

“Bonhoeffer the Musical”

Picture a pastor eloquently lecturing in the lofty halls of one of Europe’s foremost universities. Now picture that selfsame pastor shackled to the wall of a prison cell with little food, less light, and no prospect of release this side of the grave. What happened to bring about such an astonishing transformation?

The answer to this question is the life’s blood which courses through **“Bonhoeffer the Musical”**. As it does, the tale of one of history’s truly unsung heroes unfolds.

Against the backdrop of Adolf Hitler’s nihilistic regime, the true story of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s courage and compassion burns like an eternal flame in the darkness. Instead of kowtowing to the Führer’s despicable edicts, he feels duty-bound to stop his beloved country from disintegrating into physical and moral chaos. Even having been persuaded to flee this crucible of evil, his uprightness nevertheless compels him to disregard his own safety in the United States, and he boards what was to be the last ship back to Germany before the start of World War II.

Back “home” – though Hitler’s diabolical meddling has made that “home” increasingly less recognizable – Bonhoeffer exchanges his cleric’s robes for a trench coat and fedora, and becomes a spy in an effort to undermine the malevolent forces intent upon tearing not only Germany, but the whole world apart. As a member of the underground resistance, he’s required to make a gut-wrenching choice that stretches the fabric of his spiritual and ethical beliefs...

Almost inevitably in a country under the jackboot of such a doggedly destructive regime, Bonhoeffer is arrested and incarcerated. In spite of the sheer horror of the Nazi prison system – or perhaps precisely because of it – he manages to keep his cheerful disposition. As a result, he becomes a source of strength for those around him who likewise face being consumed by Hitler’s death machine.

Even when his end does indeed approach, Bonhoeffer refuses to be a victim. Instead, he looks forward with optimism and defiance to a better world – a man who no amount of vile coercion can break.

With its emphasis on heroic deeds in the direst of imaginable settings, to say nothing of a tragic love interest, Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s story simply demands to be turned into a musical.

But there’s more to producing a musical than writing a compelling story – bottom draws are full of those. In order to ensure that **“Bonhoeffer the Musical”** didn’t share a similarly

ignoble fate, composer-lyricist Scott Wilkinson and executive producer Jill Pelzer Wilkinson chose to become founding members of Ken Davenport’s Inner Circle of like-minded theatre professionals. And the decision has paid dividends a thousand fold.

Jill: When we joined the Inner Circle, **“Bonhoeffer the Musical”** was on the seemingly interminable treadmill of one rewrite after another. Now, though, it not only has a couple of NYC readings and three resoundingly successful concerts under its belt, we are looking forward to a 29-hour reading on December 14, 2018 at off-Broadway’s own Signature Theater on 42nd Street. We’re well aware that isn’t the end of the road – not by a long way! However, we have every confidence that, with the Inner Circle’s continued assistance, we’ll be able to achieve our goal of opening **“Bonhoeffer the Musical”** on Broadway itself in the shortest possible time.

Scott: **“Bonhoeffer the Musical”** had been a labor of love for Jill and me. The Inner Circle taught us, though, that it will take more than just love to get Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s story out into the world. That change in mindset was due in the main to Ken’s unfailingly generous advice. Furthermore, we’ve benefited immeasurably from not only the experience of the other Inner Circle members, but also the direct access to industry giants such as Robyn Goodman, Joe Mantello, Hal Luftig and Dori Berinstein. For instance, thanks to the input we received, we’ve been able to raise money for our show much faster than I ever would have predicted. This has essentially made our investment in the Inner Circle pay for itself many times over.

Jill, again: In addition, the Inner Circle has made us aware of our reliance on and our responsibility toward our investors. As a CPA, I’m used to making sure that every single dollar and cent is accounted for. However, as the executive producer on **“Bonhoeffer the Musical”**, I’m also committed to getting a healthy return for each and every person who entrusts me with their money. This is made easier by my firm belief that **“Bonhoeffer the Musical”** is destined to achieve that return. That’s good news not only for major investors, but also for Ken, who I’m sure wouldn’t say no to seeing his \$10,000 again – and then some!

And, finally, Scott: While getting a return on investment is important, there’s something else which makes putting money into this show both worthy and worthwhile. We live in divisive times. The tone of politicians worldwide is becoming ever rougher. The example of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, however, can serve to show a better way of dealing not only with the issues themselves, but also with each other. It’s the way of reason, compassion and love for the rest of humanity. If we’re able to get this message across with **“Bonhoeffer the Musical”**, it’ll be thanks in no small part to the lessons we’ve learned and the networking we’ve been able to do in Ken Davenport’s Inner Circle.