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Charlottesville Musician Writes "Max Understood"; A Musical About Autism

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Posted: 7:12 PM Jul 12, 2009
Last Updated: 7:13 PM Jul 12, 2009
Reporter: Bianca Spinosa
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July 12, 2009

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The challenges that [parents](#) of autistic children face everyday is a story that often goes untold until now. A [Charlottesville](#) man who wrote and produced a musical based on his autistic son is receiving national acclaim for his play, "Max Understood."

The producer and co-composer, Michael Rasbury, named the play "Max Understood" after his own son. Rasbury feels Max understands his parents, but has a different sense of normalcy.

The musical has been selected for the prestigious [New York](#) Music Theater Festival this fall. It runs September 28-October 18 in Manhattan, NY.

Michael Rasbury has experience making music as an assistant professor of sound design with the University of Virginia Drama Department, but his new musical tells a personal story.

"We've done two stage readings of the piece, and the very first time I had the chance to hear this work aloud and sung aloud, I felt a little emotional. As if I were seeing a slight replica of my life," says Rasbury.

Being a parent to an autistic child is a constant learning experience for Michael and his wife Marci.

"He's my Buddha, and the best teacher I could ever ask for," says Max's mother, Marci Rasbury.

The play takes Max's fixations, like the sounds of his favorite presidents toy, and turns it into music.

"I literally put a mic on this speaker, and sampled everything it did so I could control it," says Rasbury.

The end result is an original song, mixing the sounds of the toy with sounds of a full orchestra with cellos, violins, and violas.

"Sometimes the music is motivated by machines and dreams, so the music may cause time to slow down and stop," says Rasbury, as he explains that his musical is more of a musical poem. "We may not get anywhere in the song, but rather sit and experience it in repetitions."

By telling the story of their own experiences with autism, the Rasburys hope to show that everyone is a little different, and the definition of normal isn't always clear.

Although the play is already written and composed, it costs \$15,000 to pay for casting and rehearsals, and to enter into the New York Music Theater Festival, so the Rasburys are looking for donations.

You can donate at Michael's website, www.michaelrasbury.com or send an email to Michael Rasbury at michaelrasbury@michaelrasbury.com. Eventually you'll be able to log onto the New York Music Theater Festival website and select "Max Understood" to place a donation.

Rasbury hopes to one day put on the play right here in Charlottesville.

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