

The Marketability of Young Adult Theatre in The United States

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ABSTRACT

The term “young adult” generally conjures up an image of the ever-growing YA Fiction at a local bookstore. Novels like *Twilight*, *The Hunger Games*, *The Fault in our Stars*, and *The Perks of Being A Wallflower* are among the many that have dominated this genre, both in terms of publication and their corresponding film adaptations. Even television shows have taken a big leap towards young adult programming with series such as *The Secret Life of The American Teenager*, *Riverdale*, *Gossip Girl*, and *Thirteen Reasons Why*. This paper will analyze the marketability of young adult theatre as its own genre in the United States and pose the question as to why it is not already its own subgenre of theatre. Through qualitative research, this study will explore the realms of theatre for young audiences, young adult representation in other artistic mediums, and professional theatre’s representation of young adult topics and themes.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Theatre for Young Audience (TYA)

Theatre for young audiences is a major aspect of theatre across the United States. Most regional theatres and community theatres have a theatre for young audiences’ program and some theatres, or companies, are completely dedicated to audiences under the age of twelve.

According to Simi Horwitz of *Back Stage Magazine*, as of 2003, “children's theatre is big industry, with budgets for some theatres soaring as high as \$9 million per year. The number of children who are served by these theatres is in the millions (4.6 million entertained by the New York-based Theatreworks/USA alone) and the companies that are committed to theatre for children and/or teenagers are booming.” (Horwitz 2003). Theatre for Young Audiences, shortened to TYA, is defined by The New Victory Theatre Staff as, “any performance taking

place in the presence of young audiences — consisting of but not limited to — theatre, dance, music, puppetry, circus and physical theatre.” (Theatre Development Fund). As previously stated, some companies are dedicated solely to the production of theatre for young audiences, some of these companies include The New Victory theatre in New York City, Seattle Children’s Theatre in Washington, The Orlando Rep in Florida, and the aforementioned TheaterWorksUSA, which tours across the United States. Some examples of regional theatres showcasing theatre for young audiences include Alliance Theatre in Atlanta, Washington D.C.’s The Kennedy Center, and Long Island’s John W. Engeman Theatre, among many others.

Many children’s theatre productions are based on popular children’s literature. During the 2019/2020 season, many of the top theatre for young audience productions were adapted directly from children’s books including *Pete The Cat* by Kimberly and James Dean, *Dragons Love Tacos* by Adam Rubin and Daniel Salmieri, *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis, and *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle. TheaterworksUSA has been at the forefront of theatre for young audiences since their founding in 1961. They have commissioned and produced many children’s books adaptations in New York City and around the country on tour. Some of these productions include adaptations of *Click, Clack, Moo* by Doreen Cronin and Betsy Lewin, *Junie B. Jones* by Barbara Park, and *Henry and Mudge* by Cynthia Rylant.

According to Maggie Gilroy of *American Theatre Magazine*, “Over the past half century, Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) has grown immensely, both in the number of institutions presenting such work and in the variety of programming within the genre.” (Gilroy 2016). She goes on to explain how theatre for young audience productions are moving from mere adaptations of children’s books and fairy tales, to more contemporary subjects in order to be more inclusive of all children who attend. Inclusivity has become a large part of the theatre

world from Ali Stroker being the first actor in a wheelchair to win the coveted Tony Award, to a historically inaccurate but highly diverse *Hamilton* cast, to Jeanine Tesori and Lisa Kron being the first female composing team to ever win the Tony.

When it comes to the focus of the pieces in theatre for young audiences, theatres have begun to shine a spotlight on topics such as bullying, autism, or profanity. In the *Youth Theatre Journal*, Matt Omasta discusses, “participants’ perspectives regarding the role of sometimes controversial social issues in TYA.” (Omasta 2015). He also states that when producers are deciding what topics to allow into their theatre for young audience programs, they must ask the age-old question of, “is this appropriate for children?”

The question then becomes, who decides what is appropriate and what is not? Who gets to say what is freedom of expression and what is considered smut? One of the most famous instances of theatrical censorship is of Frank Wedekind’s 1891 play, “*Spring’s Awakening*”. Often banned, Frank Wedekind’s play portrayed the sexual, religious, and societal awakening of post-pubescent children in Germany. In 2006, a new version exploded onto the theatre scene with Duncan Sheik and Steven Sater’s heavy hitting rock musical “*Spring Awakening*”. Filled with teenage angst and overlapping inspiration from early 1900’s Germany and the modern 21st century, “*Spring Awakening*” became a global hit. Peter Marks, a staff writer for the *Washington Post* stated “the show is an exploration of the tragedies provoked by repressive societies and parents unable to communicate with their children.” (Marks, 2006) With this idea of repressive societies and parents not being capable of transparency and communication with their kids, where do we draw the line? “*Spring Awakening*” showcases what can truly go wrong in a repressed society. The play and musical both feature youth asking questions from the adults in their lives and not receiving answers, which causes tragic repercussions for the kids. Over the

years, and with the development and expansion of the internet, teens have been exposed to far more uncensored pieces of art and the world of publishing, television, film, and even theatre have evolved with that. With controversial works including HBO's "Euphoria", Angie Thomas' "The Hate U Give", and the aforementioned Broadway musical "Spring Awakening", the societal story lines are beginning to grow out of censorship and scandals of the past.

Due to the growth and popularity of theatre for young audiences across the United States, the quality of these productions also has risen. Patricia De Benedetto, the producing artistic director of the New York State Theatre Institute, notes that, when she would take her child to children's theatre productions in the 1960's the productions would be incredibly low budget and the children were spoken down to. Even today, theatre for young audiences is still much lower budget than the productions performed for adults, but there could be many reasons for that. First off, many children's theatre productions take place on the current set of the theatre's mainstage production, so they must utilize the space without affecting the set, props, and costumes of the mainstage production. Secondly, children's theatre productions typically contain a smaller cast of actors and hire non-equity actors in cases of equity mainstage productions. Finally, theatres can make a decent amount of capital from their children's theatre productions that assists in their budgetary needs for the far more expensive mainstage productions. Nowadays, the theatre for young audience world is, "no longer child's play" (Horwitz 2003). Horwitz, who wrote for *Back Stage* magazine also stated that, "the notion that theatre enhances learning has played its part in increasing the visibility and artistry of theatre for young audiences." Education plays a big role in Theatre for Young Audiences, whether it is an ethical or moral lesson, or whether the subject matter of the show relates to history, literature or other learning-based topics. When discussing a theatrical adaptation of Harper Lee's "To Kill a Mockingbird" at Young People's Theatre in

Canada, Lois Adamson states “The event was carefully planned to include multiple voices, including perspectives that raised difficult and uncomfortable questions about the text in relation to ongoing racism and inequality affecting young people in our audiences.” Adamson, the Member Schools and Education Manager for Young People’s Theatre, discusses the implications and difficulty of teaching such young audiences the use of the “N” word and inherent racism, but ultimately felt it was an important lesson for the young audiences. Horwitz also goes on to discuss the growing caliber of these productions in the artists who take part in the shows. Even actor’s equity, the labor union that represents American actors and stage managers, carries a specific contract for TYA productions. Many of today’s Broadway stars got their start in performing for young audiences including *Modern Family*’s Jesse Tyler Ferguson, *Rent*’s Daphne Rubin-Vega, and Golden Globe winner Henry Winkler.

Young Adult Representation in Other Artistic Mediums.

Young adult fiction can be defined as a genre of fictional literature written for young readers between the age of 12 and 18. However, adults are reading this literature as well. The young adult genre in relation to publishing, and film and television, is in large part due to its marketing. We may have never heard of the *Twilight* series by Stephanie Meyer or J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series if it wasn’t for the marketing involved. According to The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of creative writing, “First, the category (young adult) wouldn’t exist *without* marketing. Furthermore, YA books present an interesting demographic challenge: they’re bought by adults and young adults alike and are likely to be stocked by school or public libraries.” (Spencer 2017). Spencer goes on to discuss the dichotomy between a good young adult novel and a bad young adult novel and how the success lies solely on marketing, and even goes on to say that the young adult market of the publishing world might

just be “recession proof”. Therefore, it is determined that the young adult genre within publishing will never cease to be and will only evolve as time goes on. Also, fads play a big role in the marketability of young adult novels. For example, after the success of *Twilight*, the young adult market became oversaturated with vampire-based novels, because that was what was in demand.

According to *The Bookseller*, social media has played a large part in the success of young adult fiction. In Caroline Horn’s 2013 article, Sarah Benton, head of marketing for Hot Key Books, is quoted saying, “In terms of social media, there is definitely more of a route to directly target teenagers and get books talked about online than there was.” Horn also goes onto say, “on Tumblr, for example, readers are sharing artwork, comic strips, quotes, reviews, home-made trailers, and videos about books and authors.” (Horn, 2013). Just like any entertainment medium, word-of-mouth is always key when it comes to getting a novel known and read, but social media assists and even promotes people’s discussion regarding it. On social media sites like Instagram, publishers and authors can now interact with their fans and promote their books whilst receiving immediate responses through digital reactions, comments, and most importantly, shares.

According to The Hollywood Reporter, “the young adult book-to-film landscape has been dominated by wizards (*Harry Potter*), vampires (*Twilight*) and teens battling for survival in dystopian futures (*The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*). In fact, those three categories make up the top 15 YA book-to-film domestic box office earners.” (Siegel, 2014) This fact was disrupted by the film adaptation of John Green’s heart wrenching young adult novel, *The Fault in Our Stars*. The novel, which carried a theme of cancer, and fell more into the genre of realistic young adult fiction, shocked experts by grossing \$48 million dollars at the box office on opening weekend. Siegel, continued by alluding to the idea that we should, “look for a shift from the epic/expensive

toward the personal/modestly budgeted.” This has led to the successes of other realistic young adult novels that turned into film adaptations such as *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky, *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* by Becky Albertalli, and more. Trends are always changing throughout the young adult world, and it can definitely be a challenge to keep up.

Just like theatre for young audiences, the television world has also evolved greatly with its young adult programming. In the early aughts of the 21st century, television was heavily saturated with unrealistic young adult programming, but according to Film Daily, this has changed very much in recent years. “Today, young adult shows are stepping a little closer to the realities of what it’s like to be young with shows that are far more realistic than their predecessors.” (Fecto, 2018). In 2017, Netflix released the highly anticipated television adaptation of Jay Asher’s *Thirteen Reasons Why*, which tackled such realistic topics as teen suicide, mental illness, and sexual assault. Fecto adds that *Thirteen Reasons Why*, “has undoubtedly opened the door for more honest teen dramas.” Other shows that have taken this route include Netflix’s *Atypical* which deals with autism and how a family deals with the everyday life of the disorder, and HBO’s *Euphoria*, which handles the gritty lives of teens in the social media age.

In the age of social media, young adults make up a large portion of users. Apps like Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube and TikTok have a vast majority of users within the young adult market. Creating arts on YouTube has been around for a while. One example of this is Starkid Productions. Initially created at The University of Michigan, StarKid would create and perform original musical productions free on YouTube. Created by Glee’s Darren Criss and his classmates, StarKid went viral with their parody, *A Very Potter Musical*, inspired by the *Harry*

Potter series by J.K. Rowling. With the growth of social media use during the COVID-19 pandemic, people began to create for the young adult market on their social media pages. In August of 2020, at the height of the pandemic, TikTok user Emily Jacobsen released a song inspired by the Pixar film, *Ratatouille*. The short video soon went viral, thousands of people wanted to get involved, and *Ratatouille The TikTok Musical* was born. Through crowdsourcing efforts on TikTok, users ultimately created a full fledged musical based on the film. Users created songs, choreography, dialogue, costumes, sets, marketing artwork, and more. On January 1st, 2021, an all-star cast featuring Wayne Brady, Tituss Burgess, Kevin Chamberlain, Andrew Barth Feldman, Adam Lambert, André De Shields, and more, took to the internet for a one-night benefit concert of the TikTok created musical. The benefit concert brought in over \$2 million for The Actors Fund.

Professional Theatre’s Representation of Young Adult Topics and Themes

Christian Lewis, a theatre critic and LGBTQ+ activist for American Theatre and The Huffington Post stated, “When it comes to teenagers and Broadway, 2016’s *Dear Evan Hansen* changed the game.” (Lewis, 2019) Christian Lewis is a theatre critic and LGBTQ+ activist and he is a contributor to The Huffington Post. *Dear Evan Hansen* is an original musical, by Benj Pasek, Justin Paul, and Steven Levenson which opened on Broadway at the Music Box Theatre in December of 2016 and went on to win six Tony Awards including Best Musical. The musical deals with social anxiety, bullying, suicide, and social media among teenagers. This wasn’t the first time a teenage focused musical hit the great white way, and it also wouldn’t be the last. In 1978, Elizabeth Swados’ *Runaways* graced Broadway with its documentary style musical based on the lives of children and teenagers who ran away from home and were living on the street. The musical deals with abuse, homelessness, and family dichotomies. Since then, teen musicals

such as *Spring Awakening*, *13*, *Mean Girls*, *Be More Chill*, and *The Lightning Thief* took to the Broadway stage.

According to Christian Lewis of American Theatre Magazine, “Teen musicals are usually less directly didactic (than TYA), and typically focus on coming-of-age stories.” This relates very heavily to that of the young adult fiction genre, to which Lewis continues, “a closer and more accurate analog for the teen musical is young adult (YA) fiction.” *Harry Potter and The Cursed Child* is a play with music that is based on the *Harry Potter* series but is not directly adapted from the published book series and takes place after the book series has completed, unlike *The Lightning Thief: The Percy Jackson Musical*, which was one of the first YA novel to stage adaptation when it hit Broadway in 2019.

Christian Lewis goes on to remark the idea of Young Adult Theatre, “took a sharp turn when the subgenre became solidified, popularized, and canonized with the viral teen hit *Be More Chill*. Joe Iconis’s musical, which made it to Broadway thanks to a huge, enthusiastic teenage fanbase online” Based on the young adult novel of the same name by Ned Vizzini, *Be More Chill* had a hard time succeeding with critics and ultimately shut its doors earlier than the teenage fans might have hoped. Critics also took aim at *The Lightning Thief* by deeming it as childish, poorly written, and low-budget. Lewis exclaims, “I think it’s wrong for critics to write off Young Adult Theatre as undifferentiated juvenile trash,” and that “critics should stop ridiculing Young Adult Theatre writ large and should look more closely look at the different kinds of shows within this subgenre.”

Case Study: Joe Iconis and the Fandom of *Be More Chill*

Be More Chill by Ned Vizzini was published by Disney-Hyperion on April 19th, 2004. Simon Rodberg, of The NY Times stated, “Ned Vizzini’s novel *Be More Chill* is so accurate that

it should come with a warning: May Lead to Horrified Recognition in Any Reader Who Has Ever Been, or Known, a Sexually Frustrated Teenage Boy.” (Rodberg, 2004) The young adult novel was given a resurgence in 2015 with Joe Iconis and Joe Tracz’s electrifying stage adaptation. Joe Iconis grew up in Garden City, New York and went on to receive his bachelor’s and master’s at New York University in music composition and musical theater writing respectfully. Before earning a Tony Nomination for the score of *Be More Chill*, Iconis created Off-Broadway musicals *Bloodsong of Love: The Rock’n’Roll Spaghetti Western*, *Things to Ruin*, and the children’s theatre favorite, *The Plant That Ate Dirty Socks*. Joe is the recipient of the 2006 Jonathan Larson Award, the 2007 Ed Kleban Award and the 2010 John Wallowitch Award.

Be More Chill the musical premiered at New Jersey’s Two River Theatre in 2015. With music and lyrics by Joe Iconis and book by Joe Tracz, the show opened to mixed reviews. Charles Isherwood of *The New York Times* stated that *Be More Chill* “hews so closely to formulaic stories of adolescent insecurities and the brutal ecology of high school” (Isherwood, *The New York Times*). The musical plays to the teenage tropes of cliques and conformity similar to the likes of *Mean Girls*, *The Breakfast Club*, and *Heathers*. *Be More Chill* tells the story of Jeremy Heere, a self-proclaimed loser and his desire to be popular at any cost. In this *Glee* meets *Little Shop of Horrors* musical, Jeremy takes a science fiction approach, in the form of an odd Japanese pill called a Squip, in order to become “more chill”.

In an interview with Joe Iconis, he recalls his first ever theatre experience seeing *Little Shop of Horrors* at the tender age of six years old, “it just like immediately, immediately gave me a love of theatre”. When asked how he came to write *Be More Chill* he recalls, “it was essentially my idea, in that it started with me, but I had not read the book. My agent at the time gave me the book, and he had read it. He wasn’t saying you should adapt this into a musical, he

literally just read the book and said “this reminded me of you” and that “this might inspire you in some way”, so I read it and I was like, this should be a musical.” Ultimately, they shopped the project around to regional theatres across the U.S. and finally was commissioned by Two River Theatre in Red Bank, New Jersey to write the musical adaptation.

“I didn’t set out to specifically write a young adult musical... I just wrote something that I wanted to see, which is what I do when I write anything”, says Joe Iconis about writing the young adult theatre phenomenon. Going off of that he states, “for me, I got excited about writing something that felt like a comedy and I wanted to right like a really traditional musical comedy and I loved the characters in the book.” He goes on to say that young adults don’t like to be talked down to, so he believes that when you write a show with them in mind, you might accidentally belittle the age bracket. He also mentions that Ned Vizzini’s source material lends perfectly to that audience since it is considered a young adult novel. When discussing young adult topics and themes in theatre, Iconis states that YA is “like a thing in the literary world in a huge way, and it’s just not in musical theatre.”

The *Be More Chill* team decided, after the Two River Theatre run, and a generous donation from Robert Rechnittz, philanthropist, professor, and founder of Two River Theatre, to record a cast album of the show with Ghostlight Records. Ghostlight Records is a theatrical based recording studio located in New York. It is important to note that regional theatre productions almost never get cast albums, as that is typically reserved for Broadway and Off-Broadway productions, due to it being extremely costly. Joe Iconis states. “The album only happened because that man (Rechnittz) said I’m gonna pay for the whole thing.” The album was released on Halloween, October 31st, 2015. According to A.D. Amorosi of *Variety*, “What Jersey couldn’t do for Iconis’ 80s New Wave-ish musical score, the internet has made up for. Its electro

pop-inspired tunes (think “Stranger Things” with a hammily melodic Broadway through line) went viral, racking up 150 million+ streams in the United States alone, to say nothing of the fan art shared from Japan to New Jersey. Given the might of the meme, commercial producers took a chance on “Chill.”

Case Study: Rob Rokicki and The Biggest Little Young Adult Broadway Musical.

Percy Jackson & The Olympians: The Lightning Thief is a young adult novel, written by Rick Riordan that was released on June 28th, 2005. As the winner of the Adult Library Services Association Best Book for Young Adults award, it was clear that this was going to become a fan favorite among young adults and readers of all ages. In 2010, a film was released based on the book that took many liberties and disappointed Lightning Thief fans around the world. So, when Barbara Pasternack, the artistic director of TheatreworksUSA wanted to adapt it to the stage, Riordan wasn't too keen on the idea. TheatreworksUSA and Pasternack were determined to add a show to their large roster of theatre for young audiences that would skew a bit older. After pushing the idea for years, the publishers and Riordan agreed to grant them the rights. Joe Tracz, who wrote the book of “Be More Chill” was brought on as the playwright for this new adaptation. When TheatreworksUSA decided that this adaptation should be a musical, Rob Rokicki was brought on board.

Rob Rokicki was born and raised in Denver, Colorado and spent most of his youth falling in love with young adult fiction, as well as musical theatre. In a conversation with Rokicki, he recalled growing up and reading books like *The House with The Clock In Its Walls* and *The Phantom Tollbooth*. He also had his first idea for a musical when he was only ten or eleven years old. As he grew up, he moved to New York City in pursuit of being a professional actor, but never stopped writing his own musicals or creating ideas for them. Prior to his work on

The Lightning Thief musical, he had signed a contract for his first Broadway acting credit, the show disbanded before the production even started, and everyone involved was truly devastated. Around that disappointing time, is when he received the call to compose the music for the Lightning Thief musical, and in that moment, he felt, ““The angst of Percy, and this kid who doesn’t think he’s good enough... I immediately was like, ““Oh I get That so deeply””. Having never read the Rick Riordan book prior this, but when he finally read them, “I fell in love with the books immediately... and as an adult, a thirty something, it really spoke to me in a deep way”.

The process of getting from the writing process all the way to Broadway was a difficult one but everything just seemed to fall into their laps. Initially, Tracz and Rokicki wrote the show as a one-hour musical in 2014, followed by TheatreworksUSA’s first ever two act musical in 2017. In 2019 the musical embarked on a national tour that ultimately culminated in a limited Broadway run at The Longacre Theatre. Beloved in all of its pre-Broadway incarnations by critics and fans alike, the team were nervous, but excited to tackle Broadway, because as Rokicki states, “Scrappy imaginative shows for young people deserve to be on Broadway just as much as any other show does.”

When they opened on Broadway, the same critics who praised the Off-Broadway run, now panned the musical. Rokicki says, “We opened on Broadway, and we were hated, by not everyone, but by the establishment. Not by the fans, who kept coming back to see the show. Not by the families that came to see it. Not really by the (theatre) community necessarily, but really by this kind of elitism in how we view the art form, and that was not surprising at all.” He discusses the stigma attached to young adults within the Broadway community, and how the historically elite gatekeepers of Broadway feel that, “something has to be important or serious to

be worthy of the hallowed halls of Broadway.” Though panned by the critics, the show really opened up opportunities to many theatre goers, some for the very first time. When it comes to the audiences that attended the Broadway production, Rokicki states that, “there were kids of all backgrounds, of all ages. So, you’d have the grandparents bring their grandkids cause they were reading it currently, there were the twenty-somethings and thirty-somethings that had loved the book, and then wanted to see it again and reexperience it, or the young parents who now were trying to read those stories to their kids.”

In the possibilities of young adult theatre expanding throughout the United States Rokicki hopes that the musical will live on regionally which he believes will be a great factor in the growth of the young adult genre within theatre. Young adult, as a genre among many different artistic mediums, is a vast one and Rokicki states, “I think it taps into the fear and wonder and excitement of when that seminal couple of years when we are discovering who we are, and I think the older we get, we are still trying to reevaluate, reassess, and rediscover who we are, and that initial first coming of age is such a volatile time, and having these works of art shine a light on us, we are able to process our feelings and our emotions in a way that makes us feel less alone, or empowered.” The idea of true growth within the genre of young adult theatre in America excited Rokicki and he truly hopes to be able to be a part of it. ““We can all agree that theatre for young people is a good thing, and eventually those people will be taking over our industry, so they should have access,” states Rokicki before he beautifully ended the interview with “Broadway has some work to do.” A change is coming, and it is very clear that the youth of America, are ready for that challenge.

The Largest Young Adult Theatre Program in The United States.

Steppenwolf Theatre was created in the 1970's by acclaimed stage and screen actors Jeff Perry, Terry Kinney, and Gary Sinise in the basement of a church in the suburbs just north of Chicago, Illinois. Steppenwolf is a not-for-profit theatre company that now resides in the Lincoln Park neighborhood of Chicago. With a dozen Tony Awards and the coveted Pulitzer prize for Tracy Lett's "August Osage County", Steppenwolf has become one of the premiere theatre companies in the world. In 1983, Steppenwolf began their highly regarded education program, and evolved that program into Steppenwolf for Young Adults, which was created about twenty years ago, according to their director of education, Megan Shuchman. The Steppenwolf Theatre's mission statement reads, "Steppenwolf Theatre Company strives to create thrilling, courageous and provocative art in a thoughtful and inclusive environment. We succeed when we disrupt your routine with experiences that spark curiosity, empathy and joy. We invite you to join our ensemble as we navigate, together, our complex world." Within their Steppenwolf for Young Adults program, they typically produce two productions each season that focus on professional plays for teen audiences.

When talking with Steppenwolf marketing director, Gin To, and Steppenwolf Education Director, Megan Shuchman, it is clear just how important this program truly is. To Steppenwolf, young adult means a variety of age groups, depending on the production, but can mainly be grouped into the 7th – 12th grade teenagers, which typically consists of 12 years of age to 18 years of age. When looking at the program, touted as "World Class Theatre for Teens" it is interesting to point out the differences between mainstage marketing and SYA (Steppenwolf for Young Adults). For their SYA program, the marketing department and the department of education work collaboratively, "to come up with multi-channel messaging directed at teachers (including homeschoolers, afterschool group leaders," and more, according to Gin To. She goes on to say

that, “Education provides their perspective on school timeline, teachers’ needs, teens’ needs, complementary events they want to hold, and marketing advises on email cadence, social media promo(tional) cadence, and provides copywriting and copyediting support.” When it comes to the actual differences between mainstage productions and SYA productions, they consider the price points of the differing productions and the differences between the subscription season and a school calendar year. Gin To states honestly that, “there aren’t huge differences in the way we do the marketing,” and that “we don’t treat them as two different worlds per se.”

When deciding what two productions to put on for the teen audiences each year, the artistic department and the education department work together to “put together a season that speaks to immediate issues teens are facing and that are somehow in conversation together via a season theme,” according to Shuchman. The extent at which productions are rooted in education, social issues, and entertainment come from what Shuchman says is, “ways in which teens can see themselves in the story.” When asked why Steppenwolf is one of the only professional theatres to offer theatre for teen audiences, Shuchman replied, “Teens often feel like an elusive audience to people, they’re not sure how best to reach them and they can be overlooked as a result.” This declaration makes Steppenwolf unique in its teen focus and what makes the SYA so incredibly important to theatre in the United States. Deeply impacted by COVID-19, Steppenwolf, and most theatres, have had to turn its live programming into virtual programming. In regard to the future of the SYA, Shuchman states, “we know the power of theater to create community and promote empathy and that’s what we’ll do for now online and look forward to doing again in person as soon as we can.” Steppenwolf also plans to build a brand-new education center in order to reach more teens in the Chicago area and beyond.

For a large theatre company such as Steppenwolf to take on theatrical programming for young adult and teen audiences, it creates a larger question as to why more major theatre companies aren't taking advantage of this market. A concept that hasn't been done is a professional theatre company solely dedicated to the creation and presentation of theatre for young adult and teen audiences. This concept could prove widely that YA as an artistic genre isn't just for the publishing and film & television worlds.

CONCLUSION

The reason for this exploration of marketability of young adult theatre in the United States is quite personal. The author, Scott Johnston, has been working on a theatre company concept that takes all of this research into consideration. The concept is to create a professional theatre company, in New York City, that solely produces theatrical productions that delve into topics and themes that young adults experience and showcase them with teen and young adult audiences as the target market. The concept strives to build upon the YA publishing market as well as the YA film & television market and translate and adapt those ideas to the stage. Teens and young adults from all walks of life would be represented and the company would strive to make the young adult audiences see a version of themselves emulated on the stage.

The young adult market is a massive one. With over twenty million people making up the demographic, it is important that they become a key target in future marketing efforts and production decisions within the theatre community. Young adult novels consistently appear on New York Time's best seller lists, young adult themed movies and television shows are frequently the most popular and sought after, so now it's theatre's turn to utilize this market. With success stories such as *Be More Chill*, *Dear Evan Hansen*, *Spring Awakening*, and *The*

Lightning Thief, it is clear that the young adult market is present and ready for the next big idea in the YA arts sector. Without young adults, *Be More Chill* would not have been the success it became. It's important for the professional theatre community to take advantage of all markets, and not to patronize the youth of America, but to embrace them. It is important for their voices to be heard and enjoyed by all. Young adult theatre is incredibly marketable in the United States and should become a staple in every major city.

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