

The Spotlight

Have it "As You Like It" with Dr. Michael Boynton by Jay Clark.

Who are you?

Oh, I don't know who I am. No, my name is Mike Boynton. I am a professor in the Theatre and Film Department here at JSU.

What inspired you to get into theatre?

I wasn't really one of those theatre kids. I came into it a little late, I suppose. It wasn't until a couple of my friends in high school dragged me into doing it that I was like, 'OK, fine'. I was more of a science nerd in high school, and they're like, 'You should do shows with us', and I was like, 'OK, fine. Whatever.' And I enjoyed it, but I still wasn't like a hardcore theatre person. But in college, I explored it more and more. When I was an undergraduate student, I did more and more theatre, and I fell more and more in love with it. And finally, by my senior year, I was like, 'I think that's what I want to do for a career. I think that's the direction I want to go in with my life.' So, slowly but surely, I kind of got involved in the theatre and got roped into it, but I didn't fully commit to it until my senior year of college.

Do you have a favorite theatre piece or a favorite musical play?

Oh gosh. People ask me that question all the time, and I never answer it because it's hard to pick a favorite. There are many plays that I love. There are many plays I think are well done. Every production is different, of course. There are many musicals that I like, and there are many that I hate, and my opinions shift and change over time. I never try to pick a favorite thing. I try to keep a very broad mind to many different things, and my tastes shift and change, so I try not to pick favorites per say. Obviously, I have certain playwrights that I like, movies that I like, or genres that I like, but that's more a matter of personal taste, I guess. I hesitate to answer that question. I mean, I love Shakespeare. I do lots of Shakespeare work professionally, so a lot of his plays are cool. I love working on comedies. I also like doing cool, funky, contemporaneous new works and socio-political pieces. I'm a Star Trek nerd. I love Harry Potter. I have a very bizarre sense of taste, I guess, but more of a nerdy aesthetic, I suppose.

What house are you in?

Gryffindor. Everyone always asks me, like, Are you Ravenclaw? Maybe I should. I'm kind of like Hermione because I think the Sorting Hat asked Hermione and then almost put Hermione in Ravenclaw, but then Hermione ended up in Gryffindor. So, I feel like Hermione, and we are kindred spirits.

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Out of all the plays in the musicals that you put together, what was the hardest one to put together?

My hardest play? The hardest play I've ever worked on? My whole career? Oh, my gosh. That's too many to even think about. I mean, every play that you work on is a challenge, a joy, and a nightmare all at the same time. Every experience is new, exciting, and different in theatre, which is one reason I like the job so much. Every play is different, and the people with whom you collaborate are different. It can be exciting. I had some great experiences when I worked on Broadway for a little while, and yeah, each one has its challenges, right? Even here at JSU, I direct a lot of the shows and have done so for the past 10 years, and there's no such thing as a simple show, really. Every show has a challenge. Whether it's a technical challenge, an acting challenge, or a budgetary problem, something goes wrong, and we must fix things on the fly. The most important part of being a theatre person is being calm, relaxed, and flexible. That way, when catastrophe strikes, you can handle it because it's inevitably going to strike. And that's just part of being a theatre person. I often joke with my students when they're all stressed and freaking out about some challenge that we're dealing with or some issue that we're trying to figure out. 'One catastrophe at a time. We'll deal with this catastrophe, and then we'll deal with this catastrophe, and it's all going to be okay.'

Has there been an easier play to put together?

Not really. You know, like I said, every play has a challenge. I don't think anything ever goes 100% smoothly, nor should it. Theatre is an art, and creativity is complex. There's always a creative struggle when you're trying to write a new play. Writing a new play is hard. Creating a work of art takes labor, effort, dedication, focus, concentration, and the application of talent. All of that can be extremely exhausting, challenging, or different in its own way. In fact, you know, I think it's good that theatre is challenging in that way. I mean, I will say, like, some shows have fewer catastrophes than others, and that's what we all hope and pray for—that everything will magically come together. But yeah, I don't think there has been one show that's been the hardest, nor do I feel like there's been one that's been the easiest either.

Do you have any favorite playwrights or musical writers?

Oh well, I know it's probably cliché, but I love Stephen Sondheim's work. Many of his pieces are brilliant musically. Theatre-speaking, I'm a big Shakespeare buff. I do a lot of classical. I direct a lot of Shakespeare. I act in a lot of Shakespeare; I love doing that. So, I think Shakespeare is a very good playwright. I think there's some amazing cool playwrights living and working today that are fascinating. Right now, I'm kind of geeking out over Lynn Nottage, who's an awesome American playwright. She has some cool pieces. Tom Stoppard and Tony Kushner—they are some older names that I think are great. I have artists, whether they're actors or playwrights, that I think are talented and always are like, 'oh, I should go see that,' because I think they're cool, you know?

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Is there anything, like any updates or events, that you'd like to share?

Oh, absolutely. I'm working on a show right now, so I might as well plug it. The first major JSU main stage play of this academic year is *As You Like It* by William Shakespeare, and it's coming up soon. We open on the 27th, and it plays the 27th, 28th, 29th, and 30th. You should be able to find it in the Red and White, and the information is going to be put out in a press release soon. One weekend only. It's the first big show for the Theatre and Film Department, and we're all really excited about it. The students have been working hard on it, both on-stage, backstage, and off-stage. They're building scenery as we speak and hanging lights as we speak, and they've all been working hard and really dedicated to it. It's going to be a great show. You know, I jokingly refer to it as a pastoral romcom. So, it's one of Shakespeare's great comedies, and I think the audience is really going to enjoy it. The thing that also makes it extra exciting is that we're doing a very high concept with it. Basically, as the director, I also adapted the script and changed it. I cut a little bit, but I also added bits and pieces to it, and I'm putting it at a different time in a different place in a different context. So, we're doing a very conceptual adaptation of *As You Like It*. I don't want to ruin it, but it's exploring a lot of themes of women, gender, and sexuality. I hope in a cool, fun, positive, and supportive way. I don't want to say too much about it because I want audiences to come and see this version because it's going to be new. It's going to be a very new, radically new, awesome version that I know I'm really excited about, but I think the students are also extra excited about it.