

WRITERS' NOTES

BY BRETT RYBACK & ERIC ULLOA

A forty-minute radio piece about a guy walking across the United States isn't the usual stuff of musicals. Yet Andrew Forsthoefer's trek across America was not only a story that inspired us; it sang to us and demanded that we tell it through this art form.

At heart of *Passing Through* there are really two journeys. There is the physical journey from Pennsylvania to California via the Appalachian Mountains, through the swamps and plains of the South, and into the dry open deserts of the Southwest. Then there is the emotional journey that moves Andrew from pain and isolation to forgiveness and fellowship.

We used music to create a sense of location, changing it to reflect the different folk styles of each region Andrew passes through; music that includes bluegrass, gospel, country western, Mexican ranchera, Navajo-inspired melodies, and even that uniquely American creation, barbershop. And also through song, we gave voice to the quiet, personal emotional life of Andrew and each character he meets along the way. Inspired by the poems of Robert Frost, we used language that was vernacular and plain, and we elevated it to a sort of folk poetry.

We first arrived at Goodspeed and the Johnny Mercer Writers Colony in 2015 with the seeds of an idea and the song that would get Andrew out the door and on his journey. We returned to the Colony in 2016 with a complete first act and began stepping into Act Two. 2017 saw us at the Rhinebeck Writer's Retreat as we polished the first draft of the show. And 2018 had the very first reading of *Passing Through* at Goodspeed's Festival of New Musicals.



Now, here we are in 2019, with the first developmental production at The Terris Theatre, ready to put it on its feet and share our story with you. We hope to learn all of the lessons that only a physical production will be able to teach us. In this next phase, we implement a mountain of elements that we have not yet seen until this point. Fully-realized direction, choreography and the language it creates, sets, lights, costumes, sound design, original orchestrations, and a host of other details. Every mistake is an opportunity to further strengthen our show,

and every success reinforces the work we've all put into it these past four years.

And you, our beloved audience, are the way in which we learn. So we invite you to be a part of this process. If you see us after the show, please stop us and give us your thoughts. We are excited and hungry to hear how our show affected you and further ways in which we can enhance the experience.

We both believe in the healing properties of art, and we invite you to experience a story that is at once incredibly epic and achingly intimate. The themes of hope, loss, optimism, reconciliation, connection, and grace are as resonant as ever in America today. *Passing Through* celebrates the rich diversity of this country and reminds us that though we are many strands, we are all woven together into one beautiful fabric.

PASSING THROUGH