

Fun Home

Book & Lyrics by Lisa Kron

Music by Jeanine Tesori

Based on the graphic novel by Alison Bechdel

Directed by Lisa Rothe

Fun Home at Kansas City Repertory Theater was the last production I directed before the pandemic hit and theaters shut down last March. This piece of theatre is very meaningful to me, and I love that I have another opportunity to work on it with the students at Barnard and Columbia. Fun Home is a poignant and thoughtful coming-of-age story and a terrific for piece for university students to inhabit and explore. Many people will identify with the character of Alison, who discovers an exciting and somewhat daunting new world at college, away from home for the very first time. I also look forward to the dialogue around gender and sexuality, and how the conversation around language and identity has changed since the graphic novel first appeared.

The first mainstream musical featuring a lesbian character, Fun Home resonated for me in a deeply personal and profound way. Growing up in a small Midwestern town in the late 80s and early 90s, there weren't a lot of mainstream representations of myself. So I was thrilled and relieved to discover Alison Bechdel's comic strip, Dykes to Watch Out For which ran from 1983 to 2008 and was one of the earliest ongoing representations of lesbians in popular culture. From where I came from, these comics were culturally subversive and taboo. They were also incredibly comforting, signaling that I wasn't alone.

When I saw Fun Home at the Public Theater (with my wife!), I hadn't read the graphic novel so I didn't know I was about to be emotionally rocked to my core. It ended up being one of the most personal and life-affirming experiences I have ever had in the theatre, and the first time I had ever seen myself on stage. I know I am not alone in this. In Kansas City, I was honored and delighted to share this story with a community not unlike the one in which I grew up. The vulnerability and empathy the piece elicited was profound and deeply meaningful to not only queer audience members, but also to their supportive friends and families. This is a phenomenon my younger self had never experienced and could never have anticipated.

Working on this story with students at Barnard and Columbia will be a tremendous opportunity to explore themes of sexual orientation, gender, family dynamics, and mental health, taking care to facilitate a process that will make sure everyone in the room feels seen and heard along the way. The piece is an exhilarating ride and a robust acting challenge. Bookwriter Lisa Kron says: "There are no scenes in the book of Fun Home. There are moments in time. There's a frame where a kid is eating a bowl of cereal and a parent is leaving and then you have Alison's narrative voice....That's not a scene. The story has to be told through the actions of characters who are unaware of the defining moment of what's going to happen in the future."

I look forward to exploring this journey with the Barnard/Columbia community.