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Dav Pilkey's Dog Man Takes to the Stage—and the Road

By Sally Lodge | Jul 11, 2019

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Dav Pilkey with Dog Man and Captain Underpants.

This surely is shaping up to be the year of the Dog Man, Dav Pilkey's empowered and empowering half-canine, half-policeman protagonist. The superhero is currently headlining in TheaterWorksUSA's *Dog Man: The Musical*, which runs through August 4 at Manhattan's Lucille Lortel Theater and embarks on a North American tour in the fall. On August 13, Dog Man returns to the page in his seventh caper, *For Whom the Ball Rolls*, for which Scholastic has announced a five million copy first printing, and he'll make an encore appearance in *Fetch-22*, due out December 10. Also on Dog Man's 2019 docket—or more aptly that of his creator—is Pilkey's international "Do Good Tour," which kicks off August 17 at the Mississippi Book Festival in Jackson. The tour's name springs from the intrinsic message of *For Whom the Ball Rolls*: it's not only important to *be* good, but also to *do* good.

Raising the Curtain

TheaterWorksUSA is a not-for-profit company that for more than 50 years has produced professional theater for young and family audiences, both in New York City and throughout the country, fulfilling its primary mission of reaching underserved communities. After its premiere run in New York, during which TWUSA will provide more than 5,000 free tickets to children, the company will take *Dog Man: The Musical* on the road. On the tour, which will continue through 2020, the theater company will offer subsidized tickets to communities in need in more than 70 markets.

Though the group has adapted books starring other children's book luminaries, including Pete the Cat, Rosie Revere, Engineer, and Pout-Pout Fish, *Dog Man: The Musical* marks the debut of a Pilkey character on its stage. The musical is written by the Emmy-winning team of Kevin Del Aguila and Brad Alexander and is directed and choreographed by Jen Wineman.

Barbara Pasternack, artistic director of TWUSA, noted that she had talked in recent years to Pilkey's agent, Amy Berkower at Writers House, about the possibility of adapting the author's work for the stage. "I am a huge fan of Dav's books—they are so smart and funny," Pasternack said. "He really gets kids and writes in their voice. Getting the chance to have *Dog Man* on our stage is a dream come true."

The seeds for the production were planted in April 2018, when Berkower, who has a close working relationship with TWUSA, was the honoree of its annual benefit. "Many of Amy's colleagues and clients, including Dav, came to the event," managing director Michael Harrington said. "Shortly after the benefit, Dav reached out to us via Amy asking if TheaterWorks was interested in adapting a *Dog Man* story for the stage, and we were thrilled."

TWUSA chose to adapt 2017's *Dog Man: A Tale of Two Kitties* for their production, in which George and Harold, the fictional creators of the *Dog Man* stories, fittingly decide to put on a musical—resourcefully using everything in the tree house and garage to pull it off. "Like all Dav's books, this one inspires kids to tell stories and be creative, which is one of our main goals, too," Pasternack said. In addition, Harrington remarked, the tale that unwinds in *The Musical* "fits particularly nicely with our vision to inspire children to have optimism and hope, and to show them that they *can* realize their dreams."

Pilkey, who attended an early workshop of *Dog Man: The Musical*, had high praise for the production. "I absolutely loved it and can't wait to travel to New York very soon to see it performed live on stage," he said. "I also applaud the talented team at TheaterWorks for creating fun and high-quality entertainment that appeals to kids and audiences of all ages."

Spreading a Message of Kindness and Empathy

Dav Pilkey's Do Good Tour will emphasize the many ways books inspire—and how every individual can make a positive difference in the world. Each tour event will have a "do good" component to support nonprofit literacy organizations, local charities, military families, and schools and libraries in underserved areas. U.S. tour events will be announced via Scholastic's social media platforms throughout the summer. In November, Pilkey will travel to Asia to attend the Shanghai Children's Book Fair, with subsequent appearances in Hong Kong and Mumbai, and will visit Australia and Canada in 2020.

Here's an anecdotal preview of some of the tour highlights, shared by individuals who are hosting Pilkey—and thousands of his fans—while supporting his credo of doing good:

• **Holly Lange**, executive director, Mississippi Book Festival:

"Dav's Do Good campaign dovetails perfectly with the festival's mission to encourage a lifelong love of reading. Over a two-day period, Dav will personally inspire nearly 5,000 public-school children from underserved communities. Each student will receive a copy of his new book, compliments of the festival and the author, and Dav is giving each young reader a gift card to Lemuria Bookstore, an independent bookstore in Jackson. Dav's enthusiastic and generous commitment to these children is awe-inspiring. For many years, his books have been turning kids into readers and encouraging readers of all ages to use their imaginations and create their own stories, either on their own or with the help of a friend, like George and Harold. Dav has said that 'reading is the ultimate superpower.' We can't agree more."

• **Melissa Posten**, children's buyer and event coordinator, Novel Neighbor bookstore in St. Louis:

"Our event will be held at the Chaifetz Arena on August 18. Because our previous Dav Pilkey event sold out to more than 900 people in less than two minutes, we selected a venue that will make it accessible to as many families as possible, and we're anticipating 5,000 attendees. The event will include a presentation from Dav as well as a meet-and-greet, photo opportunities with *Dog Man* and Captain Underpants costumed characters, and a variety of activities. We are donating tickets and books to Youth in Motion, a nonprofit organization that aims to instill the value of fun while engaging youth in the community through leisure activities. We'll also be donating books to Lolly's Place, a local after-school tutoring program."



• **Holland Saltsman**, owner, Novel Neighbor:

"In previous visits to St. Louis, Dav has donated thousands of free books to kids and schools in the area and is one of the most generous authors we've ever hosted. By always setting such a beautiful example, Dav is a constant reminder to us that one person truly can make a difference, that books can change the world, and that even the smallest kind action might change someone's life. This is especially timely for us, as we've just started a nonprofit, The Noble Neighbor, and as its sole mission is to connect books, authors, and kids, Dav's event is the perfect kickoff to our own Do Good outreach."

• **Angie Tally**, children's department manager, The Country Bookshop, Southern Pines, N.C.:

"Our store is located near Fort Bragg, with more than 50,000 active duty personnel. I recently met Shirley Salters, the media specialist at Mildred B. Poole Elementary School in Fort Bragg, which has a diverse population of students who have traveled across the globe with their active duty parents. When I called Shirley to ask if she would be interested in having Dav Pilkey visit her school, she was driving, and at first all I heard was silence. Finally, she said, 'Hold on. I have to stop my car and catch my breath—this is the most exciting news I've ever had! These kids give so much, and it's absolutely amazing that this time, they are the ones getting something back. I cannot wait to see their faces.' Each of the nearly 900 students attending this event will receive a free copy of *For Whom the Ball Rolls*, courtesy of Dav himself."



On October 4, our store is hosting an evening event at Lee Auditorium, which will be open to all local families and will include a book drive, with the books to be donated to students at local Title 1 schools and to local Little Free Libraries. The event will also feature a partnership with a local children's literary nonprofit, AIMS, whose mission is to promote the love of reading by bringing authors, students, schools, communities, and parents together through great books."

Booksellers' admiration of and gratitude to Pilkey is heartily reciprocated, and he is eager to share his Do Good message on tour. "Meeting kids and hearing their powerful stories of positivity has been a great source of motivation," he said.

"They have inspired me to write about the importance of doing good in *For Whom the Ball Rolls*. I'm excited to visit communities who are coming together to celebrate reading,

and I'm incredibly honored to meet the many people behind the scenes—especially educators, booksellers, parents, and volunteers. I look forward to celebrating these real-life superheroes, and I'm humbled and grateful for their support and passion for children's literacy."

***Dog Man: For Whom the Ball Rolls* by Dav Pilkey. Scholastic, \$12.99 Aug. ISBN 978-1-338-23659-0**