

The Genesis of *All Things Equal* – The Life and Trials of Ruth Bader Ginsburg

A brief interview with producer Scott Stander and playwright Rupert Holmes

“It was the height of the pandemic,” *All Things Equal* producer Scott Stander recalls, “and I seriously wondered if there’d ever be theatre again. I’ve always had numerous productions running simultaneously around the country and across the water . . . suddenly, nothing. Overnight, Broadway, off-Broadway, national tours, puppet shows, all live theatre was dead on arrival. Hamlet’s last line is “The rest is silence.” I wondered how long we might be silenced.

“I searched my mind for ways to offer a theatrical experience under the most challenging of circumstances. Actors were frightened to rehearse, terrified to sing at each other. How do you stage *Romeo and Juliet* without the title characters embracing or kissing?

“But then I recalled the pleasure and laughter my audiences had shared whenever they saw my touring production of *Say Goodnight, Gracie*. It was a show about a couple who shared the stage and much of their lives with each other through the decades. A play about a famous duo . . . for one actor! It seemed to me that the most immediate hope for bringing back theatre as we’ve known it would be to create an original show that could be presented effectively on any kind of stage with a cast of one, in tandem with images and sounds to bring the story to life.

“But it would have to be about some rare person whose life and language were fascinating enough to hold the audience’s interest for over 90 minutes. Someone whom we’d have loved to meet one-on-one for one memorable evening of our lives. And as I began to search my mind for the ideal subject, I learned that Ruth Bader Ginsburg had lost her long, grueling battle with cancer.

“And there was no question in my mind from that moment. I wanted the world to be reminded in the years ahead about what RBG had stood and fought for, and the eloquent reasoning of her passionate dissents. I wanted us to measure in the years to come what we’ve lost without her voice and spirit.”

“The next day, I called the one person who I knew from first-hand experience could be entrusted with scripting such a work: the author of *Say Goodnight, Gracie*, the multi-Tony award-winning playwright and composer Rupert Holmes. *Gracie* and Holmes had been nominated for a Tony for Best Play and won LORT’s National Broadway Theatre Award for Best Play as well. And I felt his musical background (he has an honorary doctorate from The Manhattan School of Music and has written and conducted platinum recordings for Barbra Streisand) would make him a natural for weaving RBG’s love of opera into the work.”

It only took a minute for Holmes to enthusiastically agree to write the play. He adds, “My wife is both a Barnard graduate (*RBG was Columbia Law School*) and got her

law degree at Rutgers, which was the first university to give Ruth Bader Ginsburg a position as a professor. And like Ruth and her husband Marty Ginsburg, we've been married since our college days, so we had an understanding of that kind of lifelong partnership. Life as a female attorney was easier for my wife because of the breakthroughs RBG made decades earlier, and many have been the times when my wife has educated me on the adroit reasoning and savvy understanding that attorney Ginsburg and then Justice Ginsburg brought to both the courtroom and her incredibly articulate Supreme Court opinions.

In that same first conversation, Stander and Holmes agreed that it would be crucial for a woman to direct the play, so that between the director and the actor portraying Ruth Bader Ginsburg, the creative team would be skewed toward insuring that a female perspective was put on the piece, and with Laley Lippard directing and Michelle Azar starring, Stander feels that the triumvirate of Ruth Bader Ginsburg's words, Laley Lippard's vision and Michelle Azar's portrayal will bring the mind, heart and spirit of a great American before the court and into the spotlight once again.

Linda Arce, September 19, 2022