

SETTING: THE DEEP DARK FOREST

ACT 1:

What would you do to be perfect? Our story begins with Fairy Godfather Sir Pincus Glimmermore asking this very question, just before he runs into Toby, a cobbler, who is off delivering shoes. Toby tells him about the four lost princesses of Minisculia: Faye, Holly, Carmella, and Piper, who have been locked in a tower since their Mother died. The scene changes to the princess' tower. Their father homeschools them and keeps them studying every day. In fact, Piper has become so good at astrology that she's calculated when a comet will be passing by; in two nights! The princesses are determined to see it. They find a way outside of their tower and learn that Prince Devin is hosting a ball where he will choose a bride. The princesses try to get into his castle but are bullied away because they don't fit normal princess standards. Dejected, they walk home. Piper lags behind and is approached by Glimmermore, who says he can get her into the ball. They train at Heatherfields Academy to attain princess perfection, but still find it outside of their grasp. Glimmermore then takes Piper and her sisters to a secret pink lagoon that can transform anyone who dips in it into the most perfect princess. They argue over whether or not to dip in the lagoon, and finally decide just to go to the ball as themselves. Piper is so conflicted that she just wants to go home. But, once her sisters have left and she's alone, the lagoon is so tempting... and she dips.



ACT 2:

At Prince Devin's ball, Piper owns the show—though she is almost unrecognizable as herself. Glimmermore dubs her Princess Bliss, and Prince Devin asks her to marry him. Faye, Holly, and Carmella are so upset that they split up, each leaving to do the things they've been dreaming of outside the tower. In order to stay as Princess Bliss, Piper needs to dip regularly. She still feels conflicted, but Glimmermore convinces her to do it. He's worried, though, that if she sees her sisters she'll change her mind, so he captures the other three princesses and puts them in the dungeon. They

manage to escape with some unexpected friends and rush to stop Piper marrying Prince Devin, but arrive just a moment too late. Piper is transformed into Bliss forever... until Toby arrives with a pair of wedding shoes he designed just for her. Seeing the shoes, Piper remembers all the wonderful things that make her who she is and the illusion crumbles. Glimmermore's power is also broken. The princesses prepare together for their new life of freedom and of celebrating the knowledge that our true bliss comes from embracing who we are.

MEET THE PRINCESSES



PRINCESS FAYE

The first and eldest princess of Minisculia
Whether I'm fighting dragons or headed to the ball, you better believe I came here to slay.

My Astrological Sign: Aries
My Favorite Color: Rain Cloud Grey
If I were Stranded on a Desert Island the One Item I would Bring is: My sword.
One Word People Use to Describe Me: Angry
One Word I Use to Describe Myself: Fearless



PRINCESS HOLLY

The Second Princess of Minisculia
You may be the handsome prince, but I'd rather be talking to a unicorn.

My Astrological Sign: Libra
My Favorite Book: My Life as a Muskrat. Full disclosure: I wrote it based on the life of my dear friend Diana, the muskrat.
My Special Skills: I can tie 300 types of knots. Oh, and I can talk to animals.
One Word People use to Describe Me: Misfit
One Word I Use to Describe Myself: Spicy



PRINCESS CARMELLA

The Third Princess of Minisculia
They call me a total princess. I prefer the term "total diva." I earned it.

My Astrological Sign: Leo
Favorite Color: Sparkly Pink
My Best Feature: Impossible to choose. They are all perfect.
One Word People Use to Describe Me: Extra
One Word I Use to Describe Myself: Flawless



PRINCESS PIPER

The Fourth and Youngest Princess of Minisculia
I don't need a prince to know I have what it takes to rule.

My Astrological Sign: Capricorn
My Favorite Planet: Mercury
My Favorite Number: Any perfect square! 1...4...9...16...25...and so on.
My Hobbies: Astrophysics, Latin derivatives, advanced calculus
One Word People Use to Describe Me: Over-Achiever
One Word I Use to Describe Myself: Driven



MEET THE WRITERS

Emma Lively (book, music, lyrics) Emma writes original musicals and animated movies with Tyler Beattie. She serves as manager and collaborator to Julia Cameron (The Artist's Way), and is the co-author of several books. She was originally trained as a classical violist. *Bliss* is her first musical at The 5th Avenue Theatre.

T Tyler Beattie (book, music, lyrics) Tyler writes original musicals and animated movies with Emma Lively. A passionate educator, Tyler is the founder and coach of an award-winning middle school debate team in Harlem and a graduate of Northwestern University. *Bliss* is his first musical at The 5th Avenue Theatre.



FINDING BLISS

Emma Lively and Tyler Beattie met ten years ago when they were both working on a show in Chicago. The two have been writing together ever since. They first had the idea for *Bliss* in 2012, and much of their initial inspiration is still very much at the center of the show.

When asked to describe how their collaboration works, Lively and Beattie respond, "when we start a new project, we start by thinking about the world: what would be fun, exciting, and fascinating to enter? And then, what would that world sound like? What kind of story do we want to tell, and what characters would tell it best? We always push ourselves to be as zany as possible—no limit on the whimsy."

We recently asked them to talk about writing the new musical *Bliss*.

What inspired you to write this story?

We both love fairy tales, and we were inspired to create a kind of "riff" on fairy tales with *Bliss*. In our initial brainstorms, we talked a lot about fairy tale tropes, and specifically about the "perfect princess" that seems to be central in almost every fairy tale. Why does the princess have to be perfect? And what if she wasn't? What if all of these perfect princesses were, in fact, under the same magical spell? And what if that spell were to wear off?

Why do you think fairy tales are so captivating?

Fairy tales promise magic, fun and fantasy, and these things are enticing. The idea of "happily ever after" is at the center of most fairy tales, and, in some way, this is something we are all chasing in our lives—however it may look. *Bliss* asks the audience to broaden their definition of "happily ever after" and challenge many of the assumptions made in classic "fairy tale society."

How do you collaborate when writing a new musical?

We write everything together—book, music, and lyrics—and we also invent the world, and the original story that takes place in that world. We are best friends, and our collaboration includes a lot of laughter, a lot of long brainstorming walks, many hours at the piano and the computer, and a kaleidoscope of post-it notes on the wall.

Also, one of our secrets is that if we have an especially wacky or comedic song or scene to write, the magic hour to do it is 4:00 AM. No filters at 4:00 AM.

What challenges did you face when writing *Bliss* and what did you learn?

With every original idea, there is an initial inspiration, and then a long process of development. *Bliss* has gone through many drafts, and we have thrown out many scenes, songs and characters along the way. We are

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always open to "change for the better," and grateful to those who can guide us in that direction. Our director, Sheryl Kaller, is a brilliant dramaturg who has helped us push the themes forward and deepen the story.

Is there anything else you would like the audience to know?

In *Bliss*, we are trying to address heavy themes with a light touch. It is an evening of fun and comedy that we hope will leave the audience inspired to be a little more honest, a little more rebellious, and a little more badass in their own lives.

Bliss, at its core, asks the question, "Can I be who I really am, and still get what I really want?" We hope that the audience will leave feeling like it's definitely worth finding out.

ILLUMINATING

BLISS

WITH SHERYL KALLER

By Bridget Morgan Assoc. Director of Branding and Communications

“IT’S A MUSICAL FOR ANYBODY WHO EVER FELT LIKE THEY DIDN’T FIT IN, OR FELT LOST, OR ‘OTHER THAN,’ YOU KNOW? THAT’S UNIVERSAL.”



Sheryl Kaller directing at American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco

Sheryl Kaller is a fascinating woman with a unique and varied career. The director of *Bliss* (the 23rd new musical produced by The 5th Avenue Theatre), was the twelfth woman to have ever received a Tony Award® nomination for Best Direction of a Play for her work on *Next Fall* in 2010. Her next Broadway show, Terrance McNally’s *Mothers and Sons*, starred Tyne Daly in a universally acclaimed performance in 2014. She’s also the director of Disney Cruise Lines’ *Frozen* and Deaf West’s acclaimed production of *Our Town*, and has worked at many major regional theaters in the country.

We’re thrilled to have this incredible and inspiring woman directing at The 5th. While it may seem like a light-hearted fairytale on the surface, she believes deeply in its subject matter. “This musical is coming along at a time when we not only really want it, but when we really need it,” she says. “We do. We really need it. What *Bliss*

teaches us is that we need to be open to do better, to learn, and to live up to this wonderful, magnificent new standard that’s been set for us by the next generation.”

“I think that young children are indoctrinated in this princess fairytale culture that has a lot of positives and also a lot of shackles. What *Bliss* does, from the inside out, is take the shackles off.” You can hear the passion in her voice as she talks. “So that if you are a princess that wants to wear a beautiful skirt and stay home and have babies, that’s fabulous as far as the writers of this musical, Emma Lively and Tyler Beattie, are concerned. If you are a princess who wants to wear pants and combat boots and love another princess, that’s great too. If you are a prince who wants to wear a dress, that’s great too. None of what is valuable in this world is the external. It’s all the internal. The external will always morph and change.”

The external, however, is something that

was given great amounts of thought by the creative team when it came to casting the show. “We’ve been really thoughtful about how we tell each of these girl’s stories, and who those people are who are telling them with a particular eye toward inclusion.” The royal family of Minisculia is played by a brilliantly talented group of actors who represent a diverse spectrum of experiences and communities. To Kaller, this kind of representation forms the crux of why the musical is named *Bliss*. “This musical illuminates inclusion. It illuminates diversity. It illuminates the deconstruction of gender norms. It illuminates freedom. And it illuminates that bliss is unique to every individual, not an absolute.”

It is this eye toward diversity and inclusion that has also made it so accessible for multiple generations. “It’s not a kid’s musical,” Kaller says firmly. “It’s a musical for anybody who ever felt like they didn’t fit in, or felt lost, or ‘other than,’ you

know? That’s universal. I think that like in fairytales, there is a lesson to be learned. And the very very cool thing about *Bliss* is that everybody’s lesson will be personal to them and their own experiences.”

When asked about her own connection to the project and what drew her to the show, her answer is simple. “I have a very easy litmus – will my children be proud of me? Done. That’s what leads me to a project,” she says with a laugh. “It helped that Emma and Tyler and Josh [Prince, choreographer on *Bliss*] and I hit it off like crazy. But I only choose to do productions that I think my daughters would be proud of. So when I read *Bliss* and heard the music, I went ‘My girls would go nuts over this.’ And that was my first intro into it.”

TRANSFORMATIONS

By Jessica Campbell, Assistant Professor of English, McKendree University

Once upon a time, we thought of fairy tales as timeless, universal stories that could inspire children with a sense of wonder—and maybe get them finally to go to bed. Since the 1970s, however, feminist scholars have exposed a darker side of fairy tales: their power to promote a sexist version of femininity to young girls. Should we really be reading children stories about girls rewarded merely for beauty or obedience—or who are so passive that they literally sleep for a hundred years? Isn't there more to aspire to than marriage to Prince Charming?

Fortunately, many writers since the late 20th century have penned new versions of fairy tales intended to turn sexist plotlines on their heads. In these fairy tales, evil stepmothers tell their side of the story; Snow White stands up for herself instead of being duped repeatedly; princesses rescue princes, rather than the other way around; a modern-day girl makes wishes on a magical baseball mitt. Sometimes Beauty falls in love with a female Beast, or Sleeping Beauty runs away with her female attendant; we're even seeing children's picture books that use fairy-tale magic to fulfill the dreams of young transgender protagonists.

These fairy-tale retellings have entered our society pretty seamlessly, because here's the thing: fairy tales have always been about transformation. What we tend to think of as classic fairy tales are the versions of Charles Perrault (1697), Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm (1810s), and Walt Disney. But those men didn't invent fairy tales. In fact, many women were writing fairy tales at the same time as Perrault, and their tales don't abide by what we now see as the "rules" of fairy tales at all. In the tales of writers like Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy, women often direct the action, and sometimes princesses run kingdoms or outsmart entitled princes. Even in the centuries before fairy tales were written down, folktales exchanged verbally—often between women doing domestic chores—featured a wide variety of plots: an early Little

Red Riding Hood, for example, simply tricked the wolf into letting her get away instead of needing to be rescued by a huntsman. And after all, Scheherazade long ago spun tales for one thousand and one nights in order to halt a cycle of violence against women. Then and now, there's more than one way to live happily ever after.



WHAT'S YOUR BLISS?

The new musical *Bliss*, tells the story of four wildly unique princesses who have spent their lives locked in a tower by their overprotective father. At last, they break free and discover the world outside the castle walls—and it's nothing like they expect. In the outside world, there are dreamy princes, royal balls, unicorns, and dragons. But these princesses have passions that lie outside physical perfection and marrying a prince.

Each princess has her own unique qualities that make her stand out. Princess Faye is fiercely protective of her family. Carmella is a pop diva. Piper is a math and science whiz. And Holly prefers the company of animals to most people.

What makes you unique? What characteristics do you embody that make you stand out from the crowd? What is your bliss? Write a paragraph, draw a picture, or design a collage that describes the qualities that make you special.

Share your bliss with us at educationprograms@5thavenue.org.

**CREATE YOUR
OWN FAIRYTALE
LAND**

Bliss takes place in an imaginary fairy tale land. It is a land populated by unicorns, dragons, magical lagoons, towers, dashing princes, and of course, princesses. Set Designer, Jason Ardizzone-West and Costume Designer, Paloma Young created magical scenery and dazzling costumes that bring the story to life.

If you could design your own fairy tale land, what would it look like? Who would live there? What would everyone wear? Draw a picture of your fairy tale land and send it to us at educationprograms@5thavenue.org.

HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW YOUR FAIRY TALES?

Many of the fairy tales we know from our childhoods, have been changed from their original versions. Take the quiz below to see if you can match the Fairy Tale to the original story line.

1. Twelve Dancing Princesses

A. To fit into the tiny shoe, one sister cuts off her toe with a knife, another cuts off her heel. They are exposed in their gruesome scheme by the blood spilling onto the floor.

2. Rapunzel

B. A princess asks for help and promises her love in exchange, but is so disgusted by her savior that she throws him against a wall. Only then does he transform into someone more handsome.

3. Snow White

C. A father gives away his daughter in exchange for a handful of fancy lettuce.

4. Cinderella

D. A wise woman cut in line and made an evil wish, but because she was so impatient her plot was foiled by the person she'd cut ahead of.

5. Sleeping Beauty

E. As punishment for attempting to murder her stepdaughter four times, the stepmother is forced to wear red-hot iron shoes and dance until she dies.

6. The Frog Prince

F. Using a secret passage hidden beneath a bed, the princesses wear their shoes out dancing every night in a magical castle across an underground lake.