

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Emotional child abuse. Political corruption. A leader being taken advantage of by his cabinet. A young activist finding his voice. Fair elections. These are things we are used to reading about in the headlines of late; not generally the first things we think about when we buy a ticket to *Cinderella*. Yet, here we are, and yes, you are about to bear witness to all these circumstances onstage in just a few minutes. (Don't worry – you're still going to recognize the story—fairy godmother, pumpkin, and magic intact.)

In truth, Rodgers and Hammerstein—arguably the founding fathers of what we recognize as traditional musical theatre—have always pushed the boundaries of what was considered appropriate subject matter onstage. Perhaps not with their original 1957 television version of this musical, which was created largely as a vehicle for the incomparable Julie Andrews (who was taking Broadway by storm in *My Fair Lady* at the time), but with many of their other stage musicals. *Oklahoma!* dealt with consent, mental illness, and land appropriations. *South Pacific* took on the topic of racial prejudice. *Carousel* dealt with domestic abuse. *The King and I* is a story about racism and a strong-willed woman fighting back against the misogyny of a patriarchal society. The pair repeatedly made thoughtful social commentaries with their musicals that were firmly challenging, yet palatable for audiences of the time period.

Their version of *Cinderella* has had several iterations on the small screen—many, like my mother, fondly remember the Leslie Ann Warren version, which aired in 1965, or the Disney-produced 1997 adaptation starring Brandy and Whitney Houston. But the musical never made it to Broadway until 2013. And what the new book writers have done with the libretto for its Broadway debut is to honor the storytelling tradition that Rodgers and Hammerstein so firmly employed for their other musicals: to use well-crafted and popular stories to tackle issues of the time in a way that furthers the conversation for the next generation.

When I was asked to direct *Cinderella* here at UNC, I asked myself, “Why this show? Why now?” On the surface it seems like a dated narrative that this country is struggling to move beyond. But as I re-read the script, smartly tucked away in the dialogue and stage directions was a social commentary that firmly pushed the story into a modern age.

Not unlike recent Broadway revivals of *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel*, and *The King and I*, which without any major script changes have shone a new light on the issues of today, I hope that this production of *Cinderella* unlocks for you a new relevance for this old tale – one of agency, activism, compassion, and possibility.

“And because these daft and dewy-eyed dopes keep building up impossible hopes, impossible things are happening ev’ry day.”

Enjoy the performance!

Matt Hagmeier Curtis, Director