

ON STAGE AND OFF SEASON 40: MAKE BELIEVE

BY BESS WOHL
DIRECTED BY MICHAEL GREIF

HIDE & SEEK

A CONVERSATION WITH PLAYWRIGHT BESS WOHL.

MAKE BELIEVE IS SET IN THE 1980s. WHAT WAS IT ABOUT THAT DECADE THAT INSPIRED YOU?

It was the decade of my childhood. So many references in the play are relevant to me personally - Cabbage Patch Dolls, Nintendo and *E.T.* Those are the things I think of when someone says childhood. I was also interested in exploring how parenting has changed from the 1980s to now. How do we treat our children differently? I wanted to include the personal sense from my own life - how kids seemed to spend much more time alone, and how that has now changed because of the digital revolution. What were the devices kids used to entertain themselves then compared to now. Seeing that impact on my children vs. my personal experience was something I was inspired by.

CHILDREN PLAY A SIGNIFICANT PART IN THIS PIECE. ACT I IS TOLD COMPLETELY FROM THEIR PERSPECTIVE. WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO INCORPORATE CHILDREN IN SUCH A ROBUST WAY?

Each one of my plays comes from a variety of places. There's never just one thing that inspires me. I was definitely thinking about childhood in general. I was interested in the challenge of putting kids on stage. When I became a parent, my own childhood started bubbling to the surface for me. This show is not biographical, but I became interested in how childhood affects you for your whole life. How is it that some people can move past those experiences and others can not? How does your childhood impact who you are as an adult? I was interested in games of pretend. Theater is one big game of pretend and I wanted to explore that connection in a play.

HOW HAS THE PROCESS BEEN AS A WRITER FROM PREMIERING THE SHOW AT HARTFORD STAGE AND NOW BRINGING IT TO 2ST?

I learned a ton from being at Hartford Stage. I'm someone who is always rewriting. I like to evolve my writing until the moment I'm cut off. What I was curious to investigate in this first production was whether or not having children alone on stage for such a long period of time was even possible. It was a giant experiment - I had never really seen anything like that onstage before. How would the child actors and audience react to that? It felt so challenging and rich in the right ways. Whenever I start a play, I'm always trying to push the limits of what is possible on stage.

YOU FIRST WORKED WITH 2ST IN OUR UPTOWN SPACE. MAKE BELIEVE WILL BE IN OUR OFF-BROADWAY SPACE THIS SEASON AND NEXT SEASON, YOUR PLAY GRAND HORIZONS WILL BE A PART OF 2ST ON BROADWAY. WHAT HAS IT BEEN LIKE FOR YOU AS A WRITER TO MAKE THAT JOURNEY AT SECOND STAGE?

It's been incredible - it's hard to say enough superlatives. *American Hero*, the Uptown show, was my New York stage debut, so it launched me into the artistic life that I have now. I remember saying to my boyfriend at the time (now husband) that I just wanted to be in the conversation. So to be able to continue this journey with Second Stage, and Carole Rothman in particular, is game changing in every way. I still don't think it's sunk in yet. 🍷