

Rogue Theater Festival is weeks away from presenting their virtual play festival of short new works. To celebrate, the creators of Rogue sat down with the Playwright of "Over the Rainbow" to discuss their inspiration, process, and experience working in the times of Covid. Take a minute to get to know them and their experience working with Rogue in these wild times.

### **Answers by Andy Crosten, Creator and Actor**

**Q: Where did you get the inspiration for writing your piece?**

When I was a wee young lad, I was obsessed with the 1939 The Wizard of Oz film and would watch it constantly. For my birthday around this time, my parents got me a pair of ruby slippers. I created my own yellow brick road in our living room using yellow bath towels and would skip like Judy Garland while watching the movie. I've told this story in my other cabaret shows. I began to envision an entire show inspired by this story and what would happen if those ruby slippers really did possess the power to transport their owner over the rainbow to Oz? Thus, this show was born.

**Q: What is your writing process? When inspiration strikes? One hour a day?**

When inspiration strikes for a project, it comes over me in a magical wave and I usually will have the entire idea and structure envisioned in my head in a day or two. I start with the songs and put them in order, which then informs how the scenes will break down. In terms of execution of the actual writing, that takes a little longer. For Over The Rainbow, I worked on the script on and off for six months, all during quarantine 2020. I like to write in the mornings for a couple of hours while I'm drinking my coffee. Sometimes I'll go days or weeks between working on it. Oftentimes certain ideas or lines will come to me late in the evening or at night and I'll have to jot them down so I'll remember to add them to the script the next day.

**Q: How did you first get involved with theater and becoming a playwright?**

As a performer, I've been involved in theatre since I was a young kid. I didn't start writing projects until my late twenties / early thirties when I began performing in the cabaret circuit around NYC. I do consider myself more of an editor than an actual writer- but hey, baby steps! I contribute to the scripts of my Golden Girls drag troupe, The Golden Gays NYC and have also written / edited a handful of other projects.

**Q: What do you love about this piece and what will others love about it?**

This is by far the largest creative project I've ever taken on, and also the most personal. I am so happy with how it turned out. I really poured my heart and soul into it and I think that translates in the piece. It's funny but also sincere. I loved playing all the characters and the challenges that came with figuring out the editing. I think folks will love the inspirational and uplifting message of the show, and of course revisiting The Wizard of Oz!

Q: Have you participated in theater festivals before? What was that experience like? What has your experience with Rogue Theater Festival been?

I \*believe\* this is my first theatre festival and I'm thrilled to be a part of it. Rogue is wonderful!

Q: How has the rehearsal and performance process differed now in Covid times vs. regular times?

Well, we created the entire show in our home studio in our apartment. From writing, to rehearsing, to building the sets, the costumes, filming, and editing. In regular times, I would have wanted to do this show in a real theatre, but alas that wasn't in the cards. It'll happen in the future!

Q: What's up next for you?

I'm excited to try different incarnations of Over The Rainbow, certainly a live production once in-person theatre safely resumes. Also, my Golden Girls drag troupe, The Golden Gays NYC is keeping very busy with virtual performances. Check out [www.thegoldengaysnyc.com](http://www.thegoldengaysnyc.com)!

Q: When were you first inspired to be an actor?

I started re-enacting Disney movies in my living room for my family when I was really young. So, the bug hit me early! Ironically, my first actual play I performed in was The Wizard of Oz when I was around 11-years-old. I played Uncle Henry!

Q: What is your preparation process before going into rehearsals?

It really varies depending on the project. I'm a perfectionist and a professional so I love rehearsals. In terms of Over The Rainbow, things were so different! Most of my preparation was spent "setting up the shots" as they say in the TV/film world. We would rehearse the scene and then film the scene on the same day. In some cases I didn't even have time to learn my lines, so we used cue cards!

Q: How did you get involved with theater and acting?

I started performing in community theatre in my hometown when I was a teenager. I then went on to receive my BFA in musical theatre from Shenandoah University. Then onto the Big Apple! I've only directed a handful of projects. But I'm more and more inspired by the idea of directing. I think I have a good eye for envisioning a show and how things can be creatively staged, etc. I definitely look forward to exploring more of that.

Q: What do you love about your character and what will others love about it?

What I love most about my character is that...it's me! Haha. The inspirational message of the show, while intended for the audience, is mostly actually for me. The character goes on a journey over the rainbow in search of the meaning of life and trying to find himself...And discovers, like Dorothy, he always had the power.

Q: What has been most exciting about bringing this script to life? Most challenging?

This show is really a life-long dream come true. The most exciting part to me has been the wonderful and loving reactions I've had from folks who have seen it.

Most challenging was learning how to film and edit it all myself (using my iPhone!) Quarantine has definitely forced a lot of performers to learn how to be their own stage managers, technicians, and directors.

### **Answers by Mason Griffin, Musical Director**

Q: When were you first inspired to be a music director?

My choir and drama teachers from middle school to high school were my biggest inspirations. My choir teacher, Lisa Smith, is a brilliant pianist and pedagogue while my drama teacher, Lori Kaiser, always speaks with clarity and gives precise direction. I would not be where I am today without their guidance and love.

Q: What is your preparation process before going into rehearsals?

My first order of business is to compile a complete or near complete score before rehearsals commence. I also do a lot of thinking about the songs and how I might play them. Because we often aren't performing the songs in the context of the shows they come from it leaves me with many possibilities.

Q: How has the rehearsal and performance process differed now in Covid times vs. regular times?

The rehearsal process was basically the same as it always was but the performance process was certainly different. This show was originally conceived as an in-person show. Due to Covid, we had to reassess our options and decided that the best way to still do the show but in the safest manner as possible was to do a live stream. It was without a doubt the smartest decision we could have made.