

## ***The Normal Heart Director's Note***

*“The windiest militant trash  
Important Persons shout  
Is not so crude as our wish:  
What mad Nijinsky wrote  
About Diaghilev  
Is true of the normal heart;  
For the error bred in the bone  
Of each woman and each man  
Craves what it cannot have,  
Not universal love  
But to be loved alone.”*

*- W.H. Auden (From “September 1, 1939)*

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From Auden’s poem detailing the beginning of World War II, Larry Kramer chose the title for his play, *The Normal Heart*, a semi-autobiographical work of his experience during the early years of the AIDS crisis. Though he was a controversial writer in the 1970’s, he was one of the few people who saw early on that AIDS was an imminent threat to the Queer community. He started Gay Men’s Health Crisis with Paul Popham and Larry Mass, an organization whose mission was to combat the disease, and he would later write *The Normal Heart* based on his experience with the organization.

Since its opening at the Public Theatre in 1985, *The Normal Heart* has had multiple revivals in New York City, frequently plays in regional theaters, and has even been adapted into an HBO film. Today, almost forty years after its premiere, the play is still an undeniably important piece of American Theatre. Love and intolerance, resilience and pain, activism and death, and the formation and disintegration of relationships contrast each other to craft a complex and deeply human story of love and politics that is still painful to watch forty years later.

It is true that we are not in the throes of the AIDS crisis anymore. It is true that a majority of people infected with HIV can now live long lives without ever contracting AIDS. It is also true that the Queer community has made significant political and social advancements in the past forty years. So, if there has been so much progress, why is this play still so poignant?

Because even though Queer people are inching towards the finish line in the race for equality, we still have miles to go. Though being diagnosed with HIV/AIDS is no longer necessarily a death sentence, there is still no cure. Though Queer people are often tolerated, we

are not always accepted. This play is as timely as ever because the fight for equality is not over. Perhaps it has only just begun. After all, the Stonewall Riots were only 50 years ago, the AIDS crisis began 40 years ago, and marriage equality was gained only 5 years ago. To continue the fight, to honor those who came before us, and to love freely, we must acknowledge, understand, and share Queer stories.

Moreover, the power of *The Normal Heart* today is that we see that love—no matter what kind— is valuable and worth fighting for. In the shadow of an epidemic, love can unite a community to overcome hatred, disease, and even death. When there is no guarantee that you will be alive tomorrow, love is a beacon of hope. The undercurrent of the play is what Auden says about Nijinsky: we all want to be loved. We don't have to be loved by *everyone*, but it is human nature to want to love and be loved in return. Today we tell this story for the history, but we connect to this story because of the love.

We are standing on the shoulders of generations of Queer people who paved the way for us to love openly and freely without shame, fear, or regret. Within each of us lives Kramer, Auden, Nijinsky, Audre Lorde, Matthew Shepard, Marsha P. Johnson, Bayard Rustin, Harvey Milk, and those who fought to love freely and openly.

We must honor them and take pride in their struggles and their lives.

We must understand that we are not alone.

We have history.

We are here, we have always been here, and we aren't going away.