

St. Paul's Episcopal Church

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Pray The Gay Away: An Interview with Local Playwright Conrad Askland

Upcoming Events

**This Sunday,
November 3, is
the end of
Daylight Saving
Time!**

Don't forget to "fall back" an hour. We still expect to see you in church at 9:30 — but if you get here an hour earlier, you can just pray for those of us who remembere.

###

All Saints Sunday

November 3

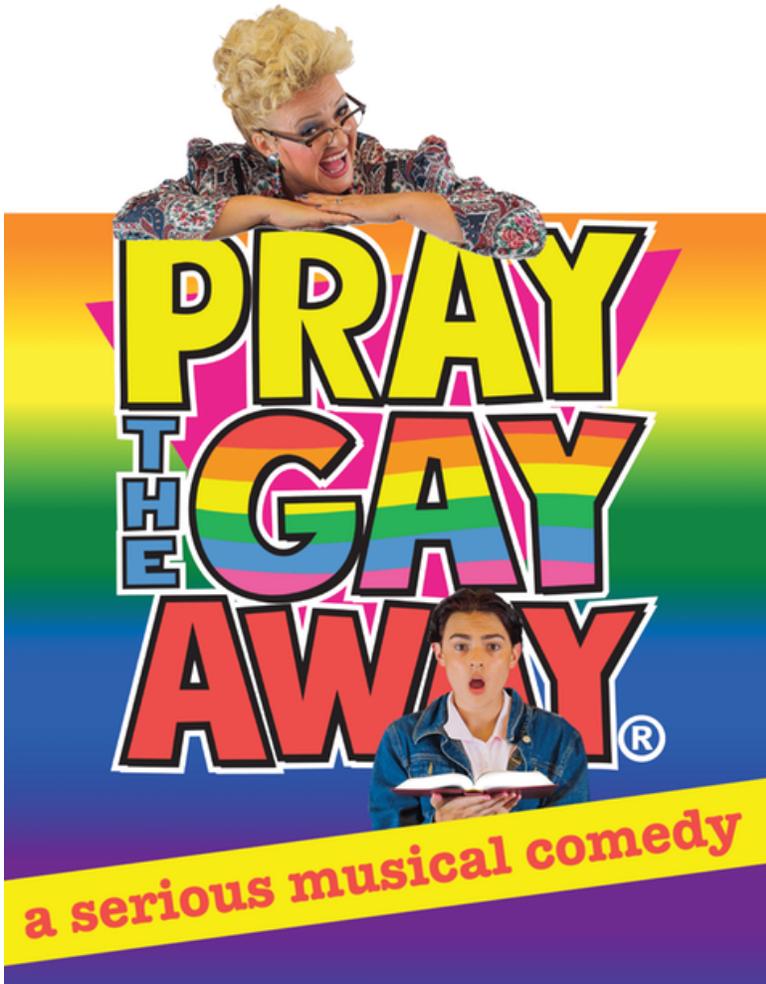
Holy Eucharist

8:00 and 9:30 AM

**Day of
Remembrance**

THEATER

ARTS GUILD



If the concept of a musical comedy about conversion therapy (faith-based programs aimed at transforming homosexuals into heterosexuals) seems highly unlikely — if not perhaps inappropriate — then get ready for the world premiere of Pray the Gay Away - A Serious Musical Comedy, appearing November 8th through the 24th at Mount Vernon's historic Lincoln Theatre. The show is being produced by the Theater Arts Guild (TAG), under the direction of its creator, local playwright Conrad Askland.

St. Paul's has been blessed to provide our parish hall as a rehearsal space for the musical comedy, and while its subject matter may be controversial for many in the larger faith community, we fully endorse its effort to create a conversation around the topic as part of living into the Gospel message of love, acceptance, and inclusiveness. While we certainly don't claim to know what Jesus would have thought about conversion therapy, we do know that he had a habit of challenging the *status quo* when it came to reaching out to marginalized members of society, and accepting others as God made them.

We had an opportunity during the musical's rehearsal period to interview Conrad Askland. We were especially intrigued with the notion of creating, not simply a comedy, but a musical comedy at that, around a subject as polemically fraught as the issue of conversion therapy. While most of our questions focused on Askland's artistic approach, and the inspiration behind the production, we also learned a lot about his

This year at the observance of All Saints on Sunday, November 3, during both our 8:00 & 9:30 a.m. services, we will read aloud the names of those whose memory you would like to celebrate as a way of honoring the impact their lives have had on us.

###

Let's Taco About It!

November 3
following our **9:30**
worship

Please join your Stewardship Committee and Martha's Guild for an enjoyable time of fellowship, conversation and good food. There will be a variety of tacos and a lovely setting for a Sharing Opportunity where everyone in attendance will have the chance to raise questions, share thoughts, make comments, or share their own testimony.

###

Bayshore Symphony Concert

Saturday,
November 9, 2019
at 7:30 p.m. — here
at St. Paul's.

- Brahms – Academic Festival Overture
- Butterworth – Two English Idylls
- Geminiani – La Folia

background as a “local boy made good.” We hope his interview responses provide some additional motivation to [buy a ticket](#) for what will be a world premiere performance of one of the most unlikely musical comedy themes since *The Producers* introduced us to “Spring Time for Hitler.”

If the musical Book of Mormon and Boy Erased (a movie about a young man’s experience with conversion therapy) had a love child, would it be fair to say it’s “Pray the Gay Away”?

(Conrad) Actually, yes...a little bit. People often ask me about *Book of Mormon*. In the musical there’s a song called “Turn It Off” about “turning off” your homosexuality. If the entirety of *Book of Mormon* was about that one song, and you added a little bit of *Le Miz* and *Boy Erased*, that’s kind of what *Pray the Gay Away* is.

It seems like such an unlikely approach to the subject matter.

(Conrad) Yes...it seems very counter intuitive to have a “serious comedy,” as we’re billing it. I spent a long time struggling with whether it would be serious or whether it would be comedy — since neither one really seemed to work. If it’s serious, then shouldn’t it be a documentary rather than a musical? If it’s comedy, how can I really do justice to the depth of the subject? When I heard that Nicole Kidman was going to star in *Boy Erased* — a very serious film about gay conversion therapy — I knew right then that I would go with comedy. It’s turned out to be a bit of both, since my viewpoint on things tends to go that way.

What inspired you to undertake this project?

(Conrad) I was living on the East Coast where I was the music director for *Rock of Ages*. Before one of the performances, a cast member had mentioned that he had gone through conversion therapy and had attempted suicide. I later asked him to tell me about his experience. I bought some books on the subject, and I wasn’t even 30 pages into one when it hit me, “Wow, I have got to put this on the stage where the church family can see what’s going on here.” That was back in 2015. I’ve been working on the show off and on for four years now.

What is your theatrical/artistic background?

(Conrad) This is my fourth full-length musical. The first was called *Witches* and was about the Salem witch trials. The second was *Pan* — an updated story of Peter Pan. *Romeo and Juliet* was a musical written to Shakespeare’s original text.

I was raised in Bellevue, and as a child I sang with the Northwest Boy Choir and later with the Seattle Opera. I went to Pacific Lutheran University, so a lot of my roots before I was 21 were in the Pacific Northwest. I moved to Southern California where I did entertainment, playing piano at Knott’s Berry Farm and recording studios. I was keyboardist for seven years with Freddy Fender of the Texas Tornados, doing country music and even playing the Grand Ole Opry. I think I’m one of the few people who can say that they’ve performed at both the Seattle Opera AND the Grand Ole Opry.

I came up here around 2006 and helped out with community theater shows at Theater Arts Guild (TAG) and META Performing Arts — and in 2008 I got picked up by Cirque de Soleil and did music direction and keyboards for them, first in China for the show *ZAIA*, and then I was music director and band leader for the world tour of *Varekai*, which was one of their touring shows. It was after that show closed that I came back to town and told my family that I wanted to take two years off to bring *Pray the Gay Away* to the stage. Amazingly, my family said, “Do it!”.

- Copland – Fanfare for the Common Man
- Mussorgsky – Pictures at an Exhibition

\$15 suggested donation, at the door. Children under 12 free. More info at bayshoresymphony.com.

###

Sermon on Trauma Healing

On Sunday, November 10, 2019, at the 9:30 a.m. service, we welcome Larry and Cami Robbins as special preachers.

Cami is Karisse’s sister. Cami and Larry have been members of Wycliffe Bible Translators since 1980. They have mostly served in Africa. In 2013 they lived through a violent armed rebellion in the country where they work. Seeing the suffering and trauma in the peoples’ lives led them to become involved in a ministry of Bible-based trauma healing. They hold workshops to train congregations in how to help adults and children who have lived through difficult times. They will give us a little taste of what they do during the sermon.

415 S. 18th Street | Mount Vernon, WA 98274

Tell us a little about the production itself.

(Conrad) We have a cast of 41. Currently, with cast, volunteers, and production crew we have over 80 people involved. We had almost 130 sign up for auditions. When TAG agreed to back this show a year ago, I told them there might be eight people at auditions and thirty audience members at opening night. I've been blown away by the amount of support we've had so far. People from churches that are not fully inclusionary with the LGBTQ community have reached out to support the show. They want to have the discussion. People from the confessional churches — the more conservative churches — have been at our workshops to give us feedback, and across the board they've told me that my treatment was very fair. If they had told me that it wasn't fair I would have made changes, so I think a lot of people are going to be surprised at how the material is presented.

What would you most like people to know about this show and why they should experience it?

(Conrad) I think people have preconceived notions about what the content of the show is and its viewpoint...and I think most everyone is wrong. I've workshopped the material with a wide variety of focus groups to test the material. I always ask two questions: "Is there any place where you feel this show attacks the church?" and "Is there any place where you think this show attacks God?" Every single person in our workshops, over one hundred in all, have said no to both questions. If they had said yes, then I would have made changes. The show is not meant to preach, but to put opposing viewpoints and experiences on stage and let audiences make up their own minds. So in that way it doesn't have a particular stance — but with the combination of music it will be very emotional for people and give them something to talk about within the community. Especially within churches. Of course, audiences are the final ones to have opinions and we will find those out on opening night.

I'd like to say "thank you" to St. Paul's. You gave us more than just a place to rehearse, you have been so welcoming and cordial. When we're here with the cast it feels like home. Thank you so much for that gift!

Service Schedule

Sunday Services:

8:00 AM

Morning Prayer

1st Sunday: Holy Eucharist

9:30 AM

Holy Communion in English

11:30 AM

Santa Eucaristía en Español (Holy Communion in Spanish)

Other Services

See Schedule of Services

Church Office

Monday - Thursday

10:00 AM - Noon

1:00 PM - 3:00 PM

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About La Iglesia de la Resurrección:

<http://resurreccionepiscopal.org>

a serious musical comedy

PRAY THE GAY AWAY®

Book, Music & Lyrics by
Conrad Askland

Directed by
Lindsey Bowen & Gabriel Guevara

Live On Stage At The
Lincoln Theatre, Mount Vernon
November 8th - November 24th, 2019

For Show Times And Tickets Visit
www.LincolnTheatre.org

Presented by
THEATER
ARTS GUILD

Nov 1, 2019, 1:58 PM

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