Jonathan Stahl - Born and raised in rural PA. I didn’t start dancing till a bit later than some. I did high school plays, sang in chorus, played in the band, sang at church and did the high school musicals as many other performers have done in their pasts. When it came time to go to college, against all odds, I made (what now seems an arbitrary decision) to study Musical Theatre. I attended Shenandoah College and Conservatory of Music (now Shen. U.). After being pegged a dancer while in college, I figured if I was going to be having a “gypsy dancer” lifestyle I should get the best dance training possible. I left college after 2 years and started dancing at Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet in Carlisle, PA. Ironically that was only one town over from where I graduated High School. I trained exclusively in Ballet at that school. I wanted to study the most “pure” aspect of the Art form. After approximately only one and a half years at CPYB, I moved to Milwaukee, WI to work at Milwaukee Ballet. I got a trainee position out of their summer program, but once again, in a short period of time, I was moved up into the company as an apprentice. The company underwent a large restructuring when Milwaukee Ballet and Pennsylvania Ballet combined as a ‘joint venture’. An innovative idea, offering the dancers a full 52 week contract, which was not typical. I remained an apprentice, but traveled with the company and even danced some soloist/featured spots in *Nutcracker*, and of *Code of Silence.*  When the company dissolved and split back to two companies after only 2 years, I stayed with Milwaukee Ballet for one more year as a full company member, and had more soloist opportunities from the corps de ballet. I also worked, on the side, in Milwaukee with a company. Dancing with Milwaukee Dance Theatre when I was not with the Ballet Company. This, and some other opportunities, brought be back to my singing. Being in Milwaukee also gave me other opportunities. I started back doing Musical Theatre in the summers, began my choreography journey, and learned the Art of doing pick up work when offered. ( I recall a French Apache dance for one of their many festivals in the summer, Bastille Days.)

At that time, I wanted to move forward in my career as a performer and find new options. I moved to Chicago and studied dance there. I did pick up dance work, dancing in the (then) acclaimed Arie Crown *Nutcraker* with the Ruth Page school. I also performed with the Chicago Lyric Opera. But when the opportunity came to do *CATS* in Hamburg Germany, I happily followed the path that led me to what would become the show I performed the most in my career. This time, it was in GERMAN!

After an adventurous time in Hamburg, I moved back to Chicago, as I did not think I would ever be ready for “the Big Apple.” I did a wide variety of things while there. Musical Theatre, Industrials, concert dance, ballet, teach, and a few other pick up jobs. It was a great training ground to survive in the world of the ARTS. But in 1996 when I got cast in *That’s Christmas: Chicago’s Merry Musical*, with a creative team and fellow casts members predominantly from New York, I decided it might be time to swim with the big fish.

I made the leap and came to New York. I still call it home, although, like most “gypsy performers” I have often times spent more time in a year outside of NYC than at home. I got lucky. Very lucky. I can put some Broadway credits on my resume. I have performed at Radio City Music Hall. I have toured the country and seen beautiful places I would not have otherwise seen in the USA and abroad. I have done everything from “Ballet to Broadway and from Denver to Dubai.” I have worked in most mediums. Less in TV and film, but I have done some.

And in the middle of all of this, I started to work with a Director/Choreographer as his Associate. (First as an Assistant, but due to the collaborative efforts, I was quickly given the title of Associate.). We worked together for about 10 years. I was lucky to get to work in some of the finest regional houses in the country. I was getting to help create the shows. Full sections of choreography were mine, from conception to creation. AND, I got to continue to perform at the same time. Most of the time, I would stay and perform, being both Associate and then Dance Captain. This process helped me really develop what is my deep passion, Directing. I have had “on the job training” although I did finally go back to finish my undergraduate degree as I was working as an Associate. I graduated from Hunter College in NY with my BA in Theatre. This also added to my love of Directing, since my focus there shifted to Theatre and less Musical Theatre.

Towards the end of those years, opportunities arose for me to take on the role of Director/Choreographer on my own. My break out chance with the musical *NINE* at Westchester Broadway Theatre. I rarely pursue work with the passion that I pursued getting to Direct and Choreograph that show. I knew it was a fit and one I really wanted to take on. Although the show did not sell as well as the theatre had hoped, the reviews were good, and more importantly it was a production that was talked about within the regional community. This started me on a path of Directing and Choreographing on my own. My resume is modest. My work is strong and passionate. I still love to doing theatre, but the direction to make work happen is less clear. I am trying to find that path more clearly again as I think I still have a lot to offer.

As I ventured into more Directing/Choreographing, I even got to work as a creative of a Cruise line for their Entertainment Department. I was a “show director”. This was a new world for me. I found I learned a lot by working here: about combining my past experiences and working towards a new experience that has become a great source of opportunity for people in the Arts. Even though, admittedly, there were some challenges to face, I always kept learning and bringing my most positive approach to what could be a challenging environment.

In either world, my approach to theatre as a Director/Choreographer has been simple. Tell the story. Don’t get lost in anything more than that. Supporting those around you to do their best work and bring their ideas and strengths to the table, then shape all of that using the visions I have created, can make for a great collaborative experience for everyone involved. I think I came to this approach honestly as that is basically how I approached performing. Teaching is the same. Pass on that perspective to the students. Find the strength of EACH student in the room and help them want to do their best. I am lucky to have been taught amazing technical approaches by CPYB, and I use those to make the experience one of technique as well as performing when in my class. I have taught throughout my career, mostly guest teaching or master classes. I enjoy the chance to come in and give a new perspective or have a student find a kernel of truth in what I’m teaching and take it with them.

I have had an eclectic and fortunate career. I am forever humbled by what I got to do, and still try to find the passion to continue in the Arts. These varied opportunities help shape who I am as an Artist and person. Ultimately at a certain level, everyone has talents. How to work with those talents, and the people attached to the talent, is what is important and yet, the tricky part. When I went back to college, I got a minor in Psychology at Hunter College. I have found this degree as useful in my career in all three mediums as I have my training in Singing, Dancing and Acting (and Directing and Choreographing.). How the human psyche works and how to be sensitive to that is an important part to telling any story. And sometimes it is just that simple.