

Fun Home

Score by Jeanine Tesori
Book and Lyrics by Lisa Kron

Saturday, March 25, 2017, from 7:15 p.m. to 11 p.m.
Ahmanson Theatre, Los Angeles

KNOW BEFORE THE SHOW

- ◉ *Fun Home* is the first mainstream musical centered around a young lesbian.
- ◉ Before it was a Tony Award-winning musical, *Fun Home* was a best-selling memoir in comics form by Alison Bechdel.
- ◉ Bechdel coined the “Bechdel Test” in her long-running comic *Dykes to Watch Out For*.

FUN HOME

The musical *Fun Home* is an adaptation by Lisa Kron and Jeanine Tesori of Alison Bechdel’s 2006 memoir-in-comics of the same name. It is about Bechdel’s coming of age, including her discovery of her lesbian identity, and her relationship with her gay father.

The musical version opened off-Broadway at the Public Theater in 2013 and on Broadway in 2015. It swept the Tony Awards that year, winning Best Musical, Best Book of a Musical, Best Original Score, Best Leading Actor in a Musical, and Best Direction of a Musical.

ALISON BECHDEL

Cartoonist Alison Bechdel has been an underground favorite for decades for her long-running comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For* (1983–2008), one of the earliest ongoing representations of lesbians in popular culture. She came to mainstream critical and commercial success with the 2006 publication of *Fun Home*, a memoir in comics form, which spent weeks on the *New York Times* best-seller list. She published a second graphic memoir, *Are You My Mother?*, in 2012.

Bechdel has said, “The secret subversive goal of my work is to show that women, not just lesbians, are regular human beings.”

THE BECHDEL TEST

The Bechdel Test is a feminist litmus test for films, TV shows, books, and other works of fiction. The test asks: Does it feature at least two women who talk to each other about something other than a man or boy? If not, it fails the Bechdel Test.

MUSICAL THEATRE AND QUEER CULTURE

Musical theatre has long been associated with gay culture. Gay men are key figures in the history of modern American musicals—Leonard Bernstein, Cole Porter, Arthur Laurents, Stephen Sondheim. And the genre’s often campy aesthetic has become a kind of national vernacular among American gay men. But musical theatre has not historically been as much of a lesbian thing. The last few decades have seen lesbian characters in a few musicals, such as *Rent* and *Falsettoland*, but *Fun Home* is the first mainstream musical to feature a young lesbian as the protagonist.

CENTER THEATRE GROUP

The nonprofit Center Theatre Group is one of the largest theatre companies in the United States, offering year-round programming at the Ahmanson Theatre, the Mark Taper Forum, and the Kirk Douglas Theatre. The company has been producing theatre for more than 50 years, and regularly programs award-winning revivals as well as world premieres. More than 750,000 people attend CTG shows each year.

THE AHMANSON THEATRE

The Ahmanson Theatre, which opened in 1967, is one of four venues at the Los Angeles Music Center, one of the largest performing-arts centers in the United States. Across the street from Walt Disney Concert Hall (home of the Los Angeles Philharmonic) and sharing a plaza with the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion (home of LA Opera and Gloriana Kaufman Presents Dance at the Music Center) and the smaller Mark Taper Forum, where intimate and innovative theatre pieces are featured, the Ahmanson brings large-scale theatrical productions to Los Angeles, including many world premieres.

Built from 1962 to 1967, the Ahmanson was designed by the important Los Angeles architect Welton Becket (1902–1969). Becket designed the Music Center in the style of New Formalism, which emphasized geometric shapes. Becket was also the designer of LA landmarks such as the Capitol Records building, the Beverly Hilton Hotel, and the Cinerama Dome. The Ahmanson underwent a major renovation in the 1990s.

The Ahmanson Theatre is named for businessman and philanthropist Howard F. Ahmanson Sr., who was instrumental in funding its construction. Ahmanson earned his fortune during the Great Depression selling fire insurance for homes under foreclosure, and also invested in real estate and oil. In the mid-20th century, he was an important figure in Los Angeles cultural life, serving on the board of the Museum of Science and Industry and supporting the founding of the Los Angeles County Art Institute (now Otis) and the construction of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Music Center. Ahmanson also helped fund a biosciences research center at USC.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- ◉ In the *New York Times*, Ben Brantley wrote, “*Fun Home* isn’t just a coming-out story or a coming-of-age story. Its universality comes from its awareness of how we never fully know even those closest to us.” Do you agree that we never fully know even the people we are closest to? What are the implications of this in your life? In human relationships in general?
- ◉ Think of the last three movies or TV shows you saw—do they pass the Bechdel Test? Or try it another way: how far back in your own watching or reading history do you have to go to find three titles that pass the Bechdel Test?
- ◉ If musical theatre has been so substantially created by queer people, why do you think it is only recently that mainstream musicals are centering queer protagonists?

IF YOU LIKED *FUN HOME*, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT ...

- ◉ The graphic memoir: *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* by Alison Bechdel
- ◉ Alison Bechdel’s long-running comic *Dykes to Watch Out For*
- ◉ Other musicals about queer identities and experience such as *Avenue Q*, *Rent*, and *Falsettoland*



Alessandra Baldacchino as Small Alison and Robert Petkoff as Bruce in *Fun Home*.
Photo: Joan Marcus



The Ahmanson Theatre, Los Angeles



Avenue Q

DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

Archivist **LONI SHIBUYAMA** of the ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives has selected the following resources to help you learn more about tonight's performance. You can access electronic resources, which include the journals and databases listed below, through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at libraries.usc.edu.

Recommended books

Fun Home: a Family Tragicomic (2006)

By Alison Bechdel

Leavey Library: PN6727.B3757 Z46 2006

Are You My Mother?: A Comic Drama (2012)

By Alison Bechdel

Doheny Memorial Library: PN6727.B3757 Z46 2012

Family Trouble: Memorists on the Hazards and Rewards of Revealing Family (2013)

Edited by Joy Castro

Doheny Memorial Library: CT25 .F36 2013

Arresting Development: Comics at the Boundaries of Literature (2016)

By Christopher Pizzino

eBook available online at libraries.usc.edu

The Indelible Alison Bechdel: Confessions, Comix, and Miscellaneous Dykes to Watch Out For (1998)

Doheny Memorial Library: NC1429.B3513 A4 1998

(Additional *Dykes to Watch Out For* titles are available at Doheny Memorial Library and ONE Archives.)

Recommended journals

- Feminist Media Studies
- Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics
- Journal of Lesbian Studies
- Journal of Modern Literature
- Women's Studies Quarterly

Recommended databases and indices

- Alternative Press Index
- Arts and Humanities Full Text
- GenderWatch
- International Index to the Performing Arts Full Text
- LGBT Life with Full Text

