

AN INTERVIEW WITH PLAYWRIGHT, STEPHEN KAPLAN

What inspired you to write *The John Wilkes Booth High School for the Performing Arts Presents the Most Inclusive Least Offensive Play Ever: An After-School Special*?

---- *I'm also a high school theatre teacher and have experienced myself the fine line between finding material that is challenging and material that someone may find offensive. And one day I realized that pretty much EVERY show has the potential to offend someone. I wanted to satirize what could happen in a community that takes things to the extreme and hopefully get people to realize what censorship can potentially lead to.*

Do you relate to any of the characters in particular? Were you like any of them when you were in high school?

---- *I was definitely a theatre "geek" in high school! I would hang out in the drama room every opportunity I had and my closest friends are still from that time period. In everything I write, there's a bit of me in every one of my characters - even those that I'm nothing really like.*

Do you have a favorite moment in the play?

---- *Having had the opportunity to watch a rehearsal run of the show, I'm loving every moment of the play and seeing what the students are doing with them! The students and director have found so much that I never even imagined and it's an incredible feeling when I get to be surprised by my own play.*

Can you comment on censorship in the arts and literature and the movement to pull books and plays from school libraries?

---- *As a parent, I understand the intent of wanting to protect our children. However, I believe it does children a greater disservice and actually harms them when they're prevented from ever being exposed to something that could challenge them. And that's what good art and literature does. It challenges us to see different perspectives and learn about things beyond what we're already exposed to. More and more, our world is becoming a series of echo chambers where we're all just seeing and hearing things that are already on our radar and align with what a combination of society and algorithms thinks we should be exposed to. Rather than making the world better, it's splintering and separating us and makes me very afraid for the future.*

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What inspired you to make the “after school special” a musical and did you write all the music and lyrics?

---- *From the very first moment I started writing this piece, I just knew that it was going to end with a musical. I love musicals and there's an earnestness and heart that musical theatre has that perfectly captures why the characters in this play want to do theatre. I wrote the lyrics and the amazing Artie Sievers wrote the music.*

Did you intend to make people think about important topics like this when watching the show, or was your focus when writing it, just on making the audience laugh?

---- *If an audience member leaves a play of mine and doesn't think about the world a bit differently after they've left, then I feel like I haven't done my job as an artist. I definitely want people to laugh and have a good time - especially with this play! - but I want them to think about what they're laughing at and why they're laughing.*

Do the actors in our production match up with what you had in your head when you wrote the play or did some of the casting choices surprise you?

---- *When I write a play, I never have a physical picture in my head of what a character looks like, but instead have a clear idea of the "essence" of each character. And the actors in this production have perfectly nailed the essence of each of their characters. So many of their acting choices have surprised me (all in good ways!) but that's why I do theatre - because it's so collaborative and everyone brings their own interpretations to the ground plan I've created with the script. Hopefully I've created a solid enough foundation for them to build upon and the structure of the piece still comes through clearly.*

Where do you think this play will go after Charter Arts?

---- *I'm very excited for the future life of this play and hope that other high schools and colleges will produce it in their seasons because it's very much about them. But I'd also love for there to be professional productions of it as well!*