

I have always been obsessed with death.

I don't mean that I was a teenager who wore all black and chains and listened to Metallica, but rather like so many of us, I've long had a preoccupation with what would happen once we approached the inevitable. Our main character Hayley articulates what triggered her similar feelings in the first lyrics of the opening number:

*I was four or five / When I learned
That everything that lives would have to die
And I cried / At the thought
Of leaving the entire world behind
Mom and Dad / Held me near
And whispered it was too far off to fear
Year after year / Time goes on
Till mom, and dad and me would all be gone*

I can recall this memory vividly: of lying in my childhood bedroom, of first forming the question of what would happen past our eighties, our nineties - something that I had never fathomed before. Of my mother putting her hand on my shoulder and telling me that I would someday die, that she and my father would someday die, and that nobody really knew what happened afterwards. Of her trying to comfort me, saying it was so very far off that I didn't need to worry myself about it, that my parents and I would be around for as long as I could possibly imagine. Of crying as I realized what this all meant.

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Because as a child of a secular family, I quickly drew the bone chilling conclusion as to what life probably was: an infinitesimally short period of existence between two infinities of nothingness. I didn't exist once already, and someday in the not-too-distant future, I wouldn't exist again.



Sounds like happy subject matter for a musical, eh? Bear with me for a moment...

From this realization came an existential crisis that would flare up during the benchmarks of which we measure our lives—first kisses, first driver's license, high school graduation, college graduation, etc. We might not always realize it consciously, but we measure our lives on a timeline—always aware of time's relentless march forward. Think about it for a moment, the decisions we make everyday are aware of our progress along this path—the things we want in our twenties are different than that of our forties for the simple reason that we are measuring how much time we have left. Our language has this awareness built in: "Ugh, over my dead body," "I'll be dead before I finish *Curb Your Enthusiasm*," "That pasta took forever."

But what if forever wasn't just an expression. What if forever was real?

What began as a personal escape from my own fears quickly formed into the world of *Deathless*—a world where living forever, of not aging, of stopping time's relentless forward motion...was as simple as swallowing a pill.

As a writer, one of my primary interests is creating high-concept worlds within which small intimate stories that examine aspects of the human condition can be told. This play is a perfect example of that; while it may sound like science fiction or speculative fiction on the surface, the show is not that concerned with miracle pills or the near future world in which it takes place. Rather, *Deathless* is a simple family story of living in the wake of loss, of family dynamics after a major event, and of understanding what it means to be alive in a world where death is still present.

But there are also car games. And a deep respect for indie rock music. Don't be scared of the big questions, this is a show that uses death to explore life.

Geography plays a huge role in the piece. As the Serling family takes its family road trips, the landscape of the American Midwest serves as our backdrop of American life itself —the rolling fields, major Midwestern cities, Great Lakes, and of course, Niagara Falls. The show is very much about an American experience, and the road trip itself serves as a very important setting for it.

Axis Mundi refers to the intersection of Heaven and Earth, or even more broadly, to the boundary between our world and something just beyond. This show, when it is all said and done, explores that idea. Can a family in a Subaru on the Interstate can be an *Axis Mundi*? Niagara Falls? Family memories? *Deathless* is a musical that takes place in the world of the profane, but ever so slightly brushes against a world beyond the veil.

There are two musical sounds of the show: the score itself, which takes its cues from organic indie folk music like Bon Iver and Sufjan Stevens, and the music that our main character Hayley is obsessed with, which takes its cues from indie rock music like The Strokes and Arcade Fire. That's one of the things I'm most excited about with this show, our characters get to listen to records and music that help tell our story, while being distinctly different than the music they sing themselves.

Beyond musical influences, I was equally influenced by television and film that is similarly interested in both these "big questions," and also the indie cinema that impacted the tone of *Deathless*: shows like *The Leftovers* and *LOST*, films like *The Spectacular Now* and *Juno*. I also took some cues from modern plays that feel particularly naturalistic, like *The Flick*, and memory plays like *How I Learned To Drive*. I read a ton of books that muse on

death...that may sound depressing, but reading and thinking about the philosophical and psychological ideas of how death impacts our lives can help us gain tremendous perspective on how to shape our everyday.

Collaborating with director Tina Landau is a writer's dream: she is thoughtful, inventive, and above all—precise. *Deathless* is a new musical that in many ways wants to feel like a play, and the mastery, creativity, and expertise that Tina brings to that development process is both unique and extraordinary. We both care about the same fusion of these disparate influences, and we both care about telling a story that asks the big questions. And Goodspeed is a collaborator itself, and a supportive and dedicated one at that. It is an unbelievable privilege to be working with a theatre that is so committed to supporting and executing our specific vision for this brand new musical.

It's my hope that *Deathless* will be, first and foremost, an emotional story about a family. About a group of characters facing the same questions of what to eat for breakfast, what to play on their iPods, and the big questions of life and loss that will ultimately brush against all of our lives.

I so hope that you will come and take the road trip with us!