



Pittsburgh playwright's musical 'Local Singles' opens Off-Broadway

Nick Navari's original musical premiered Off-Broadway at The Players Theatre on Jan. 9 in New York's Greenwich village for a five week run through Feb. 9



SAMUEL LONG ✓

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

slong@post-gazette.com ✕

JAN 10, 2025

5:30 AM

Nick Navari wrote a large chunk of his first musical with a voice recorder during the commute down I-279 to his finance job in Downtown Pittsburgh.

“I would hit record before I started my car and then just record myself for the 30-minute drive just singing and talking through the script,” Navari, a Pine native, said. “Then on my lunch breaks I would go to Einstein Bros., right on Grant Street, and I would listen to myself, what I recorded that morning, type it all out, and do the same thing at night.”

At the time, which was summer of 2019, he said he had never written anything before and had little experience in the theater industry. Previously, he had done high school theater at the Aquinas Academy of Pittsburgh and music directed two college shows while attending Kenyon College from 2014 to 2018.

After graduating, the lack of theater in his life left a “hole,” he said. Eventually, he figured the best way to try and get back into the art was by writing something original and sending it to “a lot of people.” Navari is responsible for his play’s book, music and lyrics.

After hundreds of emails, the show, dubbed “[Local Singles](#),” found its first home in 2021 at the New Hazlett Theater on the North Side. But due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the original version of the play was streamed online. It saw its first in-person run at Greensburg’s Stage Right! in February 2022. The show also ran in Denver in August 2023 and again in Charlotte, North Carolina in January 2024.

That success allowed him to quit his job in finance and work a two-year tenure as a producing artistic director at The Strand Theater in Zelienople before moving to New York for his next endeavor.

And now, “Local Singles,” along with Navari’s career, has grown even more. His first-ever musical premiered Off-Broadway at The Players Theatre on Jan. 9 in New York’s Greenwich village for a five-week run through Feb. 9. The production is part of a residency Navari is undergoing with Players.

“I literally pinch myself all the time,” Navari said. “I have nothing against finance, but I could have worked there forever and I would have moved up and I would have done blah blah blah. The other thing, too, is I was never going to be one to move to New York with 10 bucks in my pocket and hope something happens. Rather than even audition for a musical in Pittsburgh, I decided to write one just because I thought that would be the only way that I could.”

The show itself, a comedy set in a Pittsburgh YMCA, explores the lives of five people as they participate in the last remaining support group for lonely people.

Over 3,500 people auditioned for “Local Singles” at The Players Theatre — something that he said “stunned” him. The process took a long time, but

Navari, the show's director and the assistant director were able to narrow down the number to around 10 people for each role before in-person auditions started.

Two Pittsburghers were chosen in the final draw, one of them being 29-year-old Gabe DeRose, who grew up in the South Hills and worked on the original in-person run of "Local Singles" in Greensburg.

"The caliber is higher and I just feel that the stakes are a bit higher too, because the audiences that will be seeing the Off-Broadway show can potentially help the show later down the road," DeRose said.

In the Greensburg run, DeRose played the character of Wes — a "sweet but skeptical guy coming down from a breakup" — but in the latest show, he is a swing, or a multiple-role understudy, for the characters of Wes and Richard.

"I really found a strong connection with Wes — he and I are actually pretty similar which is great," DeRose said. "Hopping back into that mindset of Wes was easier than it was to hop into the mindset of Richard, the other character I'm playing, because I haven't ever done it before."

DeRose grew up learning performance at the Center for Theater Arts in Mt. Lebanon, making it a hobby he eventually took to Point Park University for his undergraduate degree. After auditioning around Pittsburgh for a while, he moved to New York and eventually found himself acting in "Local Singles."

"Nick is a genius. I think that it's really incredible that he did all of this himself — it is insane," DeRose said. "I grew so much respect for him just on that alone and then on top of that, he's the nicest guy, easiest to work with, will do anything for you if it makes you feel better about the show."

And much of "Local Singles" was crafted with passion, Navari said.

"When I was sitting in the Westin on Grant Street on my lunch break one day writing this, I was rooting for these characters. And, of course, the hope is the audience roots for them too, and I guess that's where it comes from: knowing what love is and hoping that these people can feel it as well.

"That's the goal, right? That the story sticks with people. On top of that, we're telling a story about love and it's about loss, but I think it's showing a

lot of faith in humanity and showing how a community can come together.”

First Published: January 10, 2025, 5:30 a.m.

Updated: January 10, 2025, 7:30 p.m.



Samuel Long is a Post-Gazette features reporter, covering a wide array of cultural interests around Western Pennsylvania. A graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, he has covered a range of topics, from the environment to the arts.

✉ slong@post-gazette.com

✕ [@samuel_long16](https://twitter.com/samuel_long16)

Limited Time Offer

8 weeks of unlimited access for only 99¢!

GET OFFER
