

NEW YORK, FRIDAY, MAY 16, 2014

# The New York Times

## Weekend Arts

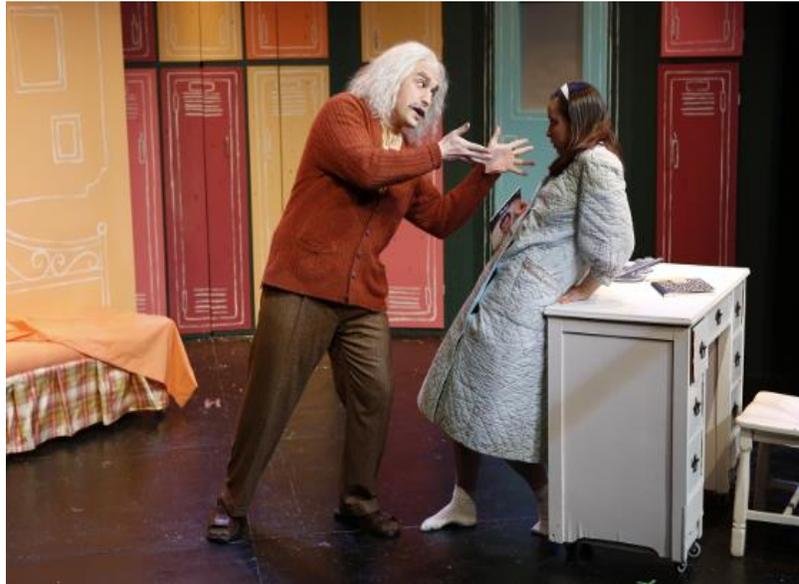
### 'Dear Albert Einstein'

You can find all sorts of things in a middle school student's locker: soggy sandwiches, fetid gym socks, crumpled PTA notices. But nobody would expect what's crammed into Susan Fisher's locker: Albert Einstein himself.

This grizzled scientist pops out, to great comic effect and to Susan's consternation, in "Dear Albert Einstein," a witty new musical for young audiences from Making Books Sing. (This organization usually adapts children's books, but this is an original story.) Einstein's not a ghost — the year is 1954 — nor has his advanced mastery of physics enabled him to be in two places at once. "I'm more of a visual manifestation of your social anxieties," he explains to Susan.

Susan (Sarah Lasko) has these badly. Gifted in math and science, she used to worship Einstein, and even wrote to him monthly. But, as she notes in a brisk epistolary tune, she won't be doing that anymore. Starting seventh grade in a new city (New York), she's determined to join the cool crowd. And nobody cool ever belonged to the Math League. But Einstein (Evan Teich), at least in Susan's subconscious, isn't so easily dismissed.

The danger in sacrificing your ideals for popularity isn't a new



theme, but the musical's authors, Russ Kaplan and Sara Wordsworth, make it feel fresh. They don't minimize Susan's pain over being a social outcast at her old school, and they portray the relationship between her and her twin, Steven (Michael Lorz), as a realistic mix of loving loyalty and seething tension.

The show also avoids simplistic dichotomies. Susan may miss math and hate the empty attitudes of her new best friend, Judy (Lindsay Bayer), but she learns that she really loves cheerleading. And her hip English teacher, Miss D. (Angela Travino), rediscovers the merits of "Ivanhoe" when she's forced to abandon teaching the work of poets like Ginsberg. Being yourself doesn't mean never expanding your horizons.

Directed by Josh Penzell, "Dear Albert Einstein" usually strikes the right balance between seriousness — discrimination against women in science is far from over — and fun. The young adult actors deserve praise, as does Mr. Kaplan's rich score, which ranges from '50s-style rock and jazz to a lilting waltz. The show's final number may even seem a little *too* upbeat for Susan's situation. But like Einstein, you won't want to do anything less than cheer her on.

(Friday at 10:30 a.m. and 7 p.m.; Saturday at 2 and 7 p.m.; Sunday at 2 p.m.; Theater 3, 311 West 43rd Street, Clinton, 646-250-1178, [makingbookssing.org](http://makingbookssing.org); \$25; \$45 for premium seats.)

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