

Notes from the director:

In 1970, 150,000 children in the United States took stimulant medications, according to a February 2014 article in *Scientific American*. By 2007, that number had risen to 2.7 million, leading the author to ask, "Do 2.7 Million Kids Really Need Ritalin?" In March, 2013, the *New York Times* reported that "6.4 million children ages 4 through 17 had received an A.D.H.D. diagnosis at some point in their lives, a 16% increase since 2007 and a 41% rise in the past decade." Two thirds of those diagnosed were medicated. The article went on to say "these rates fuel growing concern among many doctors that the A.D.H.D. diagnosis and its medication are overused in American children."

Discussions of A.D.H.D. are often fraught with controversy and misunderstandings. *Scientific American* cites studies which show 70% of the incidence of A.D.H.D. can be traced to genetics, but no one has identified a specific gene or set of genes responsible, and environmental influences can trigger or worsen the condition. Our play correctly claims that the definition of A.D.H.D. has been loosened in recent years, leading to more children being diagnosed. Dr. Sanford Newmark of the University of California/ San Francisco believes "even with the loosened definition, we are diagnosing too many children."

I originally proposed *Distracted* for South Stage production, because I thought it was well written, funny and serious at the same time, topical, and because it offered gutsy, interesting roles for our students to play - not because of any personal connection with A.D.H.D. or because I thought South Stage needed to make a statement. In rehearsal, however, it is impossible not to identify with Mama and Dad's anxiety as they struggle, not always together, to do what's best for their child, impossible not to cringe with Jesse as he struggles to be the son he thinks his parents want. Mama is surrounded by characters more than willing to tell her what to do, and the play suggests modern culture itself is, well, distracted. In the end, *Distracted* is a play about people, not about disease. It asks its questions in achingly personal terms.

As you are about to discover, this is a remarkable cast. Their discipline, humor, generosity, and joy in rehearsal have been more than any director could ask for. The design team has proven especially creative and professional. I am deeply grateful to be working with each of these actors and designers and excited to invite you, the audience, finally to share in our provocative story. Thank you for being here, for completing the circle of live interaction unique to theatre, and welcome to *Distracted!*

Jim Honeyman