

NEW OFF-BROADWAY MUSICAL

STRAIGHT FORWARD

BY BILLY ABERLE AND CHRIS SABOL

LAUNCHES AN EP OF A UNIQUE LOVE STORY

Straight Forward, a new Off-Broadway musical by Billy Aberle and Chris Sabol, will release an EP of 5 songs on November 26, it was announced today by producer Gregory Franklin. Straight Forward will have its premiere this Spring in New York City.

Straight Forward is based on the true story of an unexpected relationship between two mid-twenties straight men, Mike and Garrett, who begin as roommates and find themselves navigating a deep connection while one battles a mysterious life-threatening illness. Originally told in a viral online article shared over 100,000 times in one night and viewed by millions – “I’m an Otherwise Straight Man (Who Fell in Love with His Best Friend),” written by Mike Iamele, the story captured global attention, especially within the LGBTQ+ community.

Mike and Garrett’s evolving relationship challenges both men to confront their understanding of love, identity, and societal norms and their journey challenges conventional definitions of relationships. Straight Forward highlights the universal need for acceptance, courage, and truth.

In 2021, Straight Forward had its first staged reading at Wagner College in Staten Island and in the spring of 2022, a full workshop production debuted at the same venue, allowing Billy and Chris to further refine the show. That summer, Straight Forward premiered at the New York Theater Festival (NYMF) to sold-out audiences. In 2023 a two-week developmental run took place at Theatre Row on 42nd Street and by 2024, Billy and Chris were focused on fine-tuning the production through additional workshop readings, held in June and November, getting the musical ready for a Spring, 2025 premiere.

Directed by Billy Bustamante (Here We Are, Here Lies Love, Soft Power), Straight Forward has book, music, and lyrics by Aberle and Sabol, musical supervision by Bryan Perri (Almost Famous; Jagged Little Pill), orchestrations by Michael Starobin (Suffs; Falsettos; Sunday in the Park with George), and musical direction by Steven Cuevas (& Juliet; Moulin Rouge; Days of Wine and Roses). Roxedge Entertainment serves as general manager of Straight Forward.

Mike Ferlita (Rent 20th Anniversary Tour) sings Mike and Thomas McFerran (Jesus Christ Superstar) sings Garrett on the EP.

“When we heard of Mike and Garrett’s story, we knew it would make a wonderful musical,” said Billy Aberle and Chris Sabol. “Despite both identifying as straight, and despite their initial insecurities, the

two men finally surrendered to the truth: love is love, no matter the gender. We can't wait to share their story, in musical form, with the world and we hope this EP will give listeners a taste of what is in store when the full musical comes to New York this Spring."

To download the EP of Straight Forward beginning on November 26, please visit: www.StraightForwardMusical.com.

BIOS

Billy Aberle (co-writer of the book, music, and lyrics). A graduate of Wagner College in Staten Island with a Bachelor of Science in Arts Administration, and Falmouth University in the UK, earning his Masters degree in Creative Advertising. With over a decade of theatrical experience, Billy has worked with esteemed organizations such as The Public Theater, The Nederlander Organization, as well as numerous productions across New York City and beyond. His passion for the arts led to the co-founding of Pivotal Productions, a non-profit theater company dedicated to creating inclusive, impactful, educational theater experiences for young adults. Billy is also the Owner of Billy Boy Studio, a hospitality-focused creative agency specializing in branding, photography, social media, and content creation for the food and beverage industry.

Chris Sabol (co-writer of the book, music, and lyrics). He is a music educator, writer, arts advocate, and current Artistic Director of Pivotal Productions, a non-profit theatre company that strives to give young adults theatrical industry experience which he also co-founded. He has musically directed over sixty shows including Chicago, In the Heights, The Last Five Years, Spring Awakening, Company, Next to Normal, and Rent. Chris obtained a Bachelor of Science Degree in Arts Administration from Wagner College and a Masters of Music Education from Boston University. He also recently obtained a doctorate in Education Policy and Leadership from American University. His research centered on preserving performing arts programs in secondary school spaces to maintain growth and development of student identity. His debut album, Chris Sabol, is also streaming on Spotify.

Billy Bustamante (Director/Choreographer) Billy most recently choreographed the regional premiere of Soft Power at the Signature Theatre. Other recent credits include Here We Are at the Shed and the Broadway production of Here Lies Love. Off-Broadway/Regional credits include Notes From Now (Prospect), Whisper House (Civilians), Finn (Kennedy Center), Gold Mountain (Utah Shakespeare Festival), Into The Woods (Arden Theatre), Virginia Stage Company, Goodspeed, Lincoln Center, and NAAP. Broadway performing credits: Miss Saigon (Engineer alt.), The King and I (Lun Tha u/s). Off-Broadway/Regional: Soft Power and Here Lies Love at the Public Theater, Center Theatre Group, Arena Stage, Old Globe and Paper Mill Playhouse. Billy is co-founder of Broadway Barkada and on faculty at Jen Waldman Studio and Circle in the Square Theatre School. Billy is passionately committed to the development of new artists and building a more equitable world. www.BillyBustamante.com Insta: @BillyBCreative

Bryan Perri (Music Supervisor) Bryan was most recently Music Supervisor and Conductor of Almost Famous which San Diego's Old Globe world premiere earned him the prestigious Craig Noel Award for Best Music Direction. He served as Music Director and Conductor of Jagged Little Pill, a production that earned nine Tony nominations. His extensive Broadway credits extend to the hit musical Wicked, where he spent five years, and the original company of Chaplin, for which he not only served as Music Director, but Dance and Vocal Arranger. He also served as Music Director for the Broadway National Tour of Next to Normal, starring Tony Award winner Alice Ripley.

Michael Starobin (Orchestrations) Michael is a well-known orchestrator and arranger working on Broadway, most recently Suffs, and in Hollywood. He has been the orchestrator for some of Broadway's most innovative musicals such as Falsettos, Sunday in the Park with George, Assassins (2004 Tony Award for Best Orchestrations) and Next to Normal (2009 Tony Award

for Best Orchestrations). He was the conductor and orchestrator for Disney's animated film *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, orchestrated the songs for *Tangled* and contributed orchestrations to the film versions of *Chicago*, *Nine*, *Beauty and the Beast* (2017), *Mary Poppins Returns* and *Tick, Tick... Boom!*

Steven Cuevas (Music director and Producer for the *Straight Forward* EP). His Broadway credits include *Days of Wine and Roses*; *New York, New York*; *Dancin'*; & *Juliet*; *Moulin Rouge!*; *Tina: The Tina Turner Musical*; *Once On This Island*; *Anastasia*; *Kinky Boots*. Off-Broadway credits as music director, musician, orchestrator, and arranger include *The Connector*; *Hell's Kitchen*; *Kinky Boots*; *Little Shop of Horrors*; *We Are The Tigers*; *Closer Than Ever* as well as touring credits with *Moulin Rouge!*; *Once On This Island*; *Kinky Boots*; *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!*; *Spring Awakening*.

Mike Ferlita (Mike) has played the role of Mike in the development of *Straight Forward* as featured on the EP. His touring credits include *Gordon and Rent 20th Anniversary Tour* with regional credits including *A Bronx Tale* and *Calogero*. His film producing credits include *A Little Tent* with television credits including PBS Documentary "Broadway or Bust." Mike is a 2012 NYSMTA JIMMY Nominee.

Thomas McFerran (Garrett) has played the role of Garrett in the development of *Straight Forward* as featured on the EP. He was in the national tour of *Jesus Christ Superstar* and his regional credits include *Rock of Ages*, *Chicago*, *Kinky Boots*, *Cinderella*, and the world premiere of *The Yellow Wallpaper* at the Alliance Theatre. His television credits include "Teenage Bounty Hunters," "Sweet Magnolias."