

Harold Taw Tells Tales of ‘Missed Connections’ in Musical Theatre

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Harold Taw • Photo by Nubar Alexanian

Musical theatre requires a great deal of collaboration, and the 5th Avenue Theatre is encouraging new collaborative efforts.

Led by New Works Director Ian Eisendrath, the 5th Avenue Theatre Seattle Writers Group will soon be presenting staged reading of several new works in progress. One of these is “The Missed Connections Club,” a one-act musical created by bookwriter Harold Taw and composer-lyricist Chris Jeffries, winner of The Stranger’s first Genius Award in the performing arts.

Harold Taw reports that it is “an honor and a thrill” to participate in this new venture. “I’m the sole newbie to theater among a group of remarkable composers and bookwriters who exemplify how to push the boundaries on what the musical form can be.”

Taw’s fascination with musical theatre came to him relatively late in life. “My interest in musicals in general began when my wife insisted we purchase season tickets for The 5th Avenue Theatre,” Taw says. “It was a stereotype: the husband being dragged into musicals on ‘date night.’”

Then, his interest increased with great speed. “Soon, I began looking forward to the performances more than my wife did,” he says. “I developed strong opinions about what was and wasn’t working, then started buying cast albums and reading

scripts.”

After he was approached by the leaders of the Seattle progressive rock band Poland, Mark Bombara and Mark Romanowski, about integrating their music into a musical, Taw made the transition from spectator to creator.

Taw says that he and Jeffries took particular inspiration from a book he was reading. “Just as we entered the Seattle Writers Group, I happened to be reading a book by children’s illustrator Sophie Blackall in which she illustrated real-life posts from the Craigslist Missed Connections section about strangers who should have introduced themselves, always wondering, ‘What if?’”

He and Jeffries wondered “what if,” too. “Chris and I fell in love with that story and the sense of losing that one perfect, fragile moment because of our own inability to return another person’s affection,” Taw says.

But while a story may tell the past, live theatre must tell a story in the present. “The biggest challenge we had, as storytellers,” Taw says, “was to open up the closed, snow-globe about something that could not be recovered and to make the stakes matter in the here and now.”

Taw and Jeffries tried to avoid sugar-coating the realities of missed connections. “We wanted to stay true to the sadness inherent in wild, romantic hopes that, 99 times out of 100, result in disappointment,” he says. “What we came up with was a young caregiver—obsessed with Missed Connections ads and helping everyone except herself—who persuades a wistful, retired teacher to post about his should-have-been lover from 30 years ago. They receive a reply, but not one they expected.”

This kernel of a story has kept the connection between Taw and Jeffries solid. “Chris and my collaborative process has been iterative,” says Taw. “I came up with the story, the characters, the world, what happens and why, but all along the way we’ve consulted with each other and what I’ve written has clearly shifted, and deepened, based on the music and lyrics that Chris wrote and vice versa.”

Their partnership has allowed for the revisions that all dramatic writing requires. “Neither of us has a fixed position: We’re ready to follow whatever path feels right even that means trashing all the work we’ve done up to that point,” Taw says. “I’m fortunate that Chris is such a talented dramatist and has worn every hat in the development of a new musical.”

Following the staged reading on January 31, Taw has been dividing his time between several collaborative writing projects. "Chris and I will further revise 'The Missed Connections Club' and see whether it can find life in a staged production," he says.

In addition, he plans to complete his collaboration with Bombara and Romanowski, and to proceed with his second novel, "Saturday's Child," about a turbulent adolescence in Southeast Asia.

And alongside 'Missed Connections,' Taw will also be collaborating on a graphic novel adaptation of his short story on a similar theme, "The Repository of Broken Dreams."