FALSETTOS

MUSIC AND LYRICS BY
WILLIAM FINN

BOOK BY WILLIAM FINN
AND JAMES LAPINE

DIRECTED BY NICK BOWLING

court THEATRE

Timeline
Theatre Company

BACKSTORY YOUR GUIDE TO TIMELINE PRODUCTIONS

A MESSAGE

FROM ARTISTIC DIRECTOR PJ POWERS

Dear Friends,

Welcome to *Falsettos* and a year of unprecedented transformation for TimeLine, as we journey toward a new era for our organization. Since 1997, our mission has been about making connections—between past and present, between art and audience, and between the issues that define our time and the future we'll build together. As we launch our 28th season, this renowned musical is a demonstration of our vision for TimeLine's next act, producing on a larger canvas, in a facility that uplifts an even more robust embodiment of our mission and artistry.

After recently closing a 25-year chapter in a charming, but constraining, rented venue on Wellington Avenue, we're energized by the possibilities that lie ahead, as construction has begun in Uptown for our new home.

Aiming to open in 2026, TimeLine's new center for theatre, education, and community engagement at 5035 N. Broadway will allow us to grow and innovate—in a space that will take our work to the next level. We'll extend what an evening at the theatre can be, with expanded exhibit galleries, a café and bar that encourages you to arrive early and stay late, and new opportunities for learning and connecting beyond the stage.

While we eagerly await welcoming you to Uptown, we're thrilled to partner with three venerable institutions whose artistic work we've long admired and whose complementary missions have distinguished them as leaders in Chicago's theatre community.

We begin this series of co-productions with Court Theatre, followed by alliances with The Theatre School at DePaul University (alma mater to me and my fellow TimeLine co-founders), and finally, Writers Theatre.

Starting with Court, we're proud to expand our work in Hyde Park, where our summer program for teens—TimeLine South—has been in residence for many years. And this marks a full circle moment for TimeLine Associate Artistic Director Nick Bowling, whose career began at Court, around the same time he was also crafting a vision to launch TimeLine. Now, as director of *Falsettos*, Nick's lineage with both organizations makes him an ideal choice to helm this production—as does his reputation as one of the city's finest directors of musicals and plays.

The confines of our former space on Wellington limited our ability to produce as many musicals as we'd hoped, so Nick only got to share his musical talents at TimeLine through *Fiorello!* (in 2006 and a remount in 2008) and *Juno* (in 2014), while across the city he's been receiving deserved accolades and awards for musicals at many other theatres.

Falsettos is a show that TimeLine and Nick have longed to do for many years. As one of the earliest trailblazing musicals of the gay canon, and also a classic in the American canon, it presents a terrific opportunity to partner with Court to connect our respective missions and give this beautiful piece its due—exploring history, drawing parallels to contemporary issues, and celebrating a classic American musical.

This collaboration also befits how *Falsettos* came to be, since the show has married together distinct pieces to form a whole. Starting in the late 1970s, the esteemed creators, William Finn and James Lapine, created a collection of one-act musicals—known as "The Marvin Trilogy"—starting with *In Trousers* in 1979, as a prequel to *March of the Falsettos* in 1981, and followed by *Falsettoland* in 1990. Those latter two pieces were co-joined to make *Falsettos*, which premiered on Broadway in

1992, garnering Tony Awards for Best Score and Best Book of a Musical.

Beginning in a period between the Stonewall riots and the AIDS epidemic, *Falsettos* opens in a period of joy and sexual revolution. After being closeted for 40 years, Marvin, the character at the center of the musical, follows his heart, leaving his wife and child to be with his "friend" Whizzer. What's revealed through a gorgeously, fully sung-through show, is a depiction of gay life and love—and a depiction of family—that was refreshingly honest and revolutionary for mainstream American theatre.

In a 1981 review, *The New York Times* articulated what made this groundbreaking musical so notable, writing: "There's nothing cute, campy or precious about *[March of the] Falsettos*. Nor is there any propaganda. The show's hetero-and homosexual couples both suffer from the same anxieties, loneliness and neuroses."

It is its depth of humanity and universality that makes *Falsettos* so resounding and unforgettable, whether viewed when it was first conceived, or revisited with the benefit of perspective. Its enduring impact, soaring beauty, and exceptional suite of songs combine to make it a timely—and timeless—treasure.

We're so grateful for the collegiality of our partners at Court Theatre. And we're delighted to have you with us for *Falsettos*, as we journey toward all that lies ahead for TimeLine.

Best,

THERE'S MORE ONLINE!

Don't miss any of the materials created to enhance your time with *Falsettos!*

VIEW THE DIGITAL PROGRAM

PLUS! Visit ***timelinetheatre.com/falsettos-landing*** to explore the show's **Online Lobby Experience, Learning Guide, Discussion Events**, and much more.

THANK YOU for being a part of this very special Chicago production!

THE TIMELINE: EARLY HISTORY OF THE AIDS EPIDEMIC

May 15, 1969 A teenager in St. Louis dies after a mysterious illness, leaving his doctors confused. Almost two decades later, scientists testing his remains will find evidence of HIV.

1970–1979 Very few cases of what will later be known as AIDS are documented during this period. However, information gleaned much later will suggest that hundreds of thousands may have unknowingly become infected with HIV throughout the 1970s.

February 21, 1979 *In Trousers*, the first musical William Finn writes about the character Marvin, premieres at Playwrights Horizons in New York City. It is set in the late 1970s.

December 24, 1980 A teacher in Brooklyn dies in his 30s after being diagnosed with a rare cancer called Kaposi's Sarcoma (KS) and an unusual lung infection—both abnormal for someone of his age.

May 18, 1981 A gay newspaper called the *New York Native* prints the first known article about the then-unnamed epidemic, entitled "Disease Rumors Largely Unfounded." The article cites a New York City public health official's claim that the infection rumored to be circulating is not "exotic" as is rumored, but rather "ubiquitous" and something to which most people have naturally acquired immunity.

May 20, 1981 *March of the Falsettos*, which will later become Act One of *Falsettos*, premieres at Playwrights Horizons in New York City. It is written without AIDS in mind, and is set in 1979.

June 5, 1981 The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* includes an article about a rare type of pneumonia in five young, previously healthy gay men in Los Angeles,

THE MUSICAL

THE STORY OF "THE MARVIN TRILOGY"

Falsettos is an amalgamation of three one-act musicals (also known as "The Marvin Trilogy") spanning 13 years of cataclysmic social change. *In Trousers*, *March of the Falsettos*, and *Falsettoland* follow Marvin from emotional adolescence to compulsory maturity—Marvin, the productions, and social conceptions of queerness simultaneously evolved.

In 1978, William Finn (a gay, Jewish, mostly-self-taught composer from Natick, Mass.) conceived *In Trousers* (*Falsettos'* prologue) with a group of actors in his New York studio apartment—improvising songs about Marvin on the piano. The piece follows Marvin's newfound regression into adolescence as he comes to terms with his sexuality; when faced with the realities of coming out, he becomes his 14-year-old self. Marvin shoves his way through a dream-like world—demanding that the world mold to him as he remembers playing Columbus in his high school musical, represses his sexuality, and leaves his wife Trina.

Finn describes *In Trousers* as a "fish out of water" compared to the trilogy's subsequent shows, because he created it in a collaborative and experimental fervor instead of with an established performance space and storyline. He "thought it was simply a very, very personal show, that it had no commercial appeal." However, producer André Bishop (later, Finn's frequent collaborator) saw the show in Finn's apartment, and plucked it for Playwrights Horizons' new musical theatre lab. It opened in 1979 as Playwrights Horizons' first musical, and was remounted in 1985 with significant rewrites.

Composer William Finn (left) and director/writer James Lapine.

After *In Trousers'* success, Finn returned to Marvin in *March of the Falsettos*. Upon Bishop's urging, James Lapine (also Jewish, from Ohio, a graphic designer who had designed the cover for the *In Trousers* record, and a Yale School of Drama professor) joined as director and co-bookwriter. *March of the Falsettos* was Lapine's first musical. While writing, Lapine helped organize Finn's ideas and create narrative. Lapine says that "[Finn] created the world, and I brought it order." Finn came with four songs—Lapine developed the plot and introduced Jason as a character. *March of the Falsettos* opened at Playwrights Horizons in 1981.

Written between the Stonewall riots and at the dawn of the AIDS epidemic, *March of the Falsettos* explores untraditional family in a world of burgeoning public homosexuality without tragedy. It follows Marvin and his family post-coming out, two years after *In Trousers*. Marvin stretches his legs—stinging with the growing pains of coming out—into discombobulated domesticity with Whizzer, Trina, and Jason. Marvin (essentially a gay newborn) explodes into the world of possibility as an out gay man, and everyone reconciles with breaking from traditional Jewish heterosexual nuclear family.

Street view of Playwrights Horizons in New York City, site of the premiere of In Trousers, *circa 1979. (PETERSHAGEN/Flickr)*

Ten years after creating *March of the Falsettos*, following the AIDS epidemic's devastation, Finn and Lapine returned to Marvin's world. Set two years after *March of the Falsettos*, *Falsettoland* shows that the AIDS epidemic forces the characters to grow up. *Falsettoland* opened at Playwrights Horizons in June 1990 and transferred to the Lucille Lortel Theatre on Broadway that September. *Falsettoland* was not autobiographical, but drew from Finn and Lapine's experiences.

Finn recounts:

> *"During the day we were going to the hospitals, and people were dying. It was a horrible, horrible, horrible time [...] I was so glad I could respond to it in some way that I hoped would make a tiny difference.*
>
> *"Because we knew the ending, I constantly felt during the writing of the whole thing that the audience was going to be way ahead of us, and I was shocked that they weren't [...] There were people hysterically crying in the theatre, and I found out that many of them had AIDS. You didn't know unless people looked sick. It was a terrible, terrible time."*

Falsettoland was not ahead of its time, but responding to it. Finn, Lapine, the cast, and audiences experienced immense loss in the interim; *Falsettoland* provided an outlet.

Poster art for the Broadway revival of Falsettos *in 2016.*

After seeing a Hartford Stage production that merged *March of the Falsettos* and *Falsettoland*, Finn and Lapine developed an official combination. *Falsettos* opened on Broadway in 1992 with most of its original cast. They adjusted lines and moved a few songs around, but storylines stayed the same. A producer revived *Falsettos* in 2016 (with a new cast and more small lyrical changes) after a conversation with Lapine at an awards show. *Falsettoland* centered AIDS, while *March of the Falsettos* was created before the epidemic—Lapine discusses that combining turns AIDS into a relatively small part of the show. *Falsettos* is about being alive, family, and growing up rather than solely the AIDS epidemic's impact.

marking the first clinical report on the epidemic. Two of the five men died between the writing of the report and its publication. Two others will die soon after.

On the same day, the CDC receives a report from a dermatologist in New York about several cases of KS in gay men. Both KS and the lung infection are typically seen in individuals with weakened immune systems. Multiple newspapers report on the article in the following days, and similar reports are made to the CDC soon after.

July 3, 1981 *The New York Times* publishes its first article on the mysterious illness, headlined "Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals," which gives the affliction its first commonly used name—"gay cancer."

August 11, 1981 Pioneering writer and activist Larry Kramer organizes a meeting in his home to mobilize the New York City gay community and raise funds. Dr. Alvin Friedman-Klein, the dermatologist who had reported the KS cases to the CDC, tells the group, "we're seeing only the tip of the iceberg."

September 15, 1981 The National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the CDC co-sponsor a conference to address the new and growing epidemic.

December 10, 1981 *The New England Journal of Medicine* publishes a paper consisting of three studies showing patients had weakened immune systems that made them vulnerable to infections that would not normally be harmful. The studies suggest—but do not yet prove—that viral infection might be the root cause.

January 4, 1982 The Gay Men's Health Crisis is founded in New York City, becoming the country's first community-based organization for helping those with AIDS. Its services include information dissemination and a counseling hotline. The GMHC still exists today.

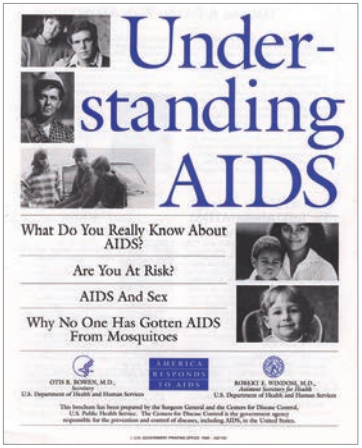
Dramaturg Deborah Blumenthal at first rehearsal of Falsettos. *(Joe Mazza/brave lux, inc.)*

WRITTEN BY
DEBORAH BLUMENTHAL, *DRAMATURG*

As a graduate student at the University of Chicago nearly 15 years ago, I studied the American AIDS plays and how we think about their lifetimes as scholars, audiences, and artists. I wrote about how time and the practice of revival had made these texts into history plays that they were not originally written to be. They were written as urgent portrayals of their moment, but time had infused them with a dramatic irony they hadn't been built with. In essence, "now" receded into "then," and newer audiences brought with them newer information—they knew more than the characters did about what was going to happen.

The lifetimes of these texts have created a knowledge gap between their characters and their audiences.

Page from a booklet printed by the U.S. government and mailed to every American household in 1988 to educate the public about AIDS. (Wikimedia Commons)



Falsettos depicts some of the earliest days of the AIDS epidemic seen in an American theatrical text; for a show that takes place in 1981, that gap is the widest of all. In June of that year, the CDC issued a report that was the first official documentation of what would later be known as AIDS. Whizzer would've been one of its earliest victims.

In 1981, concrete information was scarce. The term "AIDS" would not be used for the first time until 1982. The virus that causes it was discovered in 1983. With texts that take place later in the epidemic, modern audiences know more about what will unfold as it drags on. In this case, they possess the details of what it would be—or that it would be at all. Act One of *Falsettos* began as a one-act called *March of the Falsettos*, written, set, and first performed before AIDS was on anyone's radar.

The lifetimes of these texts have created a knowledge gap between their characters and their audiences.

When the full text of *Falsettos* premiered almost 10 years later, the presence of AIDS informed how audiences watched Act One in a way it could not have when *March of the Falsettos* stood on its own—the impending epidemic became a dark undercurrent that the characters know nothing about. For audiences, *Falsettos* is a show about AIDS, an epidemic that would extend far beyond the bounds of both the story and its original production; for the characters, the term "AIDS" does not exist as they navigate an illness first known as gay cancer, gay plague, or GRID (Gay-Related Immune Deficiency).

In many ways, *Falsettos* is also a show about facing uncertainty and growing up. For Jason, it's a literal coming of age coupled with the upheaval of adolescence. For his father, it's a different journey toward maturity, taking responsibility for his actions, and navigating the precarity of Whizzer's health.

The context of the AIDS epidemic also holds weight around mortality and maturity. In the beginning of the epidemic, the majority of patients were young,

previously healthy gay men. Individuals in their 20s, 30s, and 40s were suddenly facing death and dying in ways that were not normal for their age group. Patients were presenting with opportunistic infections previously seen primarily in weak and elderly people. Firsthand accounts talk about the strangeness of preparing for your own death at a young age, and the shock and devastation of visiting hospitalized friends so sick that they physically resembled much older men—their bodies prematurely aging and in many cases, ultimately failing.

One of the earliest large vigils staged to draw attention to the growing AIDS crisis, New York City, circa 1983. (Lee Snider)

This first generation impacted by AIDS was one for whom time accelerated. Prompted to grow up quickly as the difficulties of late-life came early, they were saddled with experiences beyond their years, like caring for terminally ill friends and lovers, watching them die, and attending funerals on a weekly basis.

While the argument above deals with the knowledge gap between characters and audiences in the performance of aging texts, there is another significant knowledge gap that bears discussion. *Falsettos* is an innately Jewish show—and it's Jewish at its heart in a key way that goes beyond the many direct references in the text.

One of Judaism's core values is *bikur cholim*, Hebrew for "visiting the sick"—a *mitzvah*, or obligatory Jewish commandment, as well as an act of *gemilut hasadim* (loving kindness), a foundational social value in Jewish teaching. The obligation of *bikur cholim* is not simply to visit those who are ailing, but to care for them, look after them, and help alleviate their suffering. In

May 11, 1982 *The New York Times* uses the term "GRID," an acronym for "Gay-Related Immune Deficiency," for the first time.

June 18, 1982 A paper published in the *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* suggests for the first time that sexual activity may be a route of transmission of the agent causing the unusual opportunistic infections in gay men.

August 8, 1982 Using data from the CDC, *The New York Times* reports that the death rate for AIDS patients is 40%. Of the 505 recorded cases to date—243 in New York City—202 have died. Two new cases are being reported every day.

September 24, 1982 The CDC uses the term "AIDS" (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) for the first time, replacing "GRID," and releases its first formal definition of the illness. Following reports of the illness in populations outside of the gay community, the definition identifies additional at-risk groups, including intravenous drug users and individuals with hemophilia. (There have been instances of earlier use of "AIDS" in journalistic outlets.)

November 5, 1982 The CDC outlines its first guidelines for precautions to be taken in clinical and laboratory settings when working with those exhibiting signs of AIDS.

January 1, 1983 The first dedicated outpatient clinic for AIDS patients in the world opens in San Francisco. This clinic will go on to develop the gold standard model for compassionate, respectful care for AIDS patients.

March 4, 1983 A CDC report cautions that sexual activity and exposure to blood may be routes of transmission and recommends methods for prevention.

May 18, 1983 Congress passes its first bill that includes funding for AIDS research and treatment.

modern times, it's seen as having a more general spiritual effect: decreasing loneliness, providing a listening ear, or a hopeful, cheerful presence.

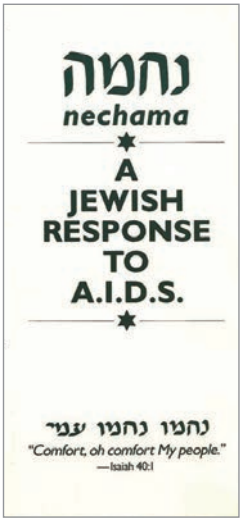
Jewish tradition also asserts a need to acknowledge and name suffering and sickness, and the importance of bearing witness to loss. It holds that potentially unsettling passages in the Torah—including several chapters entirely focused on graphically detailing illness—must not be skipped, but rather chanted aloud, discussed, and grappled with. Jewish mourning rituals center on acknowledging loss before healing can begin. You would think, then, that even despite not knowing how or why these people were sick (a knowledge gap of a different sort, but a knowledge gap all the same) the Jewish community would not turn away.

However, despite liturgy around treating the ostracized and suffering with dignity, historians have found no evidence of an organized American Jewish response in the earliest—and perhaps most difficult—years of the AIDS epidemic. Most Jewish leaders were silent—some rabbis refused to lead burial rituals for AIDS victims and obstructed AIDS education and activism. Synagogues in individual communities generally did not respond to the crisis unless they were specifically gay synagogues, which had begun forming in the 1970s and acted as local beacons of support.

The first initiative on a widespread organizational level did not come until 1985—over four years into the epidemic. A gay and lesbian synagogue in San Francisco (the same synagogue where, on Yom Kippur that September, a gay rabbi had delivered

Jewish tradition asserts a need to acknowledge and name suffering and sickness, and the importance of bearing witness to loss.

one of the first two documented Jewish sermons to mention AIDS) successfully lobbied for the Reform Jewish movement to adopt a resolution on AIDS. It called for funding, resources, and prohibition of discrimination against people with AIDS and their families, and resulted in the creation of the Union of American Hebrew Congregation's Committee on AIDS. Additional initiatives across Jewish movements followed, more broadly aligning action with the values of *bikur cholim* and *gemilut hasadim*.



Brochure cover for Nechama, founded in 1986 to educate the Jewish community about the AIDS epidemic by training volunteers to speak to synagogues and other Jewish groups about AIDS from a Jewish perspective. (Dr. Mark Katz/Beth Chayim Chadashim)

Contrasting this with what we see in *Falsettos* highlights the utter extraordinariness of what Jason does in the second act when he chooses to have his bar mitzvah in Whizzer's hospital room. When a child becomes a *b'nai mitzvah*, it signals the start of their obligation as a Jewish adult to fulfill the commandments. Jason's acceptance of Whizzer, illness and all, shows a deep connection to Jewish values—as does his decision to forego a lavish party in his honor to include a loved one who is ailing. Further, holding the event in the hospital—in a place where illness and mortality are inescapable —directly acknowledges suffering. By embracing these values as part of the very ritual of entering into Jewish adulthood, he meets the transition by facing discomfort head-on and showing care for someone whose condition would lead society to ostracize others like him—a show of enormous maturity. He grows up.

Falsettos is an important part of the canon of theatrical texts addressing the AIDS crisis, but it is unique among its peers in a variety of ways.

Most notably, when the writers began developing what would become *Falsettos*, they had no intention of creating a show about AIDS. When *March of the Falsettos* premiered in 1981, rumblings of an unusual illness circulating in the gay community were barely a whisper. In effect, the finished show is an AIDS text combined with a text that entirely predates awareness of the epidemic. This construction sets it apart.

Falsettos ends in 1981, depicting some of the earliest days of the epidemic—in company with Larry Kramer's *The Normal Heart*, which takes place between 1981 and 1984. Both depict a period of helplessness and confusion before the illness had a name and prior to the discovery of HIV (the virus that causes AIDS), certainty about routes of transmission, and other significant information.

Many of the other major theatrical texts about the epidemic take place later. For example, *Falsettos* debuted on Broadway about a year before Part One of Tony Kushner's epic *Angels in America*—but *Angels* takes place between 1985 and 1990, a period in which properties of the virus were known and treatment was starting to be available. Similarly, William Hoffman's *As Is* is set in the mid-'80s, Paul Rudnick's *Jeffrey* in 1993, and Terrence McNally's *Love! Valour! Compassion!* in the mid-'90s.

Falsettos is also one of only a few known musicals written about the AIDS crisis—certainly one of a very small group to have stood the test of time. Jonathan Larson's best-known works are about the impact of AIDS on his community, but take place later. Larson began developing *RENT* in 1989 and it is set in the late '80s or early '90s; *tick, tick... BOOM!* is set in 1990. Larson references activist and advocacy organizations that did not exist when *Falsettos* takes place. *Falsettos* premiered while RENT was still early in its development and depicts the very beginning of what, by the time Larson began writing, had irrevocably changed the world.

May 20, 1983 Scientists at the Institut Pasteur in France publish their discovery of a new human retrovirus they believe causes AIDS.

September 2, 1983 Concerns about transmission in healthcare settings is growing. In response, the CDC publishes its first list of precautions around occupational exposure for healthcare workers.

September 9, 1983 The CDC formally identifies all major routes of HIV transmission—sexual activity, IV drug use, blood transfusion or other contact with blood—and rules out transmission via casual social contact as well as via food, water, or surfaces.

March 2, 1985 The first commercial blood test to detect HIV becomes available.

September 17, 1985 President Ronald Regan mentions AIDS in public for the first time, after his administration is criticized for giving the epidemic inadequate attention and research funding.

September 24, 1985 Two rabbis at separate synagogues in San Francisco deliver Yom Kippur sermons centered on AIDS—one at a relatively new, primarily LGBTQ synagogue, and the other at one of the area's oldest and largest congregations. These sermons are the first documented formal responses to the epidemic by Jewish leaders.

One sermon calls for compassion for AIDS patients facing stigma and ostracization; the other, given to a congregation that would go on to lose 80 of its own member to AIDS, focuses on specific calls to action like safe sex practices and evoking tenets of the gay liberation movement, like solidarity and resistance.

October 25, 1985 The state of New York gives local officials power to close gay bathhouses and other places they deem to be locales of high-risk sexual activity, in order to reduce transmission of AIDS.

A march for women's liberation in Washington, D.C., 1970. (U.S. News & World Report/Wikimedia Commons)

Falsettos takes place during a period of immense social and political transformation for women. Betty Friedan's 1963 book, *The Feminine Mystique*, undergirds 1970s feminism. Friedan posits that women are dissatisfied with obligatory domesticity and desire productive lives outside of their homes.

Anti-domestic pushes led to drastic political shifts—from 1965 to 1974, women gained access to marital birth control (Griswold v. Connecticut, 1965); protected abortion rights (Roe v. Wade, 1974); the ability to take out loans and credit without a husband/male cosigner (Equal Credit Opportunity Act, 1974); and greater access to safe education (Title IX, 1972, and the Women's Educational Equity Act, 1974). The world Trina married into—at her father's urging—is not the same world she emerges into after her divorce. However, political shifts did not indicate widespread ideological shifts.

In Act 1, Trina cooks for men. She cooks, talks about cooking, or is expected to cook in six songs. Cooking signifies domesticity—in "This Had Better Come to a Stop," she expresses:

> *I was supposed to make the dinner,*
> *Make it pretty on his plate.*
> *Every wife should pull her weight.*
> *Have it ready, make it tasty*
> *And love him*

Trina fulfills her domestic role. Marvin, desiring a nuclear family dynamic with Trina (despite their divorce), shoehorns her into domesticity. He mirrors an outdated version of larger society's expectations for women—a key feature of second-wave feminism was the conception of the personal as political, and maintaining Trina's private domestic status also maintains his public position as heterosexual. Upholding domesticity kept men in power. Trina is aware of Marvin's (and society's) suppression, though intertwining with Marvin prevents her from escaping. When Marvin shifts domestic responsibility onto Whizzer (expecting him to cook dinner), Trina begins pushing against expectations.

Trina criticizes the patriarchy in "Trina's Song," yearning for the immaturity that men are permitted, and their casual ability to "rule the world." According to the National Women's History Museum, Betty Friedan "criticized the separate 'sphere' of motherhood and homemaking that women were relegated to. In contrast, men were allowed to flourish in the 'male sphere' of work, politics, and power." Trina, as a woman with a husband and children, defines the "male sphere" as a childish space. She reflects popular ideology—women could hold power and thrive outside the home; meanwhile, she is relegated primarily to the kitchen. All she says about her job is that she "stayed home from work, took good care of my men."

In Act II, Cordelia subverts second-wave feminism's implicit heterosexual standards—she cooks willingly, excitedly, and badly. If cooking means domesticity, Cordelia's lesbian domesticity is consensual, separate from forced caretaking in the private

sphere (she is a career caterer), and she cooks out of love and for work rather than obligation. Lesbian feminists in the 1970s criticized Friedan and second-wave feminism, because it assumed that all women lived in heterosexual dynamics; Friedan alienated lesbians from her feminist actions because she feared the feminist movement would be discredited through its lesbian associations. Cordelia's desire for public domesticity with women resists Friedan's limitations.

Charlotte also mainly functions within her medical career—a highly public position. Charlotte criticizes people calling her "dykish" and "lady." As a Black lesbian doctor in New York, she pushes against a cacophony of harsh and limiting structures. She works at home, and her home visits her at work. Black lesbian feminists such as Audre Lorde (poet and activist) and the Combahee River Collective (a vital Black lesbian feminist and socialist organization in Boston, which ran from 1974-1980) criticized heterosexual feminism and lesbian feminism's limiting structures—each framework disregarded intersectionality and expression of multiple identities. Black lesbian feminism promoted unity among Black and queer women; Charlotte lives at the intersection of the domestic and political through her identity.

Trina yearns for the immaturity that men are permitted, and their casual ability to "rule the world."

At the end of Trina's song, she strives for a life where domesticity, agency, and sexuality can coexist. She never reaches it—Mendel is too busy for sex, caring for Marvin and Jason during the AIDS epidemic ultimately overtakes her feminist goals, and the highly supported Equal Rights Amendment (which promised equal rights in property ownership and employment) died after it was not ratified by its March 22, 1979 deadline. As Trina embraces her new life post-divorce, she reconciles her desire for a happy and sexual marriage with the feminist reality of the patriarchy.

November 1985 At the Reform Jewish movement's biennial conference, the primarily LGBTQ congregation mentioned above introduces a resolution on AIDS that calls for funding and resources dedicated to fighting the epidemic and legislation to prevent discrimination against people with AIDS and their families. The resolution passes, but does not name the gay community directly.

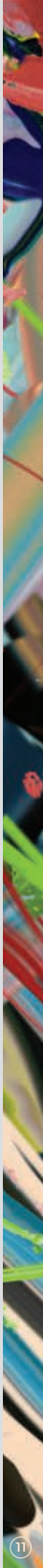
1986 Nechama: A Jewish Response to AIDS is founded in Los Angeles. The organization focuses on educating the Jewish community about the epidemic and provides services to patients along with their families and caregivers. Nechama is Hebrew for "comfort" or "compassion."

May 1, 1986 Following an announcement by the International Committee on the Taxonomy of Viruses, the virus discovered in France in 1983 becomes officially known as HIV, the Human Immunodeficiency Virus.

1987 The Conservative Jewish movement's Rabbinical Assembly issues a resolution calling for compassion for people with AIDS and their families. The following year, the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism will provide its affiliated congregations with informational packets on AIDS.

March 12, 1987 ACT UP, the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power—which will become one of the most influential activist organizations in history—is founded by Larry Kramer in New York City. Its intention is to pressure the U.S. government and insurance and pharmaceutical companies to take more action to protect those at risk for HIV/AIDS, help those who are sick, and improve efforts to find treatments.

March 19, 1987 Following an accelerated testing and approval process, the FDA approves the first medication for AIDS, an antiretroviral called azidothymidine—better known as AZT. AZT is the most expensive drug in history,



"Bar mitzvah" is Hebrew for "son of the commandment." It technically refers to an individual, however it is colloquially used to refer to an event. A Jewish boy becomes a bar mitzvah at the age of 13, at which time he is considered an adult in the Jewish community. (Similarly, a Jewish girl becomes a bat mitzvah, "daughter of the commandment," at the age of 12.)

Becoming a b'nai mitzvah (the gender neutral term) marks the beginning of a moral and ethical obligation to perform the Jewish commandments and to be responsible for one's own self and own actions. While the transition into Jewish adulthood happens automatically when a child comes of age, some children and their families choose to have formal ceremonies and celebrations.

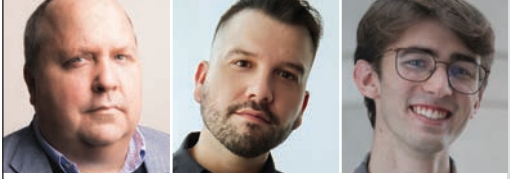
B'nai mitzvah ceremonies typically take place on Shabbat, at a weekly daytime service. The cornerstone of the ceremony occurs when the b'nai mitzvah is called to chant from the Torah—a sacred act reserved only for Jewish adults—for the first time. The b'nai mitzvah is assigned a Torah portion that corresponds with when in the Jewish calendar their ceremony takes place.

Other responsibilities given to the b'nai mitzvah during the service vary based on congregations' customs. Some b'nai mitzvot also chant an additional biblical text called a haftarah portion, give a prepared speech called a d'var Torah about their interpretation of their Torah portion, or help lead the congregation in prayer and song.

Preparation for a bar or bat mitzvah ceremony usually begins a year or more in advance and requires intensive study under the guidance of a rabbi, cantor, or teacher. Torah scrolls are written without either Hebrew vowels or Torah trope—markings that denote the melody to which the text is sung—so chanting Torah, especially for those new to it, requires a deep familiarity with the Hebrew text and a great deal of practice. Other components of the service require additional extensive work; for example, haftarah trope uses the same symbols as Torah trope, but they correspond to completely different melodies, and students are expected to write their own d'var Torah speeches.

A reception generally follows the service. Receptions can range from simple luncheons to lavish parties similar in scale to wedding receptions. Elaborate parties celebrating bar and bat mitzvahs began to appear in the United States in the 1950s, as American Jewish families became more established and affluent. It has remained commonplace in many American Jewish communities to throw over-the-top parties for which the b'nai mitzvah chooses a theme and that feature a band or a D.J., a lengthy, sentimental candle-lighting ceremony, and personalized party favors.

Boy reading the Torah at a bar mitzvah. (Shutterstock)



Director Nick Bowling (from left), Movement Director William Carlos Angulo, and Music Director Otto Vogel.

This is a brief excerpt from a wide-ranging conversation with the *Falsettos* directing team, held just after rehearsals began. For the full version and many more resources, be sure to check out the show's Digital Program, linked at *timelinetheatre.com/falsettos-landing*

(OTTO) *Falsettos* is classic theatre—it was monumental, and still is. It's a very moving portrait set to music that is so weird and zany. It's going to be very special.

(NICK) And it's also very catchy! ... Usually, you have scene, song, scene, song, and those scenes allow you to sit back and listen. With a sung-through musical, you keep sitting forward throughout. There's an engine to it that continues moving forward.

(WILLIAM) [Nick has] talked a lot about Impressionism —how *Falsettos* is about these people doing an impression of family, or an impression of a relationship, or an impression of a marriage. ... These people are trying to present a version of themselves that they want everyone else to see.

(NICK) William Finn wrote a musical with a gay protagonist, who is not a victim and is in control of his own destiny. And that makes it so important. ... He's trying to be real, but he doesn't know how because, emotionally, he's an adolescent, like his own son. This whole show is about moving from adolescence to adulthood.

(WILLIAM) You talk a lot about these characters having the spirit of a boy, and how they're playing a really elaborate game until the very end of the show. ... They're all just trying to figure it out.

(NICK) The show is filled with the past and present all at the same time, so it unleashes our creativity and our freedom to let it be surreal. William Finn is so intellectual and the lyrics are very, very fast and smart ... He's interested in getting to your gut by going through your mind.

making it inaccessible to many who need it, and comes with brutal side effects. It will remain the only available treatment until the mid-1990s.

1988 The largest Modern Orthodox Jewish organization in the U.S., the Orthodox Union, pushes for an increase in AIDS research funding.

June 28, 1990 *Falsettoland*, which will become Act Two of *Falsettos*, premieres at Playwrights Horizons in New York City. It is set in 1981.

1991 The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism releases its resolution on AIDS, a call based on Jewish values to support and advocate for people with AIDS.

April 8, 1992 *Falsettos* plays its first preview on Broadway. It will go on to run for 509 performances and win two Tony Awards (Best Book and Best Original Score).

BACKSTORY: THE CREDITS

Dramaturgy & Research by Deborah Blumenthal *and* Molly Sharfstein

Written by Deborah Blumenthal *and* Molly Sharfstein *with contributions by* PJ Powers, Lara Goetsch, and Camille Oswald.

Editing and Graphic Design by Lara Goetsch

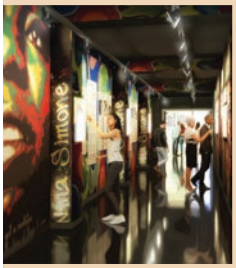
Falsettos *promotional image design by* Michal Janicki

Our Mission: TimeLine Theatre presents stories inspired by history that connect with today's social and political issues.

Our collaborative organization produces provocative theatre and educational programs that engage, entertain and enlighten.

IT'S TIME

THE CAMPAIGN FOR **TIMELINE'S NEW HOME**



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TimeLine is making extraordinary progress toward establishing the first home of our own and construction has begun at 5035. N. Broadway Avenue (near the corner of Broadway and Argyle) in Chicago's Uptown neighborhood. With more than $40 million raised so far in private and public funds, the next stages of this thrilling project are just around the corner. **We invite you to be a part of this campaign!**

EXPLORE THE STORY OF OUR NEW HOME VIA THE WEBPAGE BELOW.

To learn how you can support TimeLine's future, please contact Rosie Schultz, Director of Donor Engagement, at *rosie@timelinetheatre.com* or 773.281.8463 x126.

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YOUR SUPPORT TODAY HELPS US MAKE HISTORY TOMORROW!

As we embark on our exciting new chapter, on the precipice of making our dream home in Uptown a reality, **YOU are a crucial part of making our future a success.** You're not only our partners in discussion and continual progress, but a driving force for our core value of exploring everyone's history.

With ticket sales covering only a portion of our annual income, donations from our community are vital to sustaining the work we do.

Your donation to TimeLine enables us to:

- Continue to present and nurture groundbreaking new and acclaimed plays
- Inspire the next generation of Chicago artists and thought leaders by sharing the power of theatre
- Invest in our people and organizational resources as we plan for TimeLine's next era

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To view our full community of supporters, visit *timelinetheatre.com/donor-listing* or scan the QR code.

"Patrons know that whatever the subject matter of the next play, it is going to give you insights to take home. And, alongside the mission, they know that the experience is going to be absolutely first rate."

– John Sterling, TimeLine Board Member

(PICTURED FROM TOP): Mechelle Moe (left) and Christopher Alvarenga in TimeLine's 2024 world premiere of Dolores Díaz's Black Sunday; *playwright Robert Ford (from left), DePaul Theatre School Dean Martine Kei Green-Rogers, director Damon Kiely, and Artistic Director PJ Powers at a free TimePieces play reading of Ford's* In the Grove of Forgetting; *members of the 2024 TimeLine South teen ensemble and teaching artists after performing their original work,* Influmedia: the connection bug.

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