

Spotlight on Learning

a Pioneer Theatre Company
Classroom Companion



Pioneer Theatre Company's *Student Matinee Program* is made possible through the support of Salt Lake County's Zoo, Arts and Parks Program, Salt Lake City Arts Council/ Arts Learning Program, The Simmons Family Foundation, The Meldrum Foundation Endowment Fund and R. Harold Burton Foundation.

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Approx. running time:
1 hour and 30 minutes. There is NO intermission.

Student Talk-Back:
There will be a Student Talk-Back directly after the performance.



February 16 - March 3, 2018

Written by:
JEFF TALBOTT

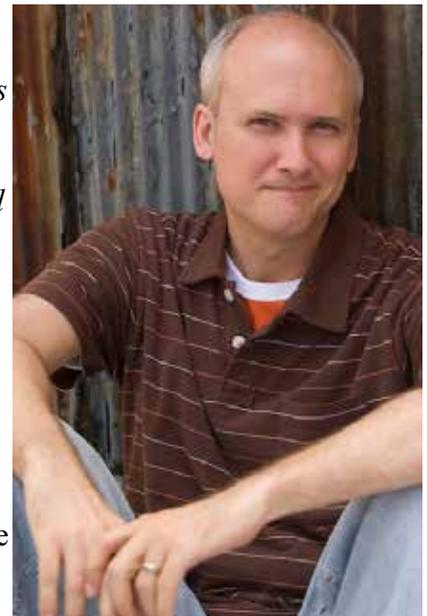
Directed by:
KAREN AZENBERG

*Playwright Jeff Talbott gives audiences a behind-the-scenes look at the development of a new play in his blog *i & me & you* at pioneertheatre.org. He talks about sci-fi, love stories, and the ingredients required to take a play from the writer's living room to the theatre's stage.*

Post excerpt, Jan. 30, 2018

2. Finding the Bathroom

Now I've got scene 1, so I guess I'm writing a play. I know it's a love story. I know it's got a sci-fi bent. All that's left is getting the rest of it on the page. Easy, right? Oh, yeah. So easy...



Playwright Jeff Talbott

Writing a play is like getting dropped into a country you've never heard of. You don't speak the language, and even the simplest things are impossible. You just want to go to the bathroom, but anybody you stop to ask looks at you like you're crazy. And you really have to go. Your only choice is to stick it out, keep asking everybody you meet and eventually you'll learn the right words. Eventually, you'll

Continued on page 2

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be able to ask more in-depth questions. Eventually, you'll be able to help some other weary and stopped-up traveler. But at first? It's slow as Vermont maple syrup in January and you feel stupid every single day.

It's also often entirely unclear if it's going to even be a play. Because you could stop at any time. Or, if you're me, that's what you tell yourself to trick yourself into continuing. "Hey, Jeff, you aren't obligated to spend time with these two lonely souls in this tiny little sci-fi love story; so just do another page and then you can go for a walk and never look at it again."

That's in the beginning. But, almost immediately, they become actual people to me, and I feel not only responsible to them, but obligated to help them tell their story. And they are pretty good at letting me know when I'm not doing it right.

The trick is learning how to listen to them.

For the rest of Talbott's 8-post series, go to pioneertheatre.org/blog.

Activity

PAGE TO STAGE

Page 3 depicts, graphically, from start to finish, how a play goes from being a draft to full a production.

(For more information on how a play goes from idea-to-draft, read the notes on page 1 from the author, and his blog posts on our website.)

Make your own Start-to-Finish poster.

Think of something you accomplished or created: a book report for a class, a poem, a science project, competed in a sports event, learned a foreign language, trained a pet or anything else that took time and development.

What should you capture on your poster?

- What key ideas led you to begin?
- What skills did you had to learn or improve upon to begin accomplishing or creating this?
- Include some of the feedback you received along the way from friends, teachers, parents, coaches, etc.
- Recount any failures you experienced along the way.
- What did you accomplish or create?

"A FEW DAYS AFTER TOMORROW"

The production of *i* takes place in a time that is "a few days after tomorrow," according to Jeff Talbott, the playwright. That means the play takes place in the future, but not so far ahead in the future that we can't envision it—or that we won't experience it in our lifetime. These changes will affect us socially and culturally.

While visits to space were far in the future for your ancestors, many of your parents and especially your grandparents were raised before something called the Internet existed. Even in your own lifetimes, you've already been introduced to Alexa, Instagram, augmented reality and 3-D printing. And you'll own a self-driving car someday soon, too!

In your lifetime, what changes do you imagine to see in:

- **medicine?**
- **transportation?**
- **pollution control?**
- **clothing?**
- **entertainment?**
- **others?**

For each of these, write a statement on how you think these changes will affect society. Think of the impact financially, on our free time, education, relationships, employment, housing and families.

From Page to Stage, or how "i" got to stage

Artistic Director Karen Azenberg received a draft of Jeff Talbott's new play in May 2016. That was draft three. Now, almost two years later, she's charted the progression of *i* since that day, from "page to stage"...

FRIDAY, MAY 27, 2016
West 44th Street, NYC
Jeff Talbott gave me a
new play he was working on

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 8, 2016
I read that script!
Loved it!

i

by Jeff Talbott

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2016
"i" to be presented in PTC's
Play-by-Play new play reading series

JANUARY 27-28, 2017
Play-by-Play readings.
Rewrites galore!
Audience loves it!

MARCH 2, 2017
"i" announced as
part of the PTC main
stage season, 2017-2018

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2018
WORLD PREMIERE!

Author contact:
Jeff Talbott

KAREN A.

World Premiere of Jeff Talbott's "i" at Pioneer Theatre Co.

by Kenneth Jones

Reprinted from bykennethjones.com. Jones is also a playwright, and the author of Alabama Story, a play that received its world premiere at PTC after initially being part of the Play-by-Play new reading series.

Colleen Baum, Todd Gearhart, Kathleen McElfresh and Nafeesa Monroe will populate Pioneer Theatre Company's world-premiere production of Jeff Talbott's drama *i* in Salt Lake City. PTC artistic director Karen Azenberg will direct the mysterious boy-meets-girl story for a Feb. 16-March 3, 2018, run.

The resident Equity company in Utah first developed the drama in January 2017 in its Play-by-Play new play reading series.

Here's how Pioneer characterizes *i*: "Sarah [played by Kathleen McElfresh] is having a rough time. She's trying to shake it, but it's not easy. She's got a new doctor [Nafeesa Monroe] and she's met a nice guy named Jake [Todd Gearhart], so things are looking up. And Jake's having a hard time, too. Together, Sarah and Jake are trying to find their way to each other—and maybe, just maybe, to some of that happiness we've heard so much about. A mysterious love story about the threads that tie us together, *i* is a gentle and unsettling new play set a couple days after tomorrow."

New York City-based Gearhart previously appeared on the PTC mainstage in *The Philadelphia Story* at Pioneer. He also appeared in *i*'s Play-by-Play staged reading, as did resident Utah actress Colleen Baum, who plays Sarah's mother, Virginia in this full production. (For the record, Wes Grantom directed the developmental reading of *i* in 2017.)

The play began in an unexpected way, Talbott previously told me: "I had read an article a while ago about a scientific experiment being done on mice that intrigued me, in terms of its implications for treating humans, but didn't know how it applied to a dramatic story, so I filed it away. Then one day, when cleaning my computer, I found the article, and started to write the

first scene in the play, which is a scene between a doctor and a woman. The play grew from there in some pretty unexpected ways."

Why is the play billed as set "a couple of days after tomorrow"?

"Part of the mystery of the play is what happened with the doctor at the beginning of the play—and since the launching pad for the whole play was a kind of medical technology that doesn't exist yet, it was fun to imagine a world just slightly ahead of where we are now," Talbott said. "A world where everything is basically the same, but with cleaner lines. The trick was making sure the world I was discovering always fed back into Sarah and Jake's halting journey towards each other. The love story is the road; everything else is just the scenery."

The creative team includes set designer Paul Tate DePoo III, costume designer Gregory Gale, lighting designer Jax Messenger and PTC resident sound designer Kate Wecker. Music is by Will Van Dyke.

It was a busy 2017 for Talbott. His play *The Gravedigger's Lullaby* got its world premiere Off-Broadway Feb. 28-April 1 in a staging directed by Jenn Thompson for TACT/The Actors Company Theatre at Theatre Row in New York City. It is now published by Dramatic Publishing.

His play *Three Rules for the Dragon* was heard in a March 6, 2017, Manhattan reading presented by Colt Coeuer and Rattlestick Playwrights Theatre (Adrienne Campbell-Holt directed Marin Ireland, Zachary Quinto, Madeleine Rogers and Babak Tafti). The play was a finalist for the 2016 O'Neill Conference and received a workshop in June 2016 at Premiere Stages at Kean University in New Jersey. He is working on a commission for a new play to be produced by Montclair State University in April 2018. Wes Grantom will direct.

Talbott is no stranger to Pioneer's Play-by-Play series, having enjoyed previous development on his play *A Public Education*, which was finalist for the 2015 O'Neill Playwrights Conference in 2014 and was later

seen in a reading by TACT. As an actor, he appeared in PTC productions of *Doubt*, *The Odd Couple* and *...Spelling Bee*.

His play *The Submission* (published by Samuel French) was the inaugural recipient of the Laurents/Hatcher Award in 2011 and was produced Off-Broadway by MCC Theater; it went on to receive the Outer Critics Circle John Gassner Award for New American Play in 2012. It was also a semi-finalist for the 2010 O'Neill Playwrights Conference. Since that time, it continues to be produced by theatres around the country.

Talbott writes musicals with composer Will Van Dyke. Their musical *Imagine Harry* was presented in the 2015 NAMT Festival of New Musicals, and was finalist for the 2017 O'Neill Musical Theatre Conference and was a finalist for the 2014 Rhinebeck Writers Retreat. In September 2015, they released an EP of their work called "A View of the River" (available on iTunes or wherever digital music is sold). They were part of Goodspeed Musicals' 2016 Johnny Mercer Writers Colony finishing a draft of their musical *Wintersong*. Their musical *Seven Broken Hearts* was developed in part at the Rhinebeck Writers Retreat in 2017. They

are currently working on a new musical commissioned by Grove Entertainment and Barbara Whitman Productions.

His other plays include *How to Build a City* (workshops at TACT and Route 66), *Elliot* (readings – Crowded Outlet, MCC Theater) and *All the Stars in the Midnight Sky* (workshops/readings – MCC, TACT).

Talbott graduated with honors from the Yale School of Drama, and as an actor has been seen in theatres all over the country and in film and TV.

*

The 2018 production of *i* will be the second play to move from PTC's Play-by-Play reading series to Pioneer's 900+ seat mainstage. In 2014, the inaugural Play-by-Play series featured Kenneth Jones' play *Alabama Story*, later fully produced by PTC in January 2015, for which it was nominated for the 2016 Steinberg/American Theatre Critics Association New Play Award. Karen Azenberg directed the premiere and its developmental readings. By spring 2018, *Alabama Story* will have been seen in at least 17 cities around the country.



L-R: Kathleen McElfresh (Sarah), Colleen Baum (Virginia), Playwright Jeff Talbott, Todd Gearhart (Jake) and Nafeesa Monroe (Beth).

Our Equity Cast



Colleen Baum

KAREN AZENBERG (Director) is in her sixth season as PTC Artistic Director. Azenberg is pleased to direct for the second time a world premiere of a play that was first on stage in our Play-by-Play new play reading series.

COLLEEN BAUM (Virginia Cooper) is happy to be back at Pioneer Theatre Company, where she was last seen in *Oliver!*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Our Town*, *The Heiress*, *Lost in Yonkers* and *You Can't Take It With You*. Other theatre credits include *The King's Men* at The Sting & Honey Company; Caine Lyric Repertory Company in *Arsenic and Old Lace*, *You Can't Take It With You*, *Blithe Spirit*, *Always Patsy Cline*, *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* and *Blood Brothers*; Plan-B Theatre Company in *Not One Drop*, *Based On A True Story*, *The Laramie Project*, *Animal Farm*, *War the Worlds* and *Tragedy: A Tragedy*; and Salt Lake Acting Company in *Course 86B in the Catalogue*, *End Days*, *Rabbit Hole* and *Kimberly Akimbo*, among others. Baum is a proud member of Actors' Equity Association.



Todd Gearhart

TODD GEARHART (Jake Bellamy) Broadway: *Bye Bye Birdie*. NY: Lincoln Center Theater, Cherry Lane Theatre, Manhattan Theatre Club, Roundabout Theatre Company, Playwrights Horizons, Vineyard Theatre, Beckett Theatre, The McGinn/Cazale, HB Playwrights. Regional: Guthrie, Hartford TheatreWorks, Alliance Theatre, George Street Playhouse, Ford's Theatre, The Ogunquit Playhouse (IRNE Award Best Actor nominated), Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, The Cleveland Playhouse. TV: "Blue Bloods," "Gossip Girl," "Lipstick Jungle," "Law & Order," "Law & Order: SVU," "The Education of Max Bickford" and Nicky in the upcoming Starz Dramatic Series "Sweetbitter." Film: *The Dark Knight Rises*, *Dogs Lie*, *Moving Mike*. Gearhart has a BFA from the University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music and studied at HB Studios with Uta Hagen.



Kathleen McElfresh

KATHLEEN McELFRESH (Sarah Cooper) Broadway: *Present Laughter*. Off-Broadway: *Taking Care of Baby* (Manhattan Theatre Club); *Greek Holiday* and *The Frugal Repast* (Abingdon Theatre Company); *Jester's Dead* (PIT). Regional: *The Second Girl* and *Brendan* (Huntington Theatre Company); *Uncle Vanya* and *The 39 Steps* (Weston Playhouse); *Boeing Boeing* (Hartford Stage); *Circle Mirror Transformation* (StudioTheatre); *Slight Hitch* (NewYork Stage and Film); *The Women* (The Old Globe); *Pride and Prejudice* (Dallas Theatre Center); *The Jammer* (Edinburgh Fringe Festival, Fringe First). TV: "Law & Order" CI and SVU; "Royal Pains." Film: *A Lotus 'Til Reckoning*. MFA from the Yale School of Drama (Williams Acting Award). BFA from Florida State University.



Nafeesa Monroe

NAFEESA MONROE (Beth Denton and others) happily makes her Pioneer Theatre Company debut with *i*. Theatre credits: Off-Off Broadway: *Hello Herman* (Sheyla Duvall). Regional: Chautauqua Theater Company's *Romeo & Juliet* (Nurse); CATF: *The Wedding Gift* (Onjah); Pittsburgh Public Theater: *Disgraced* (Jory); Queens Theatre: *To Kill A Mockingbird* (Calpurnia); Folger Theatre: *Julius Caesar* (Soothsayer/Artimedorus); Annapolis Shakespeare Company: *Hamlet* (Gertrude); and Shakespeare & Company: *Love's Labour's Lost* (Rosaline), *Mother Courage* (Yvette). Film and television credits: *I'm Through with White Girls*, "Madame Secretary" and "Blue Bloods." As a poet, Monroe opened for Jewel, appeared on HBO's "Def Poetry" and performed alongside bestselling author Neale Donald Walsch. Education: Meisner School of Acting; MFA from The Shakespeare Theatre Company's Academy for Classical Acting. She founded and is artistic director of "Classics in Color: An INclusive Theatre Company."

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