

UPSTAGE

A PUBLICATION OF THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT AT **ROUNDAABOUTTHEATRECOMPANY**, FALL 2011



**SONS OF THE
PROPHET**

UPSTAGE Callboard

WHAT

If to live is to suffer, then Joseph Douaihy is more alive than most. With unexplained chronic pain and the fate of his reeling family on his shoulders, Joseph's health, sanity, and insurance premium are on the line. In an age when modern medicine has a cure for just about everything, *Sons of the Prophet* is a refreshingly honest take on how we cope with wounds that just won't heal, and the funniest play about human suffering you're likely to see.

<http://www.roundabouttheatre.org/offbroadway/sonsoftheprophet/>

WHO

Written by Stephen Karam, directed by Peter Dubois.

WHERE

Northeastern and Central Pennsylvania

WHEN

July 2006 - March 2007

WHO

JOSEPH - 29, former competitive runner, now struggling with his health. Despite his setbacks, Joseph is not self-pitying. He's a hopeful guy trying his best.

CHARLES - 18, Joseph's brother.

BILL - 74, Joseph's/Charles' uncle.

GLORIA - 59, in her heyday, Gloria was a successful editor/book packager in NYC. Now she's in Nazareth, PA. Gloria says some ridiculous things, but her mannerisms are not ridiculous. She's as human as everyone else in the play. If anything, we should be frightened by just how real she is.

TIMOTHY - 27, Likable, handsome TV reporter. Don't be fooled by the occasional arrogant, off-putting comment. Timothy is sincere.

VIN - 18, African American/Hispanic, bounced around foster homes growing up; a good high school football player; tough kid; not articulate, but not stupid. Vin's possibly the most grounded person in the play.

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Kahlil Gibran

"You are far greater than you know, and all is well."

Kahlil Gibran, author of *The Prophet*, was born into an impoverished life in Bsharri, Lebanon in 1883. From the time Gibran could walk, he would seek out paper to draw on, and if he was unable to find paper, he would use his chalk to draw on the walls of his home. Unable to afford a formal education, the village priest taught Gibran biblical stories and legends of Lebanon.

In 1895 Gibran immigrated to America with his Mother, older brother and two younger sisters. They settled in the south end of Boston in tenements with other immigrants from Lebanon. He quickly became an outstanding pupil, and his talent for drawing and sketching captivated his teachers, who put him in touch with a man who would lead Gibran on his artistic path.

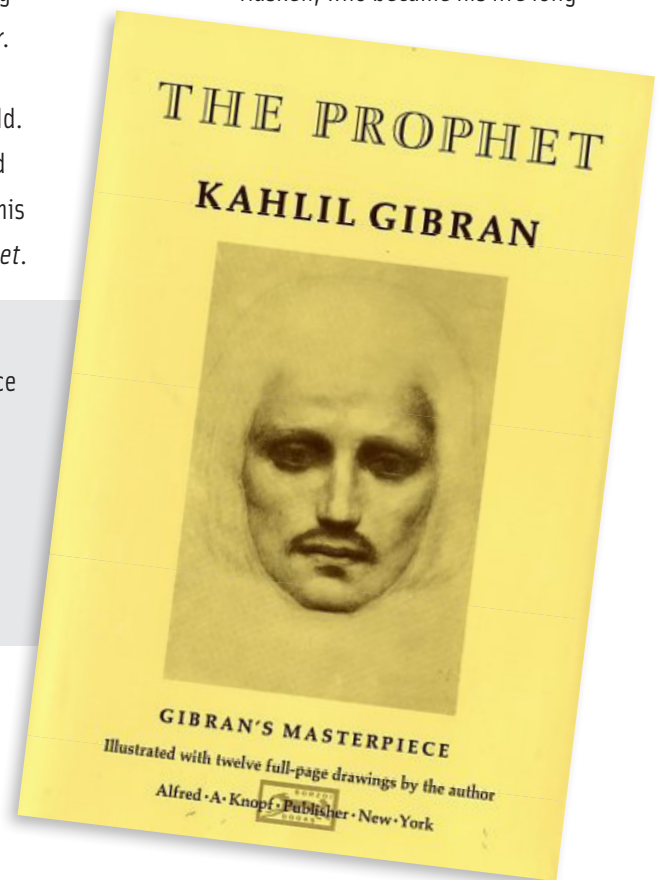
Gibran was introduced to the eccentric artist Fred Holland Day in 1896. Day took Gibran in as a protégé when he discovered his "natural genius" and began teaching him everything about the enthralling world of art and literature. In 1898, at only 15 years old, his drawings and illustrations could be seen in books, giving him his first taste of fame.

Gibran decided to go back to Lebanon in 1898 to finish his education and study the Arabic culture. He graduated from college in 1902 and returned to America to find that his sister had passed away and his mother had been diagnosed with cancer. Among this sorrow, he found an outlet within his art and had his first art exhibit in 1904. At this exhibit he met Mary Haskell, who became his life long friend and financier for his art schooling in France and the beginnings of his career.

In 1908, Gibran began to write Arabic literature that was published around the world. He soon found that New York was where he would gain real fame among writers and artists with his English publication in 1918, *The Madman*. Encouraging reviews of his work helped drive Gibran to write his next and most famous publication, *The Prophet*.

In 1923, *The Prophet* was published and immediately captured the attention of readers, selling over 100,000 copies in its first years. The book contained "the voice of the East" and revealed the philosophy and mystery that Gibran prided himself on. The book is made up of 26 poetic essays told from the point of view of a man preparing for a journey discussing joy, pain, love, sorrow, and identity. It is filled with prose that inspires and ignites questions about the mystery of life. *The Prophet* is one of the most highly regarded writings of the twentieth century.

In 1928 Gibran's health began to deteriorate, and he began to drink excessively to escape the pain. At the age of 48 on April 10, 1931 Kahlil Gibran died of liver cancer. Both New York City and his hometown in Lebanon staged two-day vigils for him.



On Playwriting

Interview with Stephen Karam

Ted Sod, Roundabout's Education Dramaturg, interviewed playwright Stephen Karam to discuss the play.

Ted Sod: Will you give us some background information on yourself? Where are you from? Where were you educated? When did you decide to become a playwright and why?

Stephen Karam: I grew up in Scranton, PA. I attended a public high school, then majored in English at Brown University. I never really decided to become a playwright, there was no turning point, per se. I never went to grad school to study playwriting, so part of me wonders...maybe I haven't decided yet? I discovered theater around middle school and have been drawn to it ever since.

TS: What do you feel the play is about? What inspired you to write this play?

SK: In a nutshell, *Sons of the Prophet* is a comedy about a guy coping with chronic pain. More generally (and amusingly), you could call it a comedy about human suffering. It explores the particularly messy portions of our lives – the times in which you find yourself coping with multiple life issues, and before any of them can be resolved – two more show up on your plate.

The play features many characters struggling with lingering pain, whether it's physical or emotional. Joseph's symptoms are unrelenting; Gloria worries her traumatic past will always loom over her life; Joseph and Charles will never get to speak to their parents again; Bill knows his health will never fully return – they're all at a stage where it's less about popping a pill and nipping their troubles in the bud, and more about starting the slow, complicated journey to coping. Figuring out the best way to move forward in the face of no easy answers.

Even the towns featured in the play (all in Eastern Pennsylvania) are all hurting. Parts of Pennsylvania built

their entire identity around industries (steel, coal, etc.) that are no longer there. It's a lot like Joseph's crisis – he built his entire identity around his athletic talent. Suddenly that's taken away. How will he define himself going forward?

TS: Does the play have personal resonance for you and if so, how?

SK: All of my plays are deeply personal. But none of them are autobiographical. Still, the play has a list of yes-that's-kind-of-true-facts.

- I grew up in Scranton, PA.
- I'm half-Lebanese. My grandfather and oldest aunt/uncle were born in Lebanon. My grandparents came over when they were in their 20s – my grandfather died speaking only broken English. He was a tailor. I was raised Maronite faith (Roman Catholicism with more incense and Arabic) and attended a Maronite church in West Scranton.
- I grew up down the block from the "real" Douaihy family ("Douaihy", like "Karam" is an extremely common last name in Lebanon). The Douaihys of Scranton had two daughters a few years older than me, we attended the same public high school. They were not only fellow Lebanese-Maronites...and Scrantonians...but also both gay. Yes, two sisters, both fabulous lesbians. Both inspired me a great deal.
- I ran cross country.
- I worked as an editorial assistant at Free Press, Simon & Schuster. Then as a legal assistant for 7 years.
- I've had my own medical struggles (like many) and even a spinal tap. But there will be no more details forthcoming as a) *Sons of the Prophet* is not a disease-of-the-week play and b) I do not want to publish my medical history online.
- Sudden family deaths have influenced the play quite a bit. Growing up, I lost three people (suddenly)

Interview with Stephen Karam

with whom I was very close. Anyone who's lost people out of the blue knows how indescribable it is.

– I had a torrid affair with Anderson Cooper.

I did not have a torrid affair with Anderson. Nothing about it was torrid. No! Kidding. Though hopefully this will generate some web traffic (Gawker, call me, we'll get you free tix).

TS: How did you research the world of the play? What kind of research did you have to do in order to write it?

SK: Well, life experience. I traveled all over Lebanon recently. I went north into the mountains and was able to pass through Zghorta (where my family was from), Ehden, Bcharre (Gibran's hometown). I'd been planning a trip in 2006 but the Beirut airport was bombed, so that scared me away for many years. Lebanon has its own share of chronic pain – for centuries it's taken hits from all sides. It's also a country that has resisted collapse, continually rebuilding and looking forward. The Lebanese people are incredibly inspiring. Along with their difficult history comes a strong resilience.

TS: What was the most challenging part of writing your play? What part was the most fun??

SK: It was challenging to ensure that Joseph didn't become a wallower, a victim. Most people are quite courageous in facing their day-to-day struggles. Everyone suffers. Joseph doesn't feel unique, he doesn't feel special; he just wants to feel better.

It was great fun (and very challenging) to try and create a naturalistic play that feels like it's careening out of control. I want the audience to never be quite sure of what will happen next – or where we'll be next. I jump time and trust the audience to fill in the blanks. Of course, to take those liberties you have to spend crazy amounts of time building a strong, solid structural frame onto which you can throw all of the madness. I like Brechtian frames (this is my 3rd play using one). I also had fun finding the poetry in the mundane details of life in Northeastern PA. There's music



to be mined from the everyday: Joseph's silent anger and Gloria's passive-aggression; the way two brothers speak to each other; board meetings; bus station announcements; physical therapy exercises...

TS: Can you describe what you look for in a director? In casting actors?

SK: In a director – someone who connects to the story and is able to tell it truthfully. I'm interested in no frills, no gags, no unnecessary frosting. Someone who's talented and smart enough to make the play work on its own terms. I didn't want this play to be about sexy rotating sets or creating fancy effects – I felt like the material wanted a spare production. Peter got that from the start and has done an incredible job.

In actors – truthfulness. I'm drawn to actors who are honest. Who let you lose yourself in the world of the play. Who never show you they're "acting" at all.

Interview with Stephen Karam

TS: This play was commissioned by Roundabout – are there any specific challenges in writing a commissioned play?

SK: Just meeting deadlines.

TS: Has the script changed since the premiere in Boston? What was the catalyst for those changes?

SK: It's changed quite a bit. I completely abandoned a subplot. I might head into previews in NY and make even more changes.

One benefit of starting in Boston is that I had time to consider all of the out-of-town criticism (from audiences and from critics). One thing that I didn't expect to have to address – since I grew up gay in a Maronite Lebanese-American family (with the occasional racist family member)...the details about the family's origin/religion were just that, the factual details about a family I knew very well. For some critics, those details meant I'd written a play that was ipso facto about homosexuality and about religion and about racism and about the Middle East, etc, etc...and suddenly, my play had 47 themes (none of which I intended – I don't even write from theme!). So I considered the reactions, both the good and the bad, and tried to make the play better in every way. I focused the story more tightly on the family and ensured that when various topics come up as a result of who these people are...they never overwhelm the narrative.

One area I didn't budge: telling a story about two gay brothers. Some advised I consider making at least one of them straight. I realize not everyone has the experience of growing up across the street from the Douaihy-lesbians... but even so, I think people who don't relate to the brothers would still not relate to them even if they were straight. Chekhov's *The Three Sisters* moves me every time – and I've never once thought "if only Masha or Olga were a little lez, I might have an in to this narrative...".

The human experience is so vast and so universal all at once. For me, telling a deeply specific, truthful story – even if it's out-of-the-box – is a better bet than trying to consciously craft a universal one.

TS: Who are your favorite playwrights? Do you find reading or seeing other plays helpful? How do you feed yourself as a writer?

SK: I never have a real answer to this question, just an endless list of plays that excite me. But here's some people on my mind: Williams, Chekhov, Shakespeare, Churchill, Wilder, Orton, Lucas, Vogel, Kushner, Robert Wilson, Bunin, MJ Gibson, YJ Lee (*Lear!*), LeFranc, D'Amor. Seeing and reading other people's plays/music/opera/dance/art is the most inspiring.

TS: What advice would you give to a young person who wants to write for the theatre?

SK: Do whatever works for you, even if it seems unorthodox. My path in NYC was anchored around a day job that had nothing to do with writing or the arts for that matter. For around 7 years I had a permanent 30-hr/week job at a Canadian law firm working as a legal assistant. It was a good fit and gave me health insurance. I opened four plays in seven years in three different cities during that time. Using vacation days! That being said, most of my colleagues have gone the MFA route. I'm sure I would have loved that experience; I still wonder if I missed out, especially on solid mentorship of some kind.

Read as many plays as you can get your hands on. Experience as many other art forms as you can, don't just read/see plays.

I'd also remind young writers that many brilliant and exciting new plays don't get picked up by theaters. A rejection is not always a reflection of the quality of the work, but sometimes a reflection of the kind of play that particular theater favors.

TS: What else are you working on now?

SK: I'm finalizing the libretto for a chamber opera, *Dark Sisters*, with music by Nico Muhly. It runs in NYC from November 9 –19th. It will then have a run in Philadelphia in June of 2012. www.darksisteropera.org •

On Directing

Interview with Peter DuBois

Ted Sod, Roundabout's Education Dramaturg, interviewed director Peter DuBois to discuss the play.

Ted Sod: How did you get involved in this production and collaboration with Stephen?

Peter DuBois: The collaboration was in many ways an arranged marriage. Robyn Goodman and Todd Haines were talking with Stephen about who he might want to work with on the show and they sent me the script. I really loved it. Stephen and I met and really hit it off. We had a subsequent dramaturgical conversation where we talked about the play and I gave him my thoughts on where I thought the draft was. We talked about the sense of direction we wanted to head in and we were very much on the same page about it.

TS: How long ago was that?

PD: That was two years ago.

TS: And the play has changed exponentially?

PD: Yes, dramatically. It's even changed since the production in Boston. In Boston, Timothy was Gloria's son, for example, and that plot element has gone away. In previous drafts, there was a lot more exposition around Joseph's point of view on the world which has been pared down. I also think that Stephen's really dropped into more natural rhythms with the comedy.

TS: Talk to me a little bit about being a director/dramaturg. It's become rare. How do you find yourself doing that? Where do you feel like the line is blurred?

PD: It's really great because Stephen knows his writing very well and he knows how he wants a scene to feel, so I don't feel threatened at all when Stephen is talking about the tone of a scene or the direction of a scene. In the same way, Stephen doesn't feel threatened when I'm looking at a line or a beat and making a suggestion about the shape or direction for something. The foundation is always the relationship; it's the director and writer agreeing that they will allow each other to have hands in the others' purse, so to speak. Stephen's very good at taking the feedback he gets, whether it's from a producer or me or from an outside dramaturg and knowing what advice is good and what advice the play isn't ready for or advice he doesn't want to use at all.

TS: Can you talk about your take on what the play is about?

PD: For me the play is about suffering and it's about people's pain and how we move through life with a certain amount of suffering and pain in our life that everybody has. Stephen is exploring ways in which that pain can get cracked open through character. It's a character driven piece. It's not a play anchored in plot. It's a play that's very much anchored in character and then plot emerges as a result, which I really love.



Chris Perfetti and Yusef Bulos in *Sons of the Prophet*.

TS: Do you mean the comedy aspect that comes out of the characters and relationships?

PD: Yes. Sometimes we'll even have to play against it. If the scene is so well structured comically, sometimes you have to dismantle a little bit. I find that when I'm working in comedy, the most important thing for me is to direct the drama that's underneath the comedy because it's really the comic substructure that actually gives the comedy depth and richness. Until we're in front of an audience, I don't worry about timing as it relates to landing jokes. With Stephen's comedy, it's more about directing the character in a situation and the comedy emerges from that.

TS: Will you talk a bit about what you needed from the actors in casting? What were you looking for?

PD: I was looking for natural ease, I was looking for actors who are very comfortable in their own skin, who aren't afraid to underplay a moment, and that's what we got. We got actors who are emotionally honest. You could tell in the auditions, the minute someone opened their mouth, if they were the kind of actor that was right for this world or not. It's a joy. Then you have someone like Joanna Gleason who's a genius of comedy because she keeps it incredibly real and she's not afraid to reveal her suffering as a human being with her characters and the result is incredibly funny.

Interview with Peter DuBois

TS: How did you collaborate with your design team?

PD: The first thing that Stephen and I talked about was that I wanted the world to feel like a void. I wanted these characters to feel that they were suspended in the universe. Stephen and I were also really inspired when we went to visit West Scranton and all the brick there was really fantastic and then we talked with Anna Louizos, our set designer, about how to put the minimum amount of stuff on stage that the scene requires, but allow it to have a more floating, poetic quality because there is a baseline of sadness that runs through the play that the setting helps to reinforce. For example, it was important for the house they live in to feel as though not a lot has been done since the mom died; that the dad's not a decorator. Charles, the youngest son, is probably the only one who's got any taste or care about décor. So there were just these certain touches that an audience may not be aware of but we're aware of and hopefully there is an impact the audience feels that is more emotional.

TS: It changed location fairly often, right?

PD: Yes—like a movie, it's moves very cinematically. You've got to be able to be in a bus station, split screen into a bedroom with the bus station, and then split screen into a living room with the bus station, and when you get into the living room, you have to have a closet that's converted into a toilet. You have all these things that are referred to that have to show up but at the same time, you're trying to honor a kind of minimalist flow and design, in a rather small space. And also never lose Joseph or that cinematic flow.

TS: Were the lighting and clothing influenced by your trip to Scranton?

PD: Definitely. Especially with the women who played the Board Women and Mrs. McAndrew. Especially as we address class in the play, the clothing became so important. Gloria needs to feel like a fish out of water, she's Manhattan in West Scranton but the rest of the characters are very much reflecting their class, their location, and point of view on style through the clothes. And Frederick Tilley is a master of detail. Detail is incredibly important to him and so it seemed like a really natural fit. And the lighting is the invisible breath of God that just blows through the play. And Japhy Weideman has a very strong, very poetic sensibility.

TS: And Sound? Will there be a lot of music?

PD: Yes! Nico Muhly is our composer, so he composed music that runs through all the transitions. There are also the other sound cues that are creating a strong sense of place and reality.

TS: What was it like to do the show at the Huntington, where you're the artistic director? How did you decide the work that needed to be done for this production?

PD: Well one of the things that Stephen did was stream line the thematic underbelly of the play so our focus was Joseph. He eliminated the link between Gloria and Timothy, and this freed up both of those

characters to evolve in ways that they hadn't before. The relationship between the brothers is developed with two new actors, so we're rediscovering the play with those two actors. We had wonderful actors in Boston, but now we have a more age appropriate company. Santino is 29 and Chris is almost 9 years younger than Santino, and there's an age spread there that's believable.

In terms of going back in to reshape and redirect, it's really about following Stephen's lead with the script and letting those changes dramaturgically impact the shape of the staging. Then we would get into the rehearsal hall and I would realize there were a few moments that I wasn't happy with the tone of a moment or how a beat was structured. There were things that I didn't realize were bothering me until I was restaging it and thought I could do better and wanted to try it a different way.

TS: Is the tone of this play something you wrestle with on a daily basis? Or does it feel the same throughout?

PD: Tone is always hard with comedy especially when you're trying to create a world that's very real. If I need to be emotionally invested in a character, I can't direct that character in such a way where they are playing moments really broadly. The tone is something we had to set the stage for at the beginning of rehearsal but the actors are really good at self-adjusting. We've had rehearsals where we'll just play out wild choices, almost to just get it out of your system.

TS: How do you keep yourself inspired?

PD: I recently went to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and that was the biggest dose of inspiration I've had in ages because it reminded me of work that I created when I was younger and living in Prague and it helped me reconnect with myself artistically. When I know I'm going to be working on a play, I'm very inspired by going to locations that the play involves and I get so much inspiration from that. With Stephen's play, we took a road trip to Scranton and talked non-stop in the car. I go through a process of falling in love with my collaborators. I find that I fall in love with my actors and designers, and I have to enjoy being in the room with them and I find ways to do that. For me, it's a love affair that I try to conduct in the room.

TS: What advice would you give a young person who wants to direct?

PD: My advice would be to jump in and do it. If you go the route where you're assisting people, make sure you're doing your own work while you're learning the craft from others. For me, it was important to start from the Greeks and move forward. When I'm in a room I love the fact that I have an arsenal of 1960 melodrama in my hand if I want it. When you're studying theatre, it's like programming your hard drive and you're getting a sense of where you are in the continuum. Like who are your antecedents, who are your classical antecedents, who are your 20th century antecedents? I always tell people for myself, I had to not have a "plan b". Because if you do, you're going to go with "plan b", because being an artist is a very difficult thing. •

On Acting

Interview with Santino Fontana

Ted Sod, Roundabout's Education Dramaturg, interviewed actor Santino Fontana to discuss the play.

Ted Sod: Why did you choose to play the role of Joseph in *Sons of the Prophet*?

Santino Fontana: I think there have been a few times in my life where the role and my life have intersected. Although Joseph is very different from me in a lot of ways, we have had very similar experiences. He keeps trying to play by the rules and keeps getting screwed over and I can connect with that. I'm sure everyone connects with that. You feel like you keep trying to do the right thing but you keep getting slammed by some force and you have no idea what's happening. Also, I haven't done a contemporary play in New York, I haven't been in a new contemporary play at all in New York—or spoken without an accent.

TS: What kind of preparation or research will you have to do in order to play Joseph?

SF: Luckily, I feel like a lot of my research is done. I worked on this play a year ago in different workshop settings. The family dynamic is very similar to my family dynamic. The only difference is my parents are still alive, thank God. I get Uncle Bill saying "Don't forget where you come from." I too was raised Catholic. I'm from a working class family, so there are very similar socioeconomic issues. There is a quote in the play where Joseph says: "Our family was only allowed to watch 'Little House on the Prairie' because people get screwed over every week." My grandma would say when we would laugh too much, "Laughing leads to crying." There is a DNA structure about how these characters view the world that I recognize.

TS: Do you want to go to Nazareth, Pennsylvania where the play takes place?

SF: I do! Definitely. And Stephen Karam, the playwright, has sent me pictures. It's the only play that I've been in recently that I have been able to travel to where it takes place.

TS: Can we talk about your relationship to Gloria, your employer, and to your brother, Charles, in the play?

SF: What I love about the play is that Joseph is in a great state of need. Actually all the characters are, which is one thing that makes great plays. Joseph needs health insurance. I work for Gloria, who is of a completely different socioeconomic background; she's had a completely different life than Joseph has had and I have to put up with her. She's very funny, she's hilarious, but she's crazy. But there are a lot of similarities between Joseph and Gloria. She's afraid to acknowledge what's actually going on with and around her. She needs someone to take care of her and to tell her it's going to be okay; which is what Joseph wants. But Gloria can't be that for Joseph. It's just not in her nature; they don't connect on that level. Even if she tried, he wouldn't allow that to happen. I think he recognizes her need but



Charles Socarides and Santino Fontana in *Sons of the Prophet*.

also thinks her problems are small compared to his. Of course, she thinks his problems are small compared to hers. The difference is that she will win, because she has the money and the power. She gets rewarded for her bad behavior, she gets a book deal. There's a line in the play: "In order to make it in this world, you have to be either an extraordinary human being, or make an series of extraordinarily bad life decisions."

TS: Joseph seems to be a surrogate parent to his brother, Charles. He becomes parental with Uncle Bill. Would you define that as co-dependent?

SF: It's very emotional. There's a void. There's a vacuum when you are faced with huge odds, huge responsibility and pressure. You can either face those pressures or avoid them and say I'm going to take care of you, and you, and you, and you and that happens with Joseph. Jumping into the parent role helps him not deal with what's going on. He never asks for help, he never says I need help. He never tells Bill this is too much for me, help me. He never lets someone else take care of him, even though that's what he wants. In order to avoid that, he jumps into the parental role.

TS: What about the Kahlil Gibran connection in the play? What do you make of it?

SF: Joseph doesn't necessarily buy the Gibran connection and it doesn't mean anything to him. Gloria wants to write a book about Joseph's connections to Gibran. She wants the money and the success

Interview with Santino Fontana

of the book that hasn't been written. Joseph doesn't want to do this book; he doesn't want the book because it's very private, you don't share that, you don't talk about your family. He doesn't even know that much about the Gibran connection. In order to keep his job, he might go with the idea of making the book happen, but either way he's accommodating a little bit. He's not trusting his gut. If he agrees to it, he's giving away his principles. He doesn't buy the Gibran connection, but he's willing to deal with Gloria about it in order to keep his health insurance.

TS: Would you talk about your process? What is the first thing you do?
SF: Read the play. Just read it.

TS: Over and over?

SF: It depends. Every play is different, every process is different. For *The Importance of Being Earnest*, I read it and I had a lot of ideas and thoughts about Algernon. I knew I was going to be working with Brian Bedford who played Lady Bracknell and directed. I had a lot of friends who had worked with him before. And I told him that I was very happy to throw everything onto him, just as he was treated by John Gielgud when John was his director and teacher. I said, I will do your version of what you think I should do, let's do this together. So that was a very different experience. I let Brian lead me. This play is a little different. They did a production in Boston that was very successful, so they know things I don't know. Right now my process for this play is just to read it over and over again. It's just identifying what the story is. It's script analysis at this point. It's not hard for me to get connected to this play, it's a very visceral thing. It's more about me wanting to make sure I'm doing Joseph justice. That is my biggest concern. My process right now is to be patient, to read it and be prepared. This play is also strongly about relationships, it is about people trying to coexist. So I've got to be open.

TS: What do you look for in a director?

SF: A partner, a collaborator and a leader. Someone who is going to say "I am in this with you"; someone who isn't going to throw me to the wolves or let me hang myself. Somebody who is going to give structure to how we're going to go about the work. As soon as they identify what the playground is, then we can go play. Those are my favorite directors. Peter DuBois is great; he is very good at being able to see what I'm doing and give me feedback. He'll bring up things I haven't thought about. He's very gentle and collaborative, which I think is the best thing you can ask for in a director. And he's very respectful.

TS: Would you take a stab at saying what this play is about?

SF: It's about things that everyone will go through. It's about moving on. It's about a young man being forced to grow up before he wants to. He finds his way through that alone. And we see him getting to the other side with a group of people that he loves. I think the play is about growing up and getting over pain. Some one was asking me the other day, "Are people going to be able to relate to what this play is about?" And I said "Of course." We're talking about these really serious stakes here. And it's funny. The family is very funny. How else are you going to get through it? Stephen based the structure of the play on Gibran's book, *The Prophet*, and each scene is a meditation on different life subjects. That's what it's riffing off of, it's riffing off of when things gets worse and keep getting worse, what do you do? How do you survive?

TS: Will you talk a little bit about your training? Did you have any great teachers who influenced you?

SF: I went to Interlochen in Michigan the summer after my junior year in high school. I found a bunch of people who had been doing what I was doing and I didn't have that in my hometown. I applied for this scholarship competition called Young Arts. They take the 20 top people in each arts division. They have visual arts, music, jazz, dance, acting...everything. For acting, you had to send in a monologue and a song and I was one of the 20 that was flown down to Florida. Then you compete. You take classes and they award you scholarship money. From there I was seen by a great teacher of mine, who is still a mentor, Ken Washington, the head of company development at the Guthrie Theatre. He was starting an actor training program at the Guthrie and one of the monologues I did was from *The Seagull*. Ken came up to me and asked "Why did you choose *The Seagull* monologue?" I said "I really like the play and the character." He said "Do you know what you're doing next fall?" And I told him I was thinking of going to go to music school to study voice, jazz piano, or musical theatre. He said "I think you'd be making a mistake...I think you're an actor." And I trusted him...and went to the Guthrie.

TS: So your parents were supportive?

SF: I feel like they were too supportive sometimes. When things are terrible I feel like saying "Why did you never tell me this was going to be too hard?" No one in my family was in the arts, at all. My mom is a teacher, my sister's a teacher, and my dad is in the agriculture industry. My grandfather was in sales and my other grandfather was a business owner. But they were very supportive.

TS: If a young person came up to you and said "I want to do what you do," what would you say to them?

SF: I would say: "What kind of acting do you want to do?" Because it's not about where you're doing it, it's about what you're doing. People in *A Chorus Line* aren't typically in *Major Barbara* and people in *Major Barbara* may have a harder time getting into a play at The Rattlestick Theatre. So what do you want to do? It takes a lot of strategy to be able to bounce around and I knew that was what I wanted to do. I would say first of all, follow what you love, not what you think will get you where you want to go. So if you want to be in classical plays, you've got that work to do. If you want to be in contemporary plays, that is going to take a lot of work as well, but it'll be a little different. If you want to be in musicals, then we're talking a whole different ball game. What kind of musicals? *A Chorus Line*? Do you want to be in Sondheim musicals? What do you want to do specifically? I really believe you can do all those things, it's just going to take focus. I knew I wanted to be able to do classical and contemporary plays and musicals. What I love about being an actor is being able to be cast into different worlds. No one can prepare you for what eight shows a week is like. You have to know your instrument so well. I remember when I was doing *The Fantasticks* waking up and the first breath would tell me how tight my voice was and then I would have to just hum and I would know exactly how the show would be that night. Bottom line, I always wanted to be in great stories, playing great characters, with the best people I could possibly work with. That was my mission statement. And so far, so good. •

When you get to the theatre...

BELOW ARE SOME HELPFUL TIPS FOR MAKING YOUR THEATRE-GOING EXPERIENCE MORE ENJOYABLE.

TICKET POLICY

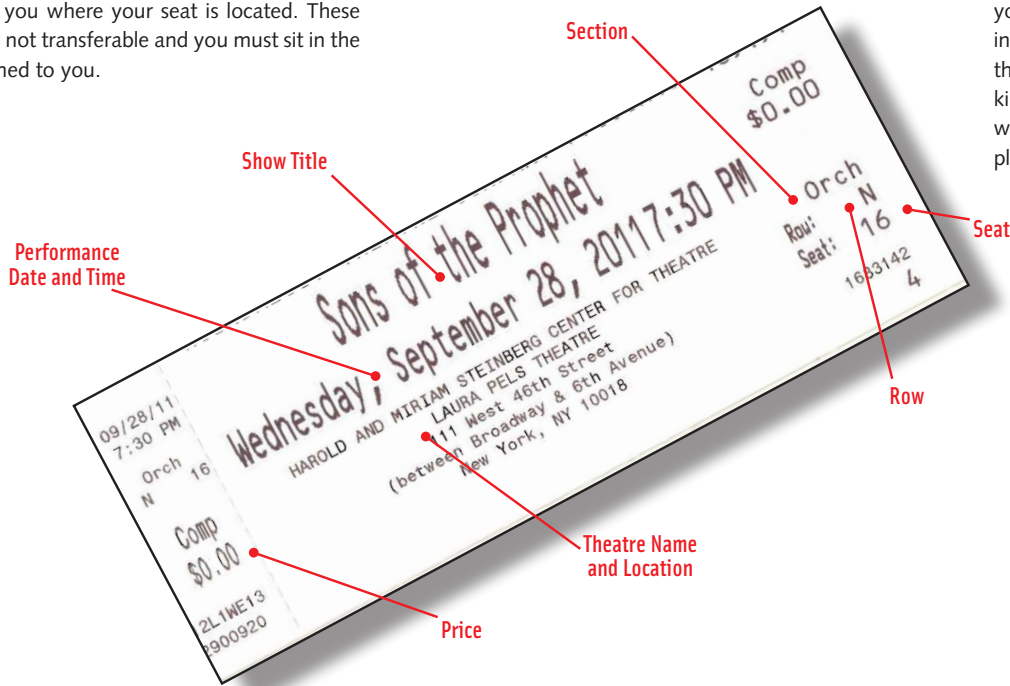
As a student participant in Producing Partners, Page To Stage or Theatre Access, you will receive a discounted ticket to the show from your teacher on the day of the performance. You will notice that the ticket indicates the section, row and number of your assigned seat. When you show your ticket to the usher inside the theatre, he or she will show you where your seat is located. These tickets are not transferable and you must sit in the seat assigned to you.

PROGRAMS

All the theatre patrons are provided with a program that includes information about the people who put the production together. In the "Who's Who" section, for example, you can read about the actors' roles in other plays and films, perhaps some you have already seen.

AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

As you watch the show please remember that the biggest difference between live theatre and a film is that the actors can see you and hear you and your behavior can affect their performance. They appreciate your applause and laughter, but can be easily distracted by people talking or getting up in the middle of the show. So please save your comments or need to use the rest room for intermission. Also, there is no food permitted in the theatre, no picture taking or recording of any kind, and if you have a cell phone, beeper, alarm watch or anything else that might make noise, please turn it off before the show begins.



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