



**Circle Players Tackles Provocative Teen Issues in  
*bare, A Pop Opera*  
May 23 – June 1, 2014**

Circle Players ends its 64<sup>th</sup> Season of shows with the edgy and socially relevant rock musical *bare, A Pop Opera*. The show deals with the gamut of issues faced by teens today-- sexuality, drug abuse, bullying, pregnancy and suicide—set in a religious school. For this production, Circle Players partners with Just Us @ Oasis Center, which provides support for high school students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ). Performances will be May 23-June 1, 2014, at Sarratt Cinema on the Vanderbilt University campus.

*Bare* centers on the secret romance that develops between two male students at a Catholic boarding school. The story is complicated by the boys' differing opinions on whether to come out with their relationship—whether to bare their souls or hide it from their friends and family. Meanwhile, their interactions with other students reveal the reality of teens coming of age in today's world.

"We're bringing that to life on the stage with all different sorts of issues -- people who are questioning their sexuality, kids with body issues, kids with substance-abuse issues, kids with self-esteem issues," says Heather Alexander, the show's director.

"I think it's a story that definitely needs to be told. There are still young people who are conflicted about these things every single day—some that don't feel free to talk about it. And opening these doors might give them an impetus or a place to consider all of these issues that are going on in their lives."

Alexander was determined to cast the show with youth actors who are teens or close to teenage rather than adults who look young. She says adults often remember only the good times of youth and blinded by nostalgia.

"Teenagers can authentically present it because those emotions are still there for them --all that flux of adolescence - they're still in it and they can do it best. All those issues are still very close to the surface. Many of the kids who auditioned for this show said 'This is my favorite show' or 'I've always wanted to do this show.' They're very passionate about this show and it connects with them in a lot of ways."

The two lead characters are played by Steven Griffin (Jason) and Christian Redden (Peter).

"Peter's best friend and roommate is Jason, and they're both closeted," explains Redden. "Peter wants to come out with Jason, but Jason doesn't. Peter really wants theirs to be an open gay relationship."

Griffin's character is the school's popular golden-boy—but with many internal struggles.

"I absolutely love the score and the story line and personally I connect with it on a lot of levels," says Griffin. "I have friends who have gone through a lot of what is in this play."

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The dynamic score of *bare, A Pop Opera* propels the emotional roller-coaster of the story—heartwarming, raw, funny at times; sad at others. The show has more singing than dialogue, demanding much from the young actors' vocal abilities. Other featured characters include Ivy (Harley Seger), the popular, pretty girl who wants to be Jason's girlfriend; Nadia (Rachel Jackson), Jason's twin sister who struggles with image and self-esteem issues using snark and humor; Matt (Mike Cahill) who is in hot pursuit of Ivy and in the process discovers the secret relationship between Jason and Peter; Sister Chantelle (Annie Bloemer) a sassy nun who is well-liked and empathetic with the students; and Father Mike (Chad David Webb), the priest who runs the school.

In portraying the priest/headmaster, Webb says he will draw from his personal experiences with sexuality and religion.

"I understand what it means to be told from day one that it is wrong; to fight back those feelings. There has always been a separation and everybody's going to have their personal beliefs. But it's very important that we understand how God really does love us and how he can use us however he has made us.

"Hopefully somebody who is suffering or hurting could see the show and feel secure," says Webb.

While religion is a central theme to *bare*, those involved in Circle's production point out the show is not condemning.

Harley Seger (Ivy) explains.

"This show is not anti-God or anti-gay; it's just pro-love. That's what I really love about the show and the music. It's not about hating anybody or picking a side. It's about acceptance."

In partnership with *bare, A Pop Opera*, Just Us @ Oasis Center will provide information and education about issues in the show. Just Us staff and youth will also participate in a TALK OUT after the Sunday, May 25<sup>th</sup>, matinee.

According to staff with Just Us, *bare* reveals the reality for many young people-- especially those who identify as LGBTQ and face family rejection.

"They are three times more likely to be at risk for substance abuse, sexually transmitted infections, and HIV infection," says Pam Sheffer, program coordinator of Just Us. "They are also six times more likely to have levels of high depression and eight times more likely to attempt suicide.

"Many of these young people reflect the characters that light up the stage in *bare* – young people that we are trying to change the odds for with positive youth empowerment filled with plenty of love and acceptance."

Circle's community partners for *bare* also include the Youth Ministry of Christ Church Cathedral in Nashville.

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“In my opinion, this show is outside of Circle’s wheelhouse, and I’m really glad they had the guts to do it,” says Director Alexander, who has performed as an actor in several past Circle Players’ productions.

“I hope people come away thinking that love between consenting people is good, and that we should be accepting of that love, whether or not it’s part of our own experience.”

The Circle production’s creative team includes Eddie Charlton as music director and Christopher Heinz as choreographer. Produced by Dr. Dara Talibah. Book by Jon Hartmere, Jr. and Damon Intrabartolo, lyrics by Hartmere and music by Intrabartolo.

The cast also includes: Melissa Garner Campbell (*Claire*, Peter’s mother), Leon Blandon (*Lucas*), Samantha Myers (*Tanya*), Erica Patterson (*Kyra*), Emily Whitlow (*Diane*), Amanda Smith (*Rory*), Jarvis Bynum (*Zack*), Caroline Spradlin, Hilary Morris and Brittany Maultbay.

Circle Players’ gives *bare, A Pop Opera* a rating of PG 13 due to harsh language, drug abuse and suicide. The show runs from May 23<sup>rd</sup> through June 1<sup>st</sup>. Performance times are Fridays – Saturdays, 7:30 pm; Sunday matinees (May 25<sup>th</sup> and June 1<sup>st</sup>), 3:00 pm.

Ticket prices are \$15 for adults, \$10 for students (all ages). On Friday, May 30<sup>th</sup>, Pay-What-You-Can at the door. No group rates are offered due to the already discounted ticket prices.

Tickets are available online via [www.circleplayers.net](http://www.circleplayers.net). Reservations can be made by emailing [boxoffice@circleplayers.net](mailto:boxoffice@circleplayers.net) or (615) 332-7529. Tickets are also on sale at the box office one hour before each performance at Sarratt Cinema on the Vanderbilt campus (2301 Vanderbilt Place; Nashville, TN 37240).

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