

Minnesota Jewish Theatre Company

Telling Stories of Our Common Search for Identity

Friday, March 24, 2017

We speak for the Minnesota Jewish Theatre Company organization in saying that we're grateful to be a part of the Twin Cities theater community. We appreciate and welcome the thoughts and comments made by those of you who have been aware of our difficult casting decision regarding our upcoming show, *We Are the Levinsons*.

Minnesota Jewish Theatre Company is a very mission-driven organization, and thus we adhere to and always strive to advance our mission: "Minnesota Jewish Theatre Company ignites the hearts and minds of people of all cultural backgrounds by producing theater of the highest artistic standards. Rooted in Jewish content, our work explores differences, illuminates commonalities, and fosters greater understanding among all people."

MJTC takes very seriously its role in bringing the text, story, and script to life. A director casts a role with the actor s/he believes can bring the character to life in the most truthful and honest way possible. To cast the role of Grace, an African American transgender woman, we reached out for assistance from many theater companies and theater professionals in the Twin Cities to find an African American transwoman actor for casting. We also spoke with individual artists in the LGBTQ community to assist us in this endeavor. We adhere to a policy of supporting and hiring Minnesota artists, but when we did not feel that any Twin Cities actor auditioned in a way that demonstrated she would bring Grace to life as her character was crafted by the playwright, we reached out to the theater communities of Chicago and NYC in search of an African American transwoman actor. As we were unable to cast the role of Grace with a transgender woman under the time constraints of a set rehearsal schedule, we cast an African American cis female actor.

We hope that it's clear that Minnesota Jewish Theatre Company is not transphobic. We have cast many artists of all backgrounds and identities in roles that do not reflect their personal lives. In alignment with our mission, every production has programs that complement the work onstage and that are free and open to the public. Each program facilitates conversation, and, as our mission states, "explores differences, illuminates commonalities, and fosters greater understanding." In conjunction with *We Are the Levinsons*, one of the programs is "Universal and Unique Challenges of Transgender Individuals." This program will be a post-performance discussion with panelists who are transgender.

We thank everyone who has commented on our casting for fostering conversation around these important issues. We're committed to bringing the best possible representation of the script and its characters to the stage. We hope that *We are the Levinsons* will increase awareness of feelings faced by those in the transgender community, and that it will provide the opportunity for audiences to learn and grow.

Barbara Brooks
Producing Artistic Director

Kurt Schweickhardt
Director

Jim Proman
Chair, Board of Directors