

GREEN DAY'S american IDIOT

the groundbreaking **BROADWAY** musical

Welcome to Center Theatre Group and Green Day's *American Idiot*

a groundbreaking American musical filled with characters who yearn for something more, songs bursting with raw emotion and a story that dares us to feel, challenges us to hope and urges us to be as alive as the music.

Music can often express feelings that are too overwhelming for words alone. Green Day musicians – Billie Joe Armstrong, Michael Dirnt, and Tré Cool – created their hit album *American Idiot* as a response to the fear and chaos of post 9/11 America. Their music challenged a world that seemed unbalanced and unjust. It gave voice to a generation of Americans, providing an outlet for emotions and a way to channel pain and frustration.

The journey from punk rock album to Broadway musical originated with long time Green Day fan and Broadway director Michael Mayer. As he listened to Green Day's music, he was moved by the album's story of American youth searching for more, feeling lost and afraid, wanting to change their lives. He knew that *American Idiot* was a rock opera ready to be staged and in collaboration with Billie Joe and the band, Green Day's *American Idiot* was brought to explosive life onstage.

Punk and Protest. Numbness and connection. Rage and Love. For the characters we meet in this musical and the artists whose work we witness – reaching deep inside to create, to feel, to express, or to connect is a journey that requires great willingness and real courage.

Turn the page to reflect upon the power of music and its necessity in our lives. Read Michael Mayer's interview for his unique take on the role of the director. Compare punk rock and protest music as responses to the world around them. Think about the power of friendship – both Green Day's life-long friendship and that of the characters we meet.

Theatre raises questions and challenges audience members to discover their own answers. See what questions this information raises for you and what questions and answers the performance provides. Thank you so much for joining us for *American Idiot*. We look forward to seeing you at the theatre!

“Do you know
what's worth
fighting for,
When it's not
worth dying for?”

—AMERICAN IDIOT

March 13–April 22, 2012 • Ahmanson Theatre

Van Hughes, Joshua Kobak and the company of *American Idiot* PHOTO: DOUG HAMILTON.

WORDS GET STUCK IN MY MIND —SORRY IF I DON'T TAKE THE TIME —TO FEEL THE WAY I DO



GREEN DAY'S AMERICAN IDIOT

Time: At some point in the recent past.
Location: Jingletown, USA, a typical American Suburb

BEST FRIENDS JOHNNY, TUNNY, AND WILL HAVE A LOT IN COMMON.

They love music and playing guitar. Their daily routine: TV, beer, pot, cigarettes, hanging out at the 7-11, and constant, mind-numbing boredom. All three are fed up with “do-nothing-go-nowhere suburban life” and the chaos, fear, and information overload of post-9/11 America. They are seeking the same things — something worth fighting for, worth living for — but go about it in three very different ways. Johnny rebels, choosing a life of drugs and chaos. Tunny thinks he'll find his place in the world by fitting in to something larger, the military. While Will resents having to stay home, he believes doing the right thing will give him some peace. Their paths have one major thing in common — fear and the inability to feel deeply.

JOHNNY

THE GUY WHO GOES TO THE CITY

Johnny is disappointed by the direction (or lack of direction) in his life. He buys bus tickets for himself, Tunny and Will, to get out of their hometown and move to the big city. Taking action empowers him. Once in the city he asserts, “I got plans, baby... The end of the world is over.”

The city doesn't provide him with the excitement and purpose he'd hoped for. Profoundly lonely, he conjures up St. Jimmy, the antithesis of everything in Johnny's suburban life: chaos, power, anarchy, violence, freedom to do whatever he wants and not care or feel anything. But the escape and numbness St. Jimmy's lifestyle (and drugs) provides quickly becomes oppressive, manipulating, and self-destructive. Johnny meets his dream girl, Whatsername, and actually starts to feel something, and it's good. But he's weak. He chooses to submit to his addiction instead of fighting for his relationship. Alone again and devastated, he's hit rock bottom: “I amount to nothing... Time to wake up.”



TUNNY

“THE GUY WHO GOES TO THE MIDDLE EAST”

Tunny follows Johnny, but is as lonely and angry in the city as he was in the suburbs. A commercial on television offers him a solution — become an American soldier and fame and adoration are yours! That's just what he needs. He enlists. In line for his physical with other enlistees, he reveals his vulnerability: “We are the waiting unknown/ And screaming.” He and the young men and women around him are crying out for purpose, direction, and validation.

Soon after, Tunny experiences the painful realities of military life during wartime. He is critically injured in combat and sent to the hospital with other wounded soldiers. There, he experiences excruciating pain and watches as other young men, no different than him, die. He laments, “Dying/ Everybody's dying/ Hearts are washed away/ Drenched in Gasoline...Songs of yesterday/ Now live underground.” In a morphine-induced haze, Tunny meets Extraordinary Girl, one of the nurses assigned to care for him. She becomes a source of comfort, warmth, and hope in an otherwise bleak situation.



WILL

THE GUY WHO STAYS HOME IN SUBURBIA

Will is all set to go with his best friends to the city, but his girlfriend Heather's pregnancy ends that. Staying home seems like the right thing to do. But Will doesn't realize that being responsible requires more than just being physically present — you've got to be emotionally present as well. Will can't take the pressure and resents the burden. In an argument with Heather he complains, “Too much too soon/ Too late and now it sucks to be you too.” Instead of rising to the occasion, Will ignores her and the baby, preferring to sit on the couch, watch TV, and smoke pot. When Heather takes their baby and moves out, Will becomes defensive and paranoid. He asserts, “There's nothing wrong with me,” and imagines her taunting, “Nobody likes you, everyone left you/ They're all out without you, havin' fun.”

ALL THREE OF THE GUYS ARE IN RUINS,

physically and mentally. Even when Whatsername, Heather and Extraordinary Girl plead with them to stop running from their emotions and accept the love they're being offered, Johnny, Tunny, and Will resist. And yet, despite their best efforts to avoid pain, they're still miserable. Separated by thousands of miles, they come to the same conclusion — it's time for them to wake up and get their lives together.

They reunite at the neighborhood 7-11, the very spot where their journeys began. They may be back in the suburbs they once found so oppressive, but their experiences over the past year have transformed them: Johnny, Tunny and Will, are finally willing to feel.

TO FEEL OR NOT TO FEEL

The album *American Idiot* was created during a time of great turbulence in our country. 9/11 and the events following it triggered intense emotions in the American people. For many, it was too much; the feelings were overwhelming. Like the characters in this play, they chose numbness over falling apart.

“I'M THE SON OF RAGE AND LOVE”

It's not just in times of conflict that we may need a break from feelings too big to deal with right away. Everyone needs to escape sometimes and chooses a way to do it: TV, computer games, gossip, eating, drugs, alcohol, working, exercise, shopping. Even though some are necessary (you've got to eat) and healthy (everyone should exercise), anything done to excess can become a crutch, a way to avoid painful feelings altogether.

It takes great courage to feel. Feelings are an energy source that can be wildly creative or wildly destructive. Once you dare to feel, that energy has to go somewhere. The characters we meet put it into their friendships; Green Day put it into their music. How else can that emotional energy be used?

ST. JIMMY

DRUGS PERSONIFIED

Johnny's heroine addiction is the most extreme numbing out that we see in the show. The role of drugs is so big, the creators decided to make it a character. St. Jimmy is the drug, the dealer, the drug-life, the high. He represents the allure of drugs, the temporary and false sense of power they give, and their self-destructive -- even deadly -- potential. As powerful as St. Jimmy seems, the one thing he can't survive is genuine feelings and connection.

Why does it take courage to feel?

What's appealing about numbness?
Why does it so often draw us in?

Does it take courage to love?
Does it take more courage to love or to rage?

Where do you choose to put the energy from your feelings? Into creativity? Friendship? Activism? Family?

“YOU JUST GO AS DEEP AS YOU CAN, EVEN WHERE YOU DON'T EVEN LIKE THE THINGS THAT YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT OR YOU'RE FEELING.”

—BILLIE JOE ARMSTRONG,
THE NEW YORK TIMES, 5/3/09



L.A.'s Theatre Company

Ahmanson Theatre
Mark Taper Forum
Kirk Douglas Theatre

601 West Temple Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Education and
Community Partnerships
CenterTheatreGroup.org/
Education

Audience Services
213.628.2772
CenterTheatreGroup.org

Theatre Locations
Mark Taper Forum
Ahmanson Theatre
at the Music Center
135 North Grand Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Kirk Douglas Theatre
in downtown Culver City
9820 Washington Blvd.
Culver City, CA 90232

Educational Materials Team

Writer
Megan Matthews

Graphic Designer
Teresa English

Associate Director of Education
and Community Partnerships
Debra Piver

Performing for Los Angeles Youth
(P.L.A.Y.) Project Faculty
Lynn Clark
Leslie Ishii
Marcos Najera
Michael Yurchak
Jesse Bliss
Tony Sancho

Educational Programs Associate
Carla Corona

Educational Communications
Coordinator
Kelly Christ

Proofreader
Janine Salinas

American Idiot 2

AMERICAN IDIOT: a punk-protest-rock-opera

Billie Joe, Mike, and Tré are punk rock to their core; the sound, aesthetic, and ideology is what made them want to commit their lives to music. But from the beginning of their career, they've never felt confined by punk conventions. With *American Idiot*, both the album and the stage musical, they pushed themselves beyond their personal limits and created something completely new, a hybrid of three genres: punk rock, protest music and rock opera.

American Idiot was like nothing anyone had ever heard, and the world went crazy for it. Green Day gave voice to an entire generation, this one angry, disenfranchised, demanding to be heard, but overloaded by information and extreme emotions. *American Idiot* did more than just defy genre – it shouted at the world for those whose voices had grown hoarse, or who had been too numb to know what to shout in the first place.

PROTEST MUSIC

PROTEST SONGS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN AN IMPORTANT PART OF AMERICAN POLITICAL EXPRESSION. Because of music's innate ability to communicate on a deeply emotional level, and the sacredness of our First Amendment free-speech rights, American protest music has played a critical role in social causes throughout our history – educating, uplifting, motivating, calling to arms, speaking up for the unheard – doing what words alone could not.

INFORMATION:

"Follow the Drinking Gourd," the anthem of the Underground Railroad, provided coded instructions for fleeing slaves – the "drinking gourd" refers to the Big Dipper constellation; other coded words described signposts and geographical markers along the escape route.

INSPIRATION:

"We Shall Overcome" – sung publicly for the first time in 1945 by members of the Negro Food and Tobacco Union during a strike – champions courage, solidarity with others in a common cause, and nonviolent resolve in the face of brutality.

CALLS FOR PEACE IN TIMES OF WAR:

In reaction to the Vietnam War, "Blowin' in the Wind" – one of Bob Dylan's countless protest compositions – and "Give Peace a Chance" by John Lennon and Yoko Ono are universal and timeless as rallying cries for anti-war protesters everywhere.

EMPOWERMENT:

Aretha Franklin's 1967 "Respect" and James Brown's 1968 "Say It Loud – I'm Black and I'm Proud," encouraged audiences to be proud of who they are and demand the recognition they deserved. In 1989, Public Enemy's "Fight the Power" denounced the legitimacy of those who abuse their authority.

GIVING VOICE TO THE VOICELESS:

In 1982's "The Message," Grand Master Flash chronicled the frustrations of life in the ghetto. In the early 1990s, when the American economy was strong, Arrested Development's "Mr. Wendal" called attention to the people who were still suffering from tremendous poverty.

EXPOSING SOCIETY'S ILLS:

Billie Holiday's 1939 single "Strange Fruit," poetically lays bare the barbaric practice of lynching. In 1988 NWA railed against the unspoken but well established practice of racial profiling and often unpublicized instances of police brutality in "F*** the Police."

Today, the 2008 economic crash and recession that followed has inspired protest songs specifically addressing the dramatically unequal distribution of resources and the disenfranchisement of countless American citizens who feel ignored by those in positions of power. Songs like Spoon's peppy "The Underdog"; Michael Piffinton & Joe Ax cover of Aloe Blacc's soulful single, "I Need A Dollar"; and the tUnE-yArDs' "My Country," which rewrites the chorus of the national anthem to include "How come I cannot see my future within your arms?" – can all be heard blaring at OWS camps across the nation.

WHAT IS PUNK ROCK



"WAKE UP!"
—WHATSERNAMING (52)

Punk

noun 1. archaic : prostitute; 2. nonsense, foolishness; 3. a : a young inexperienced person; b : a petty gangster, hoodlum, or ruffian; c slang : submissive.
adj. 1. falling short of a standard; 2. extremely unsatisfactory; 3. suffering from a temporary disorder of the body.

The word isn't positive, but nonetheless embraced by punk artists, illustrating their "I don't care what you think of me" attitude.

Punk's sound is diverse, with countless subgenres and fusions. Glam punk, hardcore punk, pop punk, riot grrrl, ska punk and skate punk are only a few of the more well known. Along with 2 Tone, Celtic punk, Chicano punk, Christian punk, cowpunk, folk punk, horror punk, Nazi punk, Oil, punk blues, Taqwacore (punk Islam), and many more, punk rock has the potential to give voice to just about anyone.

Punk music does, however, have some defining characteristics. The sound is loud, fast and rough. A simple drum kit, over-amplified electric guitar and driving electric bass, back-up aggressive vocals that are as much shouting as they are singing. Topics range from outrage to love to boredom and beyond, but underlying it all is rebellion, alienation, social discontent, and the rejection of conformity. The messages are subversive and anti-establishment.

"Do It Yourself" (D.I.Y.) is at the heart of punk's philosophy: music isn't just for people who know how to play instruments, or have pretty voices, or have record deals; energy counts for as much, if not more, than skill. Pick up an instrument. Say what you feel. Anything goes. Anyone can form a band.

Punk rock emerged in the 1970s, when the world was in economic and political turmoil. Like protest music, the punk community was responding to what they saw as the great problems of their time, but they striped away harmony and melody, leaving bare instrumentation and raw emotion. They were striking out against the world with their music, and they weren't going to camouflage their passion with anything pretty.

Three bands in particular would leave their mark on punk sound, style and image. The Ramones' self-titled first release in 1976 had a raucous, raw, short and to-the-point sound that resonated with young

people disillusioned by their government. The Sex Pistols and The Clash both released their first albums the next year, venting their outrage at the unstable economy and rampant unemployment in the United Kingdom. Both groups took the Ramones' frenetic, rough, untrained sound, their leather, t-shirt, and torn jeans uniform, and added safety pins, spiked hair, radical left-wing politics and a nihilistic attitude.

In the mid-90s, pop punk bands like Green Day and The Offspring were embraced by the mainstream in ways the punk underground never dreamed of. Green Day's first major label release, *Dookie*, was one of the most popular albums of 1994, of any genre. Every track a major hit, *Dookie* jump-started a pop punk revival that continues today.

Even Mattel has gone punk – Goth Punk Barbie sports a lace-up corset and boots; Rockabilly Barbie bears an uncanny resemblance Patricia Day, lead singer of Swedish punk band HorrorPop, who

is suing the company for using her likeness without permission. 2011's Tokidoki Barbie dons a short pink bob, tiny pink mini-skirt, leopard print tights, and arm, neck, chest and back tattoos.

Punk's mainstream prominence is a major source of contention within the punk community. Fierce resistance to cooptation naturally leads to suspicion of anything and anyone who reaches a certain level of success. It's a vicious cycle: Musicians form a band because they have something to say and demand to be heard. They hurl their music at a world they feel ignored by. Fellow punks listen and support. Then outsiders listen and like what they hear. Popularity grows. The musicians are not only embraced by the establishment, they dominate it. The world is finally listening, but their punk status is called into question; the debate is explosive. Is it possible to sell millions of records, to sell out large concert venues, without selling out?

ROCK OPERA

American Idiot is both protest and punk music, but it's also a rock opera. Musical theater uses both spoken words and songs to develop plot and characters. A rock opera is different. The story is told without any dialogue, entirely through songs unified by theme and characters. The lyrics are like poems, revealing the characters' feelings. The music takes us even deeper into the emotional landscape of the story. Combined, the poetry and music evokes a powerful mood. In experiencing a rock opera, we get to feel what the characters feel, and go with them on their inner journey.

EAST LA PUNK

Los Angeles' place in punk history is well established, but a large portion of the story is often omitted. Alongside the Hollywood scene, and before the hardcore Orange County scene, East LA punk bands were developing their own sound, fusing Latin rhythms and instrumentation into their compositions. Crossover into the Hollywood and West LA club circuit was minimal, but highly impactful. Alice Bag (born Alicia Armedariz to Mexican immigrants) formed The Bags – the first LA punk band led by a woman – in 1976 and was soon a fixture in clubs like The Masque and The Troubadour. Her thick, furious, screaming vocal style became a mainstay of the LA punk sound.

For the most part, though, East LA bands had difficulty getting booked in top LA venues. Closed doors didn't deter the community, however; they took matters into their own hands. Willie Herron, lead singer of seminal East LA punk band Los Illegals, founded Club Vex in 1980. Held weekly on the second floor of Self Help Graphics, Club Vex provided local bands with a legitimate venue, and drew musicians and audiences from both the East and West sides. In addition, a robust backyard circuit evolved that is going strong today. Every weekend, hundreds of punk fans cram into houses across East LA to hear local bands. Promotion is minimal – usually a flurry of text messages shortly before the shows. The gigs are intense, with mosh pits bigger than most clubs would allow. Bands play their sets as quickly as possible, in keeping with punk's traditional breakneck speed, but also to get as much of their set in before any neighbors can complain. If the gig is shut down, they pack up and move somewhere else, often that very same night. This is the D.I.Y. ethic so intrinsic to punk philosophy, taken to a whole other level.

"YOU WRITE THE SOUNDTRACK TO THE CHAOS. AND YOU WRITE THE SOUNDTRACK TO SOME KIND OF A REVOLT."
—BILLIE JOE ARMSTRONG



"It's a proven fact that music can change people."

—Billie Joe Armstrong

THE POWER OF MUSIC

MUSIC IS TRULY A FORCE. It's a language everyone can understand and conveys feelings that sometimes can't be articulated in spoken words alone. A song's lyrics might be in a language you don't speak, or sung so loud and fast that it's almost impossible to understand, or maybe the song doesn't have any lyrics at all. Regardless, the sound of the music itself can express a huge range of emotions – rage, love, awe, fear, joy, despair. Music has the ability to cross the boundaries of language and culture; to bring people from all backgrounds together in a shared emotional experience; and to say what can't be said.

What is the power of music?

Why do we need music in our lives?

What's your own relationship to music?

What role does it play in your life?

What style of music best expresses your thoughts and feelings?

Have you ever used music to communicate something you couldn't put into words?

GREEN DAY'S JOURNEY

music and friendships

THE MEMBERS OF GREEN DAY – Billie Joe Armstrong, Michael (Pritchard) Dirnt, and Tré Cool (Frank Edwin Wright III) – were all born in 1972, to working class families in Northern California.

At 5, Billie Joe began music and voice lessons in his hometown of Rodeo. Five years later, his father – a truck driver and part-time jazz drummer – passed away unexpectedly. His mother, a waitress now raising six kids on her own, worked hard to keep-up Billie Joe's musical training, knowing it was the main outlet for his grief.

Mike was adopted as an infant. His parents split up when he was 11; he moved with his mom and sister to Rodeo. He met Billie Joe that year in elementary school. They bonded over music and family challenges. Billie Joe taught Mike how to play guitar. It wasn't hard; Mike was a natural. In one night he learned five complete songs. Mike began lessons with Billie Joe's guitar teacher. When Mike's mother decided to leave Rodeo, instead of breaking up the friendship and musical partnership, Billie Joe's mom took Mike in.

Tré's father, a Vietnam vet, chose to raise his family far from the chaos of San Francisco in the wooded hills of Mendocino. Music gave Tré an outlet for his hyperactivity and relief from his isolated home setting. Tré started out on violin, but had a knack for the drums. In 6th grade, he was recruited to play drums for the punk band The Lookouts (whose other members were in their late-20s). By 12, Tré was a highly respected drummer in the Berkley punk scene.

In 1986, 924 Gilman Street opened – an all-ages, non-profit collective, that championed non-violent, conscientious punk. As policy, they would not book any bands that condoned racism, sexism, or homophobia. The Gilman became a home-away-from-home for 14-year-old Billie Joe, Mike, and Tré, planting the seed of progressive politics that would surface later in their career.

At 16, they knew music would be their life. Billie Joe left high school to focus full time on songwriting. Mike was committed to graduating high school, and he always had a job. But he was rarely without his guitar and every free moment was spent practicing with Billie Joe. That same year, Tré took the CED and enrolled in the local junior college. His day was split between jazz ensemble, music theory, and music history classes, a part-time job, playing percussions with the local orchestra (where he learned to read music), and playing drums with The Lookouts.

In 1990, Tré joined Billie Joe and Mike, and Green Day was officially born. Billie Joe and Mike had been best friends for half their lives, and had an almost telepathic connection when playing music. Tré had to find his place, but it wasn't difficult. His irreverence brought fun into the music, perfectly complimenting Billie Joe's philosophical, poetic nature, and Mike's pragmatic earnestness. And all three were willing to do the work necessary to create great music.

Everything clicked. In 1990, the day after Mike's graduation, they started their first national tour. The next year they toured Europe, playing sixty-four shows in three months. At 21, they set out on their second national tour in an old book mobile Tré's dad both converted and drove for them. Those years on the road, in a confined space, playing anywhere and everywhere, made their friendship stronger and their skills sharper.

Dookie, their groundbreaking first major label release, came out in 1994 and was one of the most successful albums of that year. Green Day concerts were selling out arenas all over the world, but they never forgot the 924 Gilman Street philosophy: accessibility, community involvement, doing the right thing. On the Dookie tour, Green Day kept ticket prices between \$7 and \$10 by receiving

a lower percentage of the box office, cutting back on staging, and sleeping and eating on their bus (ultimately losing money in the process).

In the spirit of community activism and the tradition of protest music, Green Day continued to use their fame to raise awareness and money for social causes. They played benefit shows in Oakland for Berkeley and Haight-Ashbury free clinics, the San Francisco Coalition on Homelessness, and Food Not Bombs. Post-Hurricane Katrina, in collaboration with U2, they recorded a cover of "The Saints Are Coming" by Scottish punk band The Skids and performed at the reopening of Louisiana Superdome.

"NOT BEING ABLE TO FAIL IN FRONT OF THOSE CLOSEST TO YOU IS THE MOST DIFFICULT THING IN THE WORLD. WE NEEDED TO GET TO WHERE WE COULD LOOK STUPID IN FRONT OF EACH OTHER—ARTISTICALLY SPEAKING."

—MIKE DIRNT, GREEN DAY: A MUSICAL BIOGRAPHY, PG. 105

Post Dookie, Green Day's albums continued to generate hit singles but they felt their work wasn't connecting with audiences in the way they knew it could. Their music was known for its silliness, insolence, boredom, and teen-age insecurity. But they weren't teen-agers any more. They were parents now, and the emotional chaos and information overload of post-9/11 life was anything but silly. It confused, frightened, and frustrated them. They channeled that energy into writing 2004's *American Idiot*, an album that articulated the complicated feelings of so many Americans. It was an as-

tounding success. They followed-up in 2009 with 21st Century Breakdown, this time focusing on an America a decade into a bloody but far-away war, an America deeply divided socially, politically, and economically. That album was also passionately embraced by music fans.

In 2009, the musical adaptation of *American Idiot* would come alive on stage, the first punk-protest-rock-opera-musical.

After almost thirty years, their friendship and creative connection is still powerful and vibrant. Who knew when they met as pre-teens that they were face-to-face with the guys they'd change the world with?



A conversation with MICHAEL MAYER

AND CENTER THEATRE GROUP TEACHING ARTIST MARCOS NAJERA



Marcos Najera How would you describe your job, Mr. Mayer?

Michael Mayer: My job on *American Idiot* is a little bit different than what a director normally does. Because I made up the story. And I interpreted this record (*American Idiot* by Green Day) and with Billie Joe Armstrong fashioned a narrative and a bunch of characters and very specific journeys for them. And then, I became the director. I feel like my job is to direct the audience. So it's not so much I tell the actors where to go and how to do their job or tell the other artists what to do, as much as I use all of the talented people that I'm fortunate enough to work with to help tell the audience where to look, what to listen to, where to focus, what to feel, what to understand, what story they should be connecting to, what they might learn about themselves and other people and help direct them to have the most fulfilling experience in the theatre that they can.

That's amazing. I've never heard it described as directing specifically for the audience.

That's what I do. That's exactly how I see my job.

And for *American Idiot*, what inspired you to create it?

I loved the record so much. The record first came out just a couple of years after September 11, 2001. It was in the middle of a very challenging time for our country. We were at war for the first time in many years. It was a moment that I felt really concerned for the future—not our country, I knew we would survive—but I was very concerned about how the younger generation would rebound from what I personally felt was a devastating political situation in our country. So when I heard this record, *American Idiot*, that was honest in its expression of frustration and rage and a beautiful illustration of almost "wanting to give up - why bother?" - it was a real moment of revelation for me. That these artists would marshal their forces and their prodigious talent to connect and communicate to their audience, which is the young people that I was worried about.

When you and Billie Joe started adapting the music from Green Day's album and putting those stories on the stage, where did you start?

I started at the beginning. I started right from the very top. And I sat there and meditated and listened and imagined and started charting out almost like a sketchbook, an outline, and started finding my way. Trying to interpret what he wrote. What he was writing about spiritually, so that I could understand how to open it up in a way that would honor the truth, the deep truth of what he was writing. I really learned to appreciate the power of melody and harmony and rhythm—everything that is not the text, every part of the song that isn't the lyric. I used to think, "the lyrics tell the story and the music carries the emotion." But that's not actually true. There's a story that is told through the music itself. And there's emotion that is told through the words.

The challenge I gave myself was that I would basically stage the record. I wouldn't turn it into a conventional musical but that I'd treat it more like an opera, where all of the lyrics became dialogue and the music became the underscoring.

If we were in the rehearsal room with you what would we hear you talking about with the actors? What riddles were you trying to solve?

How to communicate all of the complexity of the story in the most concise way possible. Because there is very little time and everything was happening on the music and it's very fast. When I was watching [the film] *The Artist*, I realized that so much of the storytelling that I did off of the lyrics in *American Idiot* really did rely almost on silent movie techniques because there is so much juxtaposition of action that's happening while you are hearing songs. Everyone's on stage the whole time, so when Johnny is singing one thing, there's also a story going

on with Will over on the couch. And it's silent because he doesn't have lyrics or dialogue. A whole story is happening between Will and his television set and his beers and his girlfriend and his baby and his friends that is off lyric. So there's a silent movie going on all the time for somebody on stage.

I'm asking a lot of the audience because I'm giving them an enormous amount of visual information, as well as musical and sonic information. A real sense of sensory overload and I wanted to put that challenge out there because I really do think that we live in a world now where—it's an onslaught of information.

Do you feel you are getting your Poetry, Politics and Popcorn into this story? I read that you started a theatre company called "Three-P Productions" with those words as the inspiration.

Oh I love that you know that! You know, it was [playwright] Tony Kushner who started that company. I was part of it.

For *American Idiot* the poetry was in all of it. The poetry is the beauty of the music—the literal poetry of the music. But I think the design, the visual, is very poetic. The way it's lit, the way the costumes are constructed, and the incredible space that [the set designer] Christine Jones devised, all of the projections and video images that Darrel [Maloney] did, and the unbelievable arrangements by [music supervisor] Tom Kitt. That's poetry as far as I'm concerned.

The politics are very clear. We understand where we are. And we understand we are at war. We understand that every person has a decision to make in their lives that is going to have some kind of ramifications, every action has consequence. And those consequences are, because we are

"PULL QUOTE, PULL QUOTE, PULL QUOTE, PULL QUOTE, PULL QUOTE, PULL QUOTE, PULL QUOTE, PULL QUOTE, PULL QUOTE, PULL QUOTE."

—CREDIT

social people, automatically political. I do believe that the personal is political. When you make any choice in your life, it is going to affect another person or any number of other people. And that becomes a political action because you have to take responsibility.

And taking personal responsibility is not idiotic.

It's the opposite of idiotic. And not taking responsibility is also political.

And the popcorn is - you want to entertain. I want you to be swept up in the story and the characters. And root for somebody and see yourself in someone and have an enormous amount of fun. I want that applause at the end to be raucous. I want people to stand up and cheer at the end of every show that I do. So popcorn might not be the most nutritious meal, but when you have a big bucket of popcorn and you've got plenty of politics and poetry to go with it, I think you are going to be really satisfied.

**“This is my rage/ This is my love/
This is my town/ This is my city/
This is my life.”**

— American Idiot

Center Theatre Group Education and Community Partnerships

Leslie K. Johnson, Director of Education and Community Partnerships

Debra Piver, Associate Director of Education and Community Partnerships

Traci Cho, Director of School Partnerships

Patricia Garza, Senior Manager

Kelly Christ, Educational Communications Coordinator

Carla Corona, Educational Programs Associate

Dan Harper, Educational Programs Associate

Ashley Opstad, Educational Programs Associate

Victor Vazquez, Educational Services Coordinator

Shannon Winston, Assistant to the Director of Education and Community Partnerships

Center Theatre Group’s mission is to serve the diverse audiences of Los Angeles by producing and presenting theatre of the highest caliber, by nurturing new artists, by attracting new audiences, and by developing youth outreach and education programs. This mission is based on the belief that the art of theatre is a cultural force with the capacity to transform the lives of individuals and society at large.

Education and Community Partnerships

Theatre is an enduring and powerful tool for communicating ideas, stories, emotions and beliefs that fuel the intellect, imagination and creative spirit. Center Theatre Group believes that stimulating awareness, creativity, dialogue and an inquisitive mind is integral to the growth and well-being of the individual and the community; and that nurturing a life-long appreciation of the arts leads inextricably to an engaged and enlightened society.

Center Theatre Group’s education and community partnership programs advance the organization’s mission in three key ways:

Audiences: Inspiring current and future audiences to discover theatre and its connection to their lives;

Artists: Investing in the training, support and development of emerging young artists and young arts professionals who are the future of our field; and

Arts Education Leadership: Contributing to the community-wide efforts to improve the quality and scope of arts education in Los Angeles.



JOIN OTHER YOUNG ARTISTS AT
Facebook.com/CTGEmergingArtists

FUNDER CREDITS

The Education & Community Partnerships Department receives generous support from The Dream Fund at UCLA Donor Advised Fund and the Center Theatre Group Affiliates, a volunteer organization dedicated to bringing innovative theatre and creative education to the young people of Los Angeles.

Additional support for Education & Community Partnerships is provided by The Sheri and Les Biller Family Foundation, the Employees Community Fund of Boeing California, The Sascha Brastoff Foundation, the Brotman Foundation of California, Diana Buckhantz and Vladimir and Araxia Buckhantz Foundation the Carol and James Collins Foundation, the Culver City Education Foundation, the James A. Doolittle Foundation, the Ella Fitzgerald Charitable Foundation, the Lawrence P. Frank Foundation, The Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Foundation, the William Randolph Hearst Education Endowment, the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, the MetLife Foundation, the Music Center Fund for the Performing Arts, the Kenneth T. & Eileen L. Norris Foundation, Laura & James Rosenwald & Orinocco Foundation, Playa Vista, Dwight Stuart Youth Fund, Theatre Communications Group, and the Weingart Foundation.

Center Theatre Group is a participant in the A-ha! Program: Think It, Do It, funded by the MetLife Foundation and administered by Theatre Communications Group, the national organization for the professional American theatre.



REFERENCES

- American Sabor. (n.d.). *East LA punk*. Retrieved from <http://americansabor.org>
- Cabral, J. (2011, September 22). East L.A. backyard punk scene rages on. *LA Weekly*. Retrieved from <http://www.laweekly.com>
- Diehl, M. (2007). *My so-called punk: Green Day, Fall Out Boy, the Distillers, Bad Religion: How neo-punk stage-dived into the mainstream* (1st ed.). New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press.
- Egerdahl, K. (2010). *Green Day: A musical biography*. Santa Barbara, CA: AB-CLIO, LLC.
- Goodman, E. (2006, September 14). More U2 and Green Day: Billie Joe and Bono plan to reopen Superdome. *Rolling Stone*. Retrieved from <http://www.rollingstone.com>
- Independent Lens. (n.d.). *Strange fruit*. Retrieved from <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens>
- Los Angeles Rock Opera Company. (n.d.). *What is rock opera?* Retrieved from <http://www.larockopera.com>
- Luppert, P. (2009-10). American Idiot and the road to Berkley Rep. *The Berkley Rep Magazine*, 1, 13-20.
- Pareles, J. (1995, October 8). Three acts try to build on their laurels. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com>
- Pareles, J. (2009, May 3). The morning after American Idiot. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com>
- Rolling Stone Archives. (n.d.). Green Day. Retrieved from <http://www.rollingstone.com>
- Small, D. (2005). *Omnibus Press presents the story of Green Day*. New York, NY: Omnibus Press.
- Spitz, M. (2006). *Nobody likes you: Inside the turbulent life, times, and music of Green Day* (1st ed.). New York, NY: Hyperion.
- D’Amelio, J. (Producer). (2009, May 24). *CBS Sunday Morning* [Television Series].