

LETTERS TO EVE
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- "...find love, be loved again. By bus, by train, by war, by pen"

PLAY HISTORY

Letters To Eve

A Play History

Letters To Eve began a couple years ago on a brisk winter afternoon, mid-December. My Grandmother, Midori and I sat down and shared tea together. She liked to read coupons and watch CSI: New Orleans by herself, but I felt like doing my duties as a Grandson so I joined her coupon adventure. After a while talking about nothing we stumbled upon a mutual interest in World War II. I was probably into some wartime novel at the time so I felt completely qualified to discuss everything war. After two or three cups of Chicago's finest green tea, she started describing her experiences in the Japanese Internment Camps. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1942, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which forced all Japanese American Citizens into relocation camps across the country.

I was aware of my grandmother having survived the camps but her opening up made it more real. We dived head first into everything Internment Camps and I was hooked, not just by the tragedy of it all, but by how nonchalant my grandma explained her experiences. She unfolded the history of her years behind barbed wire fences like one recounts a plane ride or a trip to the D.M.V. She held no resentment, fear, anger, guilt, she was just happy someone was interested in her history. She held a job in the camp, was given a salary, she had friends, activities, responsibilities; purpose. This was the exact moment I said to myself, "This is the story that needs to be told".

With the seed planted I started researching everything WWII and everything internment camps. Down this rabbit hole I discovered some truly amazing things. I returned to Los Angeles and immediately visited the Japanese American History Museum. There I uncovered what would become one of the core themes of this musical, friendship. At this museum they have big catalogues filled with handwritten accounts from former prisoners. One of the questions on the form was something to the effect of, "What do you remember most from the camps?", and almost 90% of the answers were, "Life long friendships". Only a couple answers detailed the issues with the camps and even then they were apologetic, honorable critiques like "The weather was rough" or "The food could have been better" (not exact answers). In this museum they also have sections dedicated to the 442nd, the first all Japanese army battalion to serve in WWII. Here I learned they were the most decorated battalion during WWII. I started noticed themes. Honor, pride,

friendship, love, and an undying patriotism. With these pillars of knowledge and new emotional ties to this piece of history, I started plotting out the story line.

Months later, with a stem of a story fleshed out, I started trying out different musical themes. I was Musical Directing Les Miserable for my theatre company at the time so I was heavily influenced by the dynamics of that piece. I knew that style was the right direction but in respect of the period I began studying Jazz music. I knew Jazz was huge in the 40's but what I did not know was how popular it was in Germany. This got me thinking, how often do we discuss the Germans during WWII as people, not Nazis. This sentiment resting in the back of my head, I continued my research and came across some amazing accounts of African American prisoners in concentration camps. Again, a light went off in my head and I saw another story no one has ever told before. Maybe in a book or some short stories, but never in a theatrical medium. I went back to the drawing board and created Archie Kyle, a Jazz musician during WWII who gets captured during a tour in France. Loosely based off of actual musicians from that time period, Archie helped discover the true arch of all of these stories, humanity.

Art is about pushing boundaries, telling honest stories, and expressing pure human connection. With these story-lines starting to connect I created a list of goals for the show:

1. I want to show the perseverance of the Japanese American citizens during WWII. Many musicals create archetypes of characters and don't shed light on the human experience. I want to show these prisoners as friends, fathers, mothers, families, and follow those 'relationships', much less their 'struggle'. Not taking their struggle lightly by any means, that is still a very important component to the show, but the audience needs to see these people for who they were.

2. A Black protagonist using music and hope to be a hero. Not enough shows have black protagonists, and of those shows not many of them carry on in an interracial love story. African Americans have such a rich history, if not the richest history when it comes to using music to handle horrific situations. We first find Archie breaking stone in a concentration camp, all the while trying to find a rhythm to the breaking of stone; trying to find some level of musicality to it. Gospel, Jazz, Blues, these are styles of music that demand one to grasp the deeper parts of one's soul. So with Archie in the picture, the music, the dynamic, the characters are all effected in palpable ways.

3. Sexual Violence against Jewish Women During The Holocaust. Also the title of a great book written by: Sonja M Hedgepeth and Rochelle G Saidel, these atrocities are never expressed in a theatrical forum. In fact, most artistic accounts of the

Holocaust don't shed enough light on these situations. When it comes to war and rape, our society has somehow found a way to lessen its cultural impact. I wanted to use parts of this show to create a dialogue on this subject. Many shows lose their audiences with some sort of message, a broken fourth wall followed by awkward, almost rudimental dialogue with the sole purpose being the author to make sure we 'understand'. I want the audience to be given clues to such sexual violence taking place, giving them the opportunity to think for themselves; maybe go home and research the matter. Any show that opens a dialogue and gets the audience thinking is a show that changes the world.

4. Germans during WWII as humans, not just Nazis. Partially motivated by the short story, "The Sunflower", written by Simon Wiesenthal, I wanted to have a Nazi Officer, much against the Third Reich, more interested in Archie Kyle's musical talents and much less his race, religion, or class. This plot line has always been a favorite of mine, flipping an expected archetype; a technique great for forcing the audience to think. Dierk, the Nazi Officer in Letters To Eve, develops an endearing relationship with Archie and their relationship highlights our capacity to love no matter the circumstance or popular course of action.

5. The importance of Writing; writing your story. This was one of the first themes of the show. Ray, our main protagonist (from the internment camps) has a special bond with his father. They share stories and Ray's father presses the importance of writing ones story and living life with the memory in mind. I believe everyone can be a writer if we put pen to paper we can make a difference. If its sending a love letter to someone or finishing an autobiography writing can cement one's history and immortalize them.

6. Music as a tool to help one deal with horrific situations.

7. Music, rhythm, and poetry as a form of communication that binds all race, religion, country, class, and gender together.

Letters To Eve is scheduled to premeire in Santa Monica at The Miles Memorial Playhouse, November 10th, 2016.