


# Interview: Fountain Theatre's Simon Levy Shares His LIFESPAN OF A FACT

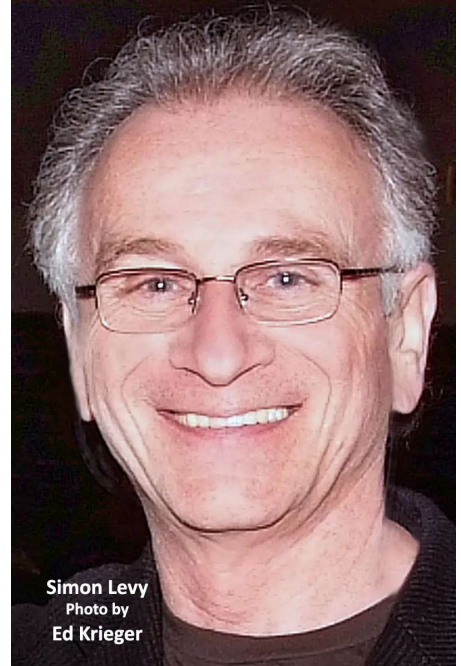
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by Gil Kaan

The Fountain Theatre west coast premieres Jeremy Kareken, David Murrell and Gordon Farrell's *The Lifespan of a Fact* opening February 18, 2023 (with previews starting February 15th). Fountain Theatre's producing director Simon Levy directs the cast of Ron Bottitta, Inger Tudor and Jonah Robinson.

Simon took some time between his rehearsals to give me some insight to the behind-the-scenes of *Lifespan* and the Fountain.

**Thank you for taking the time for this interview, Simon! I am so glad I finally get the chance to interview you after seeing so many of your incredible, tear-jerking productions especially *Daniel's Husband* and *The Normal Heart*. So, what factors influenced you to west coast premiere *The Lifespan of a Fact*?**



The plays I'm attracted to wrestle with contemporary societal issues. I'd been looking for a project that theatricalized this "post-factual" world we're living in. What is Truth, and is it negotiable? But I didn't want something politically on-the-nose. When I read *Lifespan*, I fell in love with it because it's based on a true story and tackles these issues through three wonderfully contrasting, funny, smart, and compulsive/obsessive characters who have vastly differing takes on this question of "truth" and "artistic freedom" in publishing. As we watch the play, we can't help but think about what's going on in politics, journalism, and social media today.

**Had you seen the 2018 production with Bobby Cannavale, Cherry Jones and Daniel Radcliffe?**

I did not see the Broadway production but heard wonderful things about it from friends who did see it.

**What would your three-line pitch for *Lifespan* be?**

Based on a true story. When a renowned essayist writes a literary nonfiction essay about a teenager who commits suicide by jumping off the top of the Stratosphere Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas. Are "facts" and "truth" about his life and what happened negotiable? Or is it okay to make stuff up, change some details, for the sake of a good story? Where is the line between accuracy and fiction? (Think of all the "biographical" movies that play loosely with the "facts" to make the story more dramatic.)

**You've directed and produced over 120 productions in Los Angeles and San Francisco, directing Ron Bottitta in *The Children at The Fountain*. Who have you worked with before of the other *Lifespan* cast or creatives?**

Working with Ron Bottitta again is a delight. Such a gifted, organic actor. And it's great to work again with Marc Antonio Pritchett, who's doing Sound; and Michael Mullen, who's doing Costumes. The rest of the team are new to me.



Ron Bottitta, Inger Tudor & Jonah Robinson  
Photo by Cooper Bates

**What aspects of a script attract you to want to direct it?**

I'm attracted to plays that resonate with contemporary issues, especially in a poetic/realistic way. Plays that make us think about something in a different way. That open our heart. That "change" us, no matter how slightly. Plays that wake us up or re-awaken us. I'm always looking for that poetic gesture, that opportunity to use all the tools of theatre (lighting, video, sound) to draw the audience into the inner lives of the characters and the world of the play. I believe in using those tools and being bold about it. And I love plays that have complex characters - characters that are messy, with deep secrets and deep wells - characters who surprise us and reflect back to us who we are. We are such messed up, beautiful, complex beings, we humans. I love plays that "hold that mirror up to nature."

**What originally convinced you to join *The Fountain Theatre* as its producing director in 1993, three years after its inception?**

When I first joined the Fountain to help "rescue" a show nearly 30 years ago, I knew immediately it was my artistic home because the people there - Stephen, Deborah, Scott, and all the others over the years - are people of the heart; people who do theatre for the right reasons. They are artists who love this art form. It's not about their ego. It's about the art. They are family.

**What aspects of a script attract you to include it in *The Fountain Theatre* season?**

Socially/politically-conscious plays that wrestle with contemporary issues and have a deep heart.

**This is a *Sophie's Choice* question: what is *The Fountain Theatre* production closest to your heart?**

Like a father, you love all your children, for various reasons. So many of the productions I've done at the Fountain stand out for me, but I would have to say *The Normal Heart* holds a special place in my heart for very personal reasons.



Ron Bottitta, Jonah Robinson & Inger Tudor  
Photo by Cooper Bates

**You are now a successful theatre director, producer, playwright and screenwriter. What did you want to be growing up?**

Hmmm? First, I wanted to be a Marine. Then a fighter pilot. Then a spy. Then a poet. Then a writer. Then a sax player. Then an actor. Then a director. I didn't achieve the first three, but I've dabbled in the others.

**If you had to choose just one of your four professions to pursue for the rest of your life, which one would it be? And why?**

A director. I love being in rehearsal, playing in the playground, creating with gifted people.

**You have earned countless awards and honors in your career. Is there one particular one that stands up above the rest? And why?**

Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle Award for Lifetime Achievement in Directing. It's nice to know your work has been affective and noticed.

**What is the status of your latest writing projects Two Hearts and Heartland, America?**

Both are doing the rounds, though I've moved on to other writing projects.



**What do you have planned for The Fountain's upcoming season?**

After Lifespan, we'll be doing a 40th anniversary production of Last Summer at Bluefish Cove this summer. Our fall show is still TBA. (we're waiting to see which direction our country is going in). We'll also be doing a Chamber Music Series, a Jazz at the Fountain Series, and Flamenco. Some of these will be on our outdoor stage. And we'll continue our Education Outreach Program, Fountain Voices, introducing and teaching the next generation the beauty and thrill of live theatre.

**Will you be directing any of these shows?**

No plans at the moment.

**What is in the near future for Simon Levy?**

I'm supposed to go on a long-delayed world cruise in early 2024. There is much to see and explore out there... if the COVID gods (and world events) are kind.

**Thank you again, Simon! I look forward to checking out your Lifespan.**

For tickets to the live performances of The Lifespan of a Fact through April 2, 2023; click on the button below:

[Click Here to Buy Tickets](#)