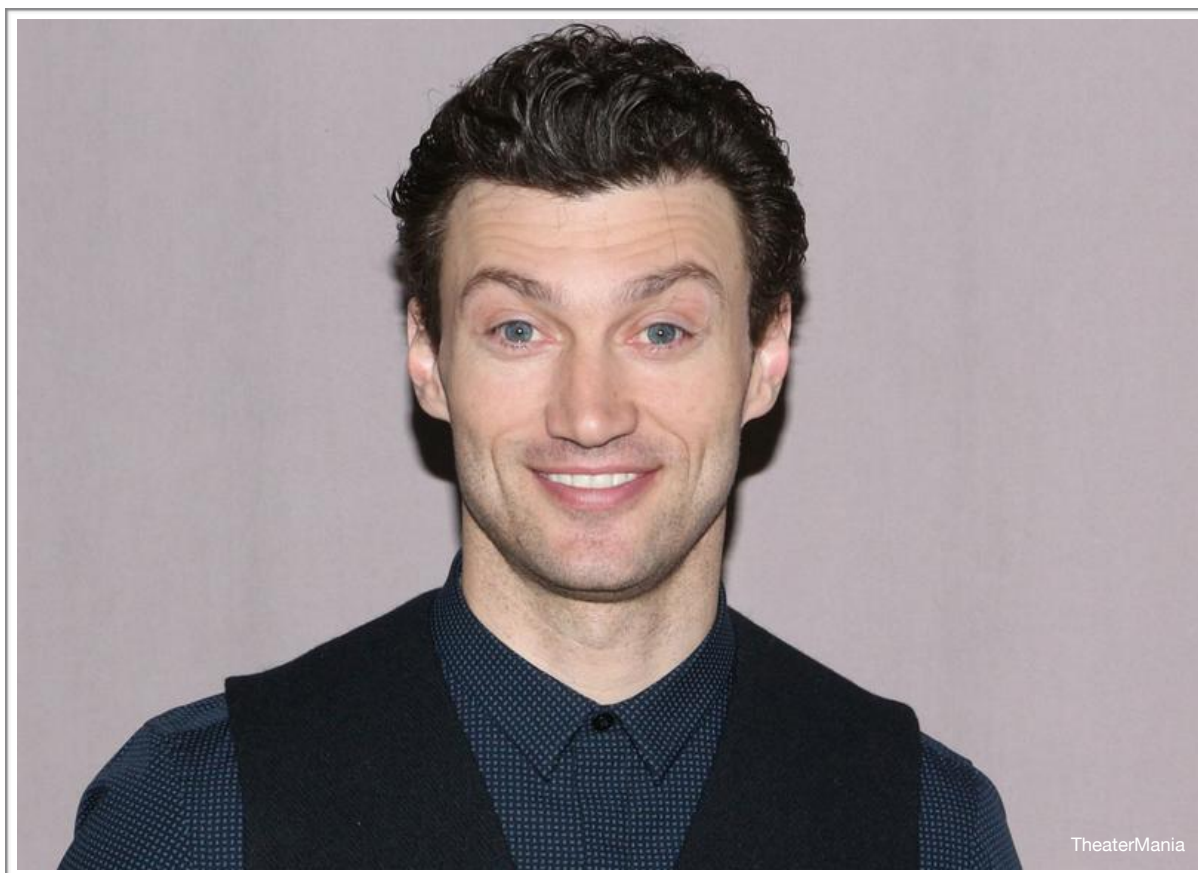

FROM B TO Z: CATCHING UP WITH BRYCE PINKHAM

By Sara Garcia



It's been a busy year...

for Broadway star Bryce Pinkham, and there's no stopping him now. After performing in two different Broadway shows (*A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder* and *The Heidi Chronicles*) this past year and garnering multiple nominations for his performances, I was lucky enough to catch up with him just after he received his second Outer Critic's Circle Award nomination and his first Drama League nomination for Distinguished Performance.

Although he was nominated last season for *Gentleman's Guide*, Pinkham was quick to note that the nominations haven't lost their magic yet. In fact, he equated his back-to-back nominations to entering a "weird Twilight Zone." While excited, he admitted that it feels a little different for him this time around, less stressful. This comes as no surprise, considering the stark contrast between the two works—one an energetic comedic musical, the other a heavy, feminist play. Still, Pinkham embraced the demanding challenges seemingly effortlessly.

His role in *Gentleman's Guide* as the murderous, unsuspecting social climber Monty Navarro was well received (earning him his first Tony nomination), so it came as quite the shock when his January departure was announced. "People forget," Pinkham detailed. "We opened in October, so it's not like I left right away." At the time of his departure, he'd been in the show for a year and four months.

That's quite a substantial run, not to mention the fact that *Gentleman's Guide* is a two and a half hour long sprint in a three-piece suit. "When you are onstage the entire time in a musical and losing a gallon of sweat a night, it wears on you," he recounted. "My body and my voice needed a break."

Even so, Pinkham was quite the trouper—known as "Iron Man" among those working on the show because he never missed a performance. He wasn't about to run off for just any show; the timing would have to be just right, as he didn't want to cut his journey as Monty short.

"I knew I wasn't going to take that break until something came along and the right project came along to take me away," he said. The change would mean an opportunity to do something different, and he was ready for it. "*Heidi Chronicles* presented itself as that project and it made all



Pinkham in his first scene with Elisabeth Moss

“It’s like a weird Twilight Zone...”

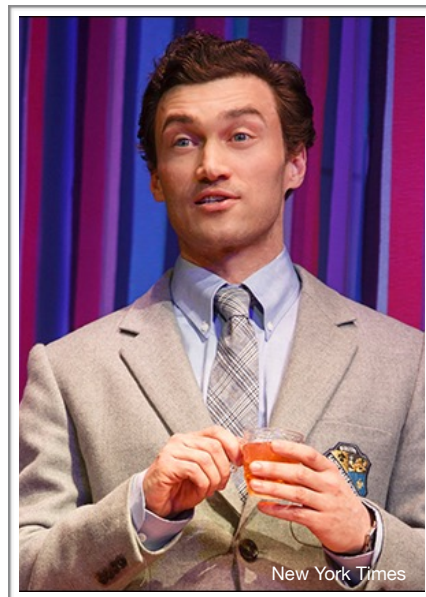
In terms of style and character, his role in *The Heidi Chronicles* is a major departure from the merry musical. One of Wendy Wasserstein’s most famous works, the semi-autobiographical play chronicles the story of Heidi Holland, an art historian, from high school in the late sixties through her career in 1989, taking a close look at the challenges that she and her friends face as they mature.

Under the accomplished direction of Tony award winning Pam MacKinnon (*Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf*), this spring's production of *Heidi* is the first Broadway revival of any of Wasserstein's works. For Pinkham, this was a dream come true.

"I've wanted to work with Pam MacKinnon for a while," he said. "I make lists of people I want to work with. It's not like I write them down and put them on the fridge, but I have a list of directors that I want to work with at some point, and Pam Mackinnon was high on that list."

Pinkham is joined by a star-studded cast: Elisabeth Moss (*Mad Men*) in the titular role and Jason Biggs (*Orange is the New Black, American Pie*) as the abrasive but charismatic Scoop Rosenbaum. Pinkham is taking on the role of pediatrician, Peter Patrone, one of Heidi's best friends. Though nothing new nowadays, Peter sparked quite the conversation back in the 1980s, before it was cool to have a gay best friend.

"I didn't know at the time, but Wendy wrote Peter Patrone based on a few of her best friends and she kind of gave her best friends some of the best stuff to do in the show," Pinkham said of his role as Peter, describing it as a wonderful part. "He is just so loved, not only by Heidi,



Pinkham as Peter Patrone

but also the audience just seems to love him, and I'm very lucky that I get to do that role every night. He's such a witty, clever, funny guy, but also with a deep sensitivity and compassion for others—it's a great role."

Speaking of deep, the play tackles some powerful and demanding themes, many of which are still substantial questions now, twenty-six years after Wasserstein wrote it. Focusing primarily on the feminist movement, Wasserstein's work deals with the choices that many women, and men, are forced to



Pinkham and Moss in a particularly tense scene between Peter and Heidi

make when balancing work and family. It's not an easy job, but Wasserstein's writing delivers the subject matter with a delicate but precise hand.

Pinkham, however, dug further beneath the surface to find a deeper meaning in the play. "I think it's actually a mistake to label the play a 'feminist play' because it's so much more than the feminist movement, which Heidi gets caught up in," he explained. "I think it's about friends growing through time together and the challenges that they face in keeping each other

important in their lives. I think it's about people who make choices and then look back at those choices and evaluate what those choices did for them."

He even admitted to a bit of a change in his own perspective, noting that he previously commended the show for its female playwright, director, and star. Working on the play made him realize that "It's also just a really good playwright, a really good director, and a really good leading lady." Therein lies the heart of the show, exactly what Wendy Wasserstein wanted her audience to see. "I think Wendy had no interest in being labeled as a female playwright," he noted thoughtfully. "She wanted to have all the chances that every other person should have to be a playwright on Broadway. She had to do a lot of good work to get herself there, and I believe that others, be they male or any other version of our species should be allowed to fulfill that potential if they have the talent."

"This play has made everyone who's seen it think about these very issues."

Following in the footsteps of Wasserstein, Pinkham, a self-proclaimed "humanist," understands the challenges that can come with the struggle to create equilibrium between career and family. He keenly feels the warring emotions that Wasserstein was trying to evoke and investigate through *Heidi* on a personal level, and lamented that acting is just like any other career.

"In order to progress to a place you want to be professionally, there's always gonna be sacrifices on a personal level, just in terms of the amount of time you can devote to creating a little nest," he said. It's a real issue that hits home for many people, possibly more so now that it seems to affect both men and women. He believes that "this play has made every one who's seen it and every one who's worked on it [think] about these very issues."

On a lighter note, when asked about where he sees himself in five to ten years, Pinkham was much more playful. After mumbling his way through his age, figuring that in five years he'll be "thirty-grumble" and in ten years he'll be "forty-grumble," he ultimately came to a rather simple conclusion. "I think in five years I'll have a dog. How about that?" He laughed. "And in the next ten years, maybe I'll add a human life I can be responsible for."

Professionally, he hopes to move his acting to the screen in the next ten years. "I'd like to get in front of more cameras and do some more on-camera acting, just to get some better practice at it, because I've spent time on stage and I feel like I've gotten a chance to get much better in that regard," he said. Much like with his recent change up, he'd like to give something else a shot. "I'd really like to spend some time getting to know different media as well. I'd like the chance to try something else and open those doors as well. So hopefully in ten years I'll have done that and can look back on ten years of trying to improve that skill set."

The much more imminent, post-*Heidi* future is also a little hazy. "I don't know precisely," he responded when asked what was next. "I'm a big believer in crossing bridges when you get to them and not before. I've sort of given up trying to worry too much about those things and just concern myself with going in and doing the best I can each night for that audience. I guess the

short answer is ‘I don’t know.’” His long answer is a bit more complicated, though he did say that he felt his “time at Gentleman’s Guide is not necessarily finished.” Still, he decided that it was best not to make any presumptions about the future of *Gentleman’s Guide* and whether or not their timeline would allow for his return.

Fortunately, Pinkham seems to have a pretty laid-back attitude and is open to new things. In an ideal world, he said, he would be able to do both *Gentleman’s Guide* and something new.

“I derive great joy from helping people...”

Whether play or musical, he doesn’t have a preference. “I would like a career that allows me to do many things,” Pinkham explained. “In order to get that, I felt the need to branch out and show people that I can be in plays on Broadway, too.”

After recounting the three jobs that he worked before acting (an English tutor, a waiter, and a children’s soccer coach), he noted that it was all “an extremely humbling experience and it will motivate you to find work as an actor because you never want to go back.” Much more importantly, however, his love for helping others is evident.

“I would probably find some way to teach. I love being in the classroom,” he replied when asked what he would be doing if he weren’t acting. “I love teaching students, whether they’re acting students or students of another discipline. I enjoy the conversations that come up in a classroom.” Additionally, he has a passion for helping preserve the environment, saying that he would want something that would make him feel “like [he] was on the front lines of trying to save this big blue planet we live on.”



Pinkham working with Zara Aina in Madagascar

Pinkham, who started acting during his youth in northern California, has a deep love for helping children through theater. “I’d probably be working for a not-for-profit with kids,” he continued with my question. “I have this organization that I co-founded to help kids in Madagascar (Zara Aina). If I wasn’t [sic] also trying to continue my acting career, I’d probably be doing that full time.” The non-profit is designed to help at-risk children reach their full potential through the dramatic arts. “I derive great joy from helping people and from using theater as a tool of empowerment,” he said. “I know that was a long answer to a short question, but you know, somewhere in there you’ll find the answer.”

That I did, Mr. Pinkham. That I did.

Subsequent to our interview, *The Heidi Chronicles* announced that they would be closing on May 3rd.