to meet people quickly and make fast friends in the many new places I was living. By the time I finished high school, I knew I loved performing and chose to go to New York to study acting instead of going to a university, because I knew I could NEVER possibly regret it! Later, after appearing in numerous shows here at the Goodspeed Opera House, I realized I wanted to try my hand at directing and was given the opportunity to pursue that passion, and I directed my first show here in 1995, which was *john & jen*, by Andrew Lippa, and I have enjoyed directing many other shows here, on Broadway, and around the world since then!"



Richard Costa (Ensemble): "My mom was a big influence. I went with her to choir rehearsals and once a year they would do a musical. Goodspeed was my first union job as an actor, and now I'm back 29 years later!"



Gerard Lanzerotti (Swing): "I was born and raised in New Jersey, and I always thought I'd grow up to take over the family business and be a baker like my dad. But then I started doing shows in high school, and that was it."



Emily Larger (Ensemble): "I started dancing when I was 4 because I didn't like soccer. I don't remember my parents telling me, 'hey, you're good at this.' I remember telling them, 'hey! I'm good at this!' It was no surprise when I finished high school as soon as I could and moved to New York to make the dream happen."



Samantha Littleford (Swing): "Both of my parents were dancers, so I grew up in the dance world and took it for granted. But then I saw *Annie* and the bug bit. I wanted to be Annie."



Barbara Marineau (Grandma): "When I was six years old, I saw Mary Martin in *Peter Pan* on television and discovered my passion! Three years later, I was playing the "Sad Girl" in *Bye Bye Birdie*. Here I am, 60 years later, still doing what I love! Blessed, indeed!"



Connor McRory (Ensemble): "I actually grew up as a BMX racer. A family friend's son was doing a commercial, and they needed another boy, so I did that and fell in love with performing. I did BMX, too, until I was in a crash and broke three ribs. I don't remember anything, but my parents ran onto the field after the crash, and I was saying, 'I hate this. I just want to dance.'"



Simon Pearl (Ensemble): "My mum always says I played the baby Jesus in a nativity play, and people said I was very good—but how can you be good as baby Jesus?"



Rachel Rhodes-Devey (Ensemble): "I had a babysitter who was an actress, and she showed me *The Sound of Music*. I thought it was amazing, and she said, 'If you think that's cool, let's go see something live.'"



William Russell (Ensemble): "I was picked on in school and didn't really know what my 'thing' was until I was cast as Willy Wonka in the school play, which gave me a social circle within my school. And then I realized, 'Goshdarnit, I love this, and I need to do this professionally!'"



Tess Santarsiero (Ballet Girl): "I really love exploring different voices and characters, not just 'regular Tess.'"



DISCUSSION QUESTION

What is something that you are passionate about and how did you discover it? What motivates you to pursue this passion?

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