



## **Director's Download: Michelle Chin on *Dear Evan Hansen*, Coming-of-Age Stories, and the Power of Being Found**

By Elizabeth Montgomery

*Dear Evan Hansen* takes the stage at The Phoenix Theatre Company this summer, directed by Michelle Chin in what she describes as a bucket-list production.

Featuring a score by newly minted EGOT winners Benj Pasek and Justin Paul, the musical has become one of the defining works of contemporary musical theatre, earning acclaim for its emotional honesty and songs that continue to resonate with audiences around the world.

This production also features Hatty Ryan King\*, who previously played Zoe Murphy on the national tour, bringing her experience with the role to the Hormel Theatre stage June 10 through August 2.

Chin is no stranger to The Phoenix Theatre Company. In addition to directing *Dear Evan Hansen*, she serves as the organization's Summer Camp Director, Festival of New Works Director, and Resident Dramaturg. But this production holds a special place in her heart.

We sat down with Chin ahead of rehearsals to talk about what makes *Dear Evan Hansen* endure, the challenges of directing a story where both teenagers and parents struggle to

connect, and why she believes the musical resonates even more deeply today than it did when it first premiered.

**Q: For anyone unfamiliar with the show, how would you describe the story?**

**Chin:** It's essentially about a high school senior, there's some tragedy that occurs at his high school, and then there's a series of miscommunications that result in a spiraling of lies that catch Evan Hansen in this complicated web, and he sort of is complacent, and it results in a lot of different things that happen to him, both positive and negative, and how he handles that and how the community around him handles that, and how social media plays into that as well.

**Q: You've described social media as almost a character in the show. How does that come to life on stage?**

**Chin:** Yes, I like to call social media the ninth character within the show. Our set really is functioning to allow video and projection to be at the forefront, to allow that character to really be palpable with our actors and with the audience. So it's fairly open. We have a series of LED screens that fly in and out, and we have scrim surfaces that come in and out of the space to be able to allow projection to either isolate on those scrims or to overlay to feel all-encompassing for those characters, but it moves very quickly. Everything is either something that can move in and out from the sky or on and off stage and via wagons for our furniture units to change space very quickly and keep the plot moving.

**Q: What's the biggest challenge in balancing the show's humor with its heavier emotional moments?**

**Chin:** The way that it is written is so lovely because there is a lot of humor in it, and I think if there wasn't, it would be too much of an emotional gut punch, and I don't think that audiences would want to enjoy it in the same way. The characters of Alana and Jared are sources of a lot of the comedy in the show, particularly in the first act.

But even Evan is so charming. It's interesting because if you just think about this character that is going down this spiral of lies, it's very much an antihero that you're supposed to be rooting for, and it seems that you would immediately be like, well, why did he do all of these things? But I think there's something about Evan, and you recognize that he's just a kid and that every decision that he makes, even if he's telling this lie and he shouldn't, it is just coming from a place of wanting to help others and then getting stuck. It's to prevent

conflict. It's to prevent arguments. And I think that we all can identify, as everyone goes through that phase when they're teenagers, of having either so much filter or no filter at all. And I think that brings a lot of levity to the piece, and also allows you to really connect with and understand where Evan's mind is at.

**Q: What excites you most about bringing this show to Phoenix?**

**Chin:** I have loved this show for a very, very long time. I'm absolutely delighted and honored to be doing the Arizona premiere of the piece. It's mind-boggling to me that when Pasek and Paul, the composers and lyricists, and Steven Levenson, the book writer, they were all around 24 years old when they started writing this piece. And I think that because they were young people themselves, they just had such a great understanding of how to accurately write adolescence.

I think especially now, coming out of a global pandemic, we were just the most disconnected I think the world has ever been. And I'm so excited that more people are going to get to experience this story. I know so many people that have seen the show, and these characters are so beautifully written and they feel so human and so real. There's so much detail to them, but yet there's also certain details that are left out that allows them to feel even more universal, so that someone can see the show and say, I know Evan, I know who that kid is, or, that was me. That is me.

And I think that is such a beautiful way to then start a conversation. Maybe it's too hard for, especially a young person, to admit that they're having anxiety or depression or loneliness. And by going and seeing a piece like this, they can say, well, I really understand Connor and he's like me, and he thinks like me. That can open up a door to allow even more conversations to happen, whether that be leading down a path to get somebody help, or if it's just a great way to then help some of those lost parents or lost kids be able to see eye to eye and have art be the door that opens that avenue for them.

**Details**

**Dates:** June 10 – August 2, 2026

**Location:** The Phoenix Theatre Company, Dr. Stacie J. and Richard J Stephenson Theatre  
Tickets: [phoenixtheatre.com](http://phoenixtheatre.com) | (602) 254-2151

Audio Description and American Sign Language interpretation are available for this production. Performance dates and details can be found at [phoenixtheatre.com](http://phoenixtheatre.com).

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