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STAGE DEBUT OF “A SPECIAL COVID-19” AN INDUBITABLE SUCCESS

April 22, 2021 by Brigid O'Leary

FREDERICKSBURG, VA— “A Special Covid-19” is in the books and those who worked on the musical couldn't be more proud of their efforts. And with due cause. The two-act musical written, directed, and performed completely by a cast people with disabilities ran for two shows. It reflected on the challenges of the 2020 pandemic as lived by someone with a disability.

The event was organized by STEP VA, a local 501c nonprofit that “empowers people with special needs through artistic expression and sensory exploration,” and it was a completely in-house production. Playwrite and composer Noah Finch, 22, has been a STEP VA participant for six years. In tandem STEP VA leadership and a select group of other professionals who worked with him in the mentoring process, Finch wrote and scored the two-act musical, and hand-picked his cast from his friends within the organization, many of whom have been involved nearly as long as he has. Three members of the tech crew also came directly from STEP VA, which started hosting a “Tech Week” summer sessions two years ago, to allow participants to learn what happens behind the scenes of a stage production. Just about a year after Finch wrote his first song about the coronavirus, those 13 individuals—10 in the cast, three on stage crew—took the show from paper to stage.



The cast and crew of “A Special Covid-19” take a bow at dress rehearsal.

“I’m so impressed by the talents and skills of all of the performers and crew. Noah painted a very accurate portrayal of the pandemic and its impact. The care that was taken by the production crew to accommodate the performers was impressive. It was a true reflection of the wonderful things that STEP VA has to offer,” said Kristin Welton-Oswalt, a teacher in Spotsylvania, Va., who knew some of the cast and crew from school and was in the audience on opening night.

After nearly flawless first show, the cast’s confidence in themselves and their project grew significantly; so much so that at the finale the next night, lead Joey Guyton felt comfortable enough to ad lib some of his lines in the second act. It was a daring move, and many would have presumed that some of the cast members might not react well to impromptu changes. Regardless of how they felt about the situation, the rest of the cast kept their composure and carried on with a poise rarely seen in people their ages, especially those in their first full-length production. Very few in the audience knew something was amiss, unless they

were told. Fredericksburg resident Julie Sweeney, who brought her daughter to the second show, was one such audience member.

“I wouldn’t have known,” Sweeney, said after she was told that a portion of the second act had been ad-libbed. She added that she enjoyed the show and what it brought to the community. “I thought it was good to see them all shine in their own way.”

Though the stage show has ended, a recording of the livestream from April 17 is available online at the STEPVA website, www.stepva.org, and the organization is looking into options for selling a DVD of the performance at a later date.

For more information or to donate, please, visit www.stepva.org.

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