



a new musical

book and lyrics by
Daryl Lisa Fazio

music by
Aaron McAllister

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LOGLINE

In a small Ohio town, 8-year old Ethan Hale falls through the ice and is miraculously saved. But no one sees the rescue. And no one steps forward as the hero. So when Ethan insists that it was a "birdman," the townspeople embark on a journey into their individual faith and doubt, their collective hope, and what it means to be extraordinary.

CHARACTERS

- ETHAN HALE, 8 years old
- SAM OGDEN, 30s, chief of police, Ethan's uncle
- EVE HALE, 20s, Ethan's mother, Sam's sister, widow
- DR. RUTH CONTI, 40s, psychiatrist
- IRIS CONTI, 70s, Ruth's mother
- MASON WILLIAMS, 50s, African-American, hardware store owner and town sage
- MARY WILLIAMS, 50s, African-American, Mason's wife, professor at the college
- BRIDGET "BRIDGE" SIMOVITZ, 18, college student, Ethan's babysitter, loner and activist
- ENSEMBLE MEMBERS, miscellaneous roles, 4-6

SONG LISTACT ONE

01 THE PLACE WE LIVE	<i>Sam, Ensemble</i>
02 SEE-THROUGH	<i>Ruth, Iris</i>
03 HERE I AM	<i>Ruth, Eve</i>
04 TALK	<i>Mason, Ensemble</i>
05 AIN'T NO BIRDMAN	<i>Mason, Mary</i>
06 PROOF	<i>Sam</i>
07 I HAVE SOME QUESTIONS	<i>Eve, Ethan</i>
08 INSIDE OUT	<i>Bridget</i>
09 LOST FOUND LOST	<i>Ruth, Iris, Ethan, Eve</i>

ACT TWO

10 TODAY	<i>Ensemble</i>
11 THE DOCTOR'S WIFE	<i>Iris</i>
12 PROOF (REPRISE)	<i>Sam</i>
13 INVINCIBLE	<i>Bridget, Ethan</i>
14 RUNNING	<i>Sam, Eve</i>
15 FEATHER	<i>Ethan</i>
16 TO SAVE US	<i>Ruth</i>
17 LET YOU GO	<i>Eve</i>
18 BELIEVE	<i>All</i>

ACT ONE: Creer, Ohio, Late February, Present Day

SCENE 1

Lights up. Late afternoon. Frigid. Gray. A blackbird caws in the distance.

Main Street (suggested through a streetlight, a planter covered in snow, a sign or two, a door frame). There is a bench in the middle of the stage.

***MASON WILLIAMS**, late 50s and an imposing figure, shovels snow from his hardware store's walk as his wife, **MARY**, sprinkles salt.*

*Inside Henderson's Restaurant—nothing more than a few small tables and possibly some stools and a counter—**EVE HALE**, mid-20s, a tough cookie in jeans, a t-shirt and an apron, her hair in a ponytail and wearing not a speck of makeup on her freckled skin or under her tired eyes, clears dishes off a table where a **FEMALE PROFESSOR**, 30s to 60s, reads a book. **ETHAN HALE**, 8, smart and serious, sits at a table nearby doing his homework, his legs swinging back and forth.*

The PROFESSOR gets up from her seat and leaves a few dollars on the table.

EVE

(auto-pilot, a reflex)

Come see us again.

PROFESSOR

(in her own trance)

Thanks, Eve.

*The PROFESSOR exits while still reading the newspaper, almost colliding with **BERT**, the mailman, who mutters under his breath.*

ETHAN

Momma?

No answer. EVE wipes the table absently.

Momma?

No answer.

Momma, I'm done with my multiplication tables.

EVE

(coming to)

Let me see.

ETHAN

You can check. But no mistakes. What should I do now? Fill up the ketchup bottles? The salt and pepper? Put all the credit card receipts in alphabetical order and—

EVE

Not during the dinner rush, Ethan. *(beat; ETHAN looks around the empty diner)* Just sit.

ETHAN sits and reads a book (North American Birds). Legs swinging, feet hitting the table with a thump. Swing. Thump. Swing. Thump. Swing. Thu—

Or go outside.

ETHAN jumps up, putting on his coat and hat (one of those fur-lined ones with the ear flaps), grabbing a little pair of cheap binoculars and a book from his bag, and running to his mother.

He goes to hug her, but she buttons up his coat instead.

Hat on at all times. And not more than 50 steps from the door.

ETHAN

60.

EVE

50.

ETHAN

55.

EVE

50.

ETHAN nods, then runs out the door. Outside, he walks, heel-to-toe, heel-to-toe, religiously counting his steps. The other townsfolk, including the PROFESSOR, BERT, MIKE, about 21 and wearing glasses and a dirty mechanic's jumpsuit, and DORIS, a nurse in scrubs, move throughout the space outside now, playing their roles dutifully, hugging their own bodies tightly to keep warm, wearing a friendly face. EVE continues to scrub empty tables that surely must already be clean.

A visual rhythm sets in, and the music begins (#1).

Song (#1)—“THE PLACE WE LIVE”

ALL

CREER, OHIO'S THE PLACE WE LIVE,
THE PLACE WHERE WE GROW OR JUST GET BY.
 WE GO ABOUT OUR DAYS
 WITH A SMILE AND A WAVE.
WE THINK TOMORROW WE'LL FEEL ALIVE.

They cross in front of the bench and, as they part, reveal ETHAN sitting alone. He reads his book intently, periodically scanning the sky with his binoculars.

MASON

(to ETHAN, in a voice that betrays an inner-city upbringing)

Cold place to read.

ETHAN

(without looking up)

My hat's insulated, Mr. Williams, so my body heat's trapped there.

MASON

I found some old Superman comics belonged to our boys. You want 'em?

MARY

All those adventures just collecting dust.

ETHAN

No, I don't have time. I'm memorizing all the birds that migrate east of the Mississippi River. When I sight one, I write the day and time in my book.

MARY

Does your mother know you're out here?

ETHAN

(suddenly looking up)

Did you see that? That was a Baltimore Oriole! His migration pattern must be off!

ETHAN spots the bird near the edge of the stage and sprints over to it, looking straight up with his binoculars.

MASON

Go inside and get warm, Ethan!

MASON and MARY watch him. Then:

MARY

That's what I'm gonna do.

MARY exits into the store as MASON resumes shoveling. He doesn't see when, in the next moment, ETHAN bounds offstage to follow the oriole.

Snow begins to fall lightly as the ENSEMBLE, now joined by police chief, SAM OGDEN, in uniform, continues to move across the stage, which darkens as dusk arrives.

PROFESSOR

(melodramatically stopping SAM on the street)

Chief, you still haven't gotten organized about that brigade for—

SAM

(interrupting, gently)

That's because there hasn't been a break-in here in recorded time, Elizabeth.

PROFESSOR

But I really think we should err on safety's side and—

SAM

(barreling through)

We don't need a neighborhood watch in a place where everyone already watches.

PROFESSOR

But—

SAM

You trust me, right?

PROFESSOR

Well...yes.

SAM

(jokingly, but with something under it)

Don't say so unless you mean it.

PROFESSOR

Yes.

She's cold. She lets it go today and heads on her way.

SAM/EVE

CREER, OHIO'S THE PLACE WE LIVE
AND WHERE OUR PARENTS LIVED
BEFORE.

SAM/ENSEMBLE

WE GO ABOUT OUR DAYS
WITH A SMILE AND A WAVE,
WHILE DOWN DEEP WE ACHE FOR
MORE.

ETHAN re-enters, farther upstage, where a spotlight reveals a hand-painted wooden sign that says "LAKE SPARROW, 3 FISH LIMIT." We see the shadow of a bird fly across the stage, then back. ETHAN stops suddenly, in the middle of the stage, realizing he's at the edge of the frozen lake. He looks down, the shiny surface reflecting up onto his face.

ETHAN looks up again to see the "bird" hovering near the far edge of the stage.

He watches it through his binoculars. Soon after, it disappears.

ETHAN wobbles for a moment at the lake's edge, then charges out onto the ice, sliding to a stop, almost losing his balance, and looking again through his binoculars.

Abruptly, there is a series of small cracking sounds. Then one deafening crack.

The oblivious townsfolk walk in front of him and, when they part, exiting the stage entirely, the child is gone, the stage completely empty.

Silent. Still. For what seems like hours. The snow has gotten much heavier now, blizzard-like.

ENSEMBLE

(singing)

AHHHHHHHHHHHHH

Then the stage is engulfed in a bright, white light that blinds us to onstage action. We hear ETHAN take a massive breath. And everything goes dark.

SCENE 2

Lights up.

*An hour later. Emergency room hallway of the small-town hospital. The ENSEMBLE as **PATIENTS, NURSES, DOCTORS** move through the scene, clearly all talking about the child.*

SAM stands outside a door, staring at it.

DORIS

(approaching SAM)

Everybody's asking who found him.

SAM

A fisherman. But Ethan was out of the water by then. He said his lips were blue.

DORIS

Did he see anything? Anybody?

SAM

Not a thing. Not a soul.

DORIS

(giving SAM's shoulder a squeeze; all these people have known each other since grade school)

This whole thing is like some kinda dream.

SAM

No way. Did you hear Ethan screaming? That was no dream.

DORIS

Was that screaming to you? I thought it sounded more like, I don't know, Sam, he was excited. He sounded...happy.

SAM

Happy? *(pause)* Happy.

CREER, OHIO'S THE PLACE WE LIVE,
THE PLACE WHERE I'VE LEARNED TO GET BY.
YOU'LL SEE ME EVERYDAY
GIVE A SMILE AND A WAVE.
I THINK TOMORROW I'LL FEEL ALIVE.

ENSEMBLE MEMBER 1

A HUNDRED YEARS PAST, CREER CAME TO BE,

ENSEMBLE MEMBER 2

A COLLEGE TOWN RISING FROM THE STEEL WE MILLED

ENSEMBLE MEMBER 3

AND THE FAMILIES WE MADE.

SAM

30 YEARS BACK, THE STEEL MILL CLOSED.
THE WORK WAS GONE, BUT STILL WE **DROVE** ON.

ENSEMBLE

WE WON'T ADMIT **WHEN** WE'RE AFRAID.

SAM

EIGHT YEARS AGO, MY NEPHEW WAS BORN;
RIGHT OFF A SPARK, DROWNING OUT THE DARK,
BRAVE AND BRIGHT; LOOK HOW HE'S GROWN.

(spoken)

ONE YEAR AGO, EVE'S HUSBAND, JAMES, DIED;

(sung)

AND THOUGH I TRY, I DON'T KNOW WHY.

JUST A FLUKE THAT LEFT MY SISTER, HER BOY, ALONE.

SAM holds Ethan's shoe in his hand.

EVE enters, out of breath, face white as a sheet. She still wears her stained apron, a pencil behind her ear, clutching a dinner plate, as though she ran out of the door in mid-clean-up.

EVE

Where is he? Why do you have that, Sam? *(grabbing the shoe)* Where's the other one?!

SAM

(gently prying the plate from her fingers)

Evie, what is this? Here, let go and give—

EVE

He's not supposed to wear these shoes in the snow. I've told him a thousand times to wear his boots. I told him 50...I told him 50...he...oh, God...what did I...are you going to take him away?

She becomes unsteady on her feet. SAM holds her up. She doesn't want him to. She wants to get away.

SAM

(singing)

SOME HOURS AGO, HE FELL THROUGH THE ICE,
TOO THIN TO HOLD, WHEN FOUND HE WAS COLD,

ENSEMBLE

(quietly, as if telling a secret)

BUT ALREADY PULLED FROM THE HOLE.

SAM/ENSEMBLE

CREER, OHIO'S THE PLACE WE LIVE
AND WHERE OUR PARENTS LIVED BEFORE.
WE GO ABOUT OUR DAYS
WITH A SMILE AND A WAVE,

EVE

WHILE **DEEP DOWN** WE WANT TO ROAR.

SAM

Can you stand up? Sure you can. See?

SAM points to a doorway.

They had to sedate him to make him rest. He was delirious, wanting to get up and find who pulled him out. He kept saying, over and over...I don't want to scare you...*(stopping, arguing with himself, agonizing over whether to tell her...)*...

EVE

What??

SAM

Whoa. Shh, nothing, kid, he was just really cold. And scared. But not now. Uh-uh. He's fine. He's okay. He's not alone now, right?

EVE turns to look at the closed door. Behind it, lights come up on ETHAN, asleep in a hospital bed.

SAM's cell phone rings. He looks at the ID.

SAM

Damn. *(hitting the Talk button)* Yeah? *(pause)* Yeah, all right. No, I've got it. Thanks, Tommy.

SAM ends the call.

I have to take care of this. You ready?

EVE

That's the same room James was in.

SAM

No, it isn't, kid.

EVE

You think I'm gonna fall apart just like Mom. You want me to cry and just fall apart.

SAM

I want you to do whatever you need to do.

EVE

Ethan?

SAM

He can't hear you out here, Eve. Go on.

EVE turns the doorknob.

Lights out.

SCENE 3

Lights up.

Fifteen minutes later. It's snowing on a deserted street.

***IRIS CONTI** walks slowly across the empty stage. Her hair is snowy white. She wears a nightgown and a long robe that drags on the ground. One of her slippers comes off, but she keeps walking, head up, watching the snow fall, smiling vaguely. Her hands tremor, a side-effect of the Parkinson's medicine that keeps her from freezing up. Her neck jerks awkwardly.*

Light, offstage, from car headlights shine on the old woman. A car door slams. SAM comes up behind her. He picks up her slipper, then takes her elbow gently.

IRIS stops walking.

SAM

Record lows tonight, Mrs. Conti. Not a good time for a walk.

IRIS

The wind is the inside of my head.

SAM

Sorry?

IRIS

Circles. Winter pulls from underneath. You think you're alone. Then it melts.

SAM

You've got a way with words.

He takes off his coat and puts it around her.

Your daughter'd like to see you home safe.

IRIS

Ruth is a peacock.

SAM

You need me to guide you to the car or do you know where you are?

Music underscore (#1A) and transition.

IRIS

Where you are.

They exit.

Lights down as...

SCENE 3B

Sounds of knocking on a door.

Dim lights up on the Conti home's foyer. There's a front door and, off to one side, another door that leads to Ruth Conti's study/office. The house is wealthy and oppressive.

***DR. RUTH CONTI** enters, harried but still business-like, phone to her ear and wearing her winter coat.*

RUTH

No. I didn't, but there's simply no way. She's never made it that far. Hold, please.

RUTH opens the door. SAM and IRIS are in the doorway.

RUTH

Mother! Chief Ogden, you're a marvel. I've just driven the entire town. Where was she?

SAM

Old highway 12.

RUTH

(hanging up the phone abruptly)

Good God, are you certain?

SAM

Yes, ma'am.

IRIS

Peacock.

RUTH

(pulling her mother into the house)

Mother, you're fortunate you don't have hypothermia. Please, Chief Ogden, please come in.

SAM

Call me Sam, Dr. Conti. Chief Ogden was my dad.

RUTH

And Dr. Conti was mine.

SAM comes in and closes the door behind him, as RUTH gives her shaking mother a cursory exam.

(to her mother)

Shaking like a leaf. You have a disease, Mother. This is not acceptable.

SAM

Could you use some help with her, Doctor?

IRIS

I'm not dead.

RUTH

I have things under control. Sam. And I suppose if we're on a first-name basis, you should call me Ruth.

SAM acknowledges with a nod, then takes his coat from IRIS's shoulders and puts it on. He rubs IRIS's arms and hands to warm them.

SAM

She's real different, your mother. Different from how I remember her when I was a boy. She smiles all the time these days.

RUTH

Yes, well, the basal ganglia in her brain are dissolving. It's all a symptom.

SAM doesn't have any clue what to say to that. RUTH is oblivious.

What do you mean, you remember her?

SAM

I grew up here, ma'am. Ruth.

RUTH

Yes. Of course. You were probably born around the time she sent me away.

SAM

If you two really are all right here, I should get back to the hospital.

RUTH

Someone's been hurt?

SAM

My nephew had an accident on the lake. The ice broke.

RUTH

Oh my God. How old is he? A very little boy?

SAM

Seven. No, wait, he just turned eight. He's okay. Physically he's okay.

RUTH

You're worried about him beyond the physical? Is he talking since it happened?

SAM

He's in hysterics. They had to medicate him.

IRIS wanders off into another part of the house. RUTH doesn't notice, now completely absorbed in Sam's story.

RUTH

Angry screaming? Fearful screaming? Do they have him restrained?

SAM

A lot of questions.

RUTH

I apologize. You're right. It's not my business.

SAM

It's not that. I just don't know how to answer—

RUTH

I was prying. It's an occupational hazard.

SAM

I guess he's been seeing things.

RUTH

Things?

SAM

Kids have big imaginations, though, don't they? I mean, this one, he's usually pretty serious, I've always thought, and he lost his dad about a year ago. But kids are...I don't know...it's just strange the way he makes it sound like some sort of...angel. This thing, he calls it a...birdman. Just like that. Birdman. *(pause)* We aren't religious. Where would he get that?

RUTH

Chief Ogden—

SAM

Sam.

RUTH

Yes. You let the boy's mother know, if she's worried, I can be of help. We'll leave it at that. *(taking a card from a nearby table)* You can call the cell number.

SAM

I don't think his mom can afford a big-time psychiatrist.

IRIS enters.

RUTH

This is Creer, not the big-time. Something can be worked out.

IRIS

Cats are curious.

SAM

Thank you, Ruth. That's mighty charitable.

IRIS

High and mighty.

SAM

(to RUTH, referring to IRIS)

It's probably not a bad idea to keep something reflective on her. A runner's vest maybe. *(starting to leave, then turning back to RUTH)* Oh, and, um, welcome home. 'Night.

SAM slips out the door.

RUTH glares at her mother.

RUTH

I thought you were dead in a snow bank.

IRIS stands in front of her, completely still, until one hand shoots up above her head. RUTH tries to push the hand down, but Iris is a statue. RUTH reaches into her pocket for a bottle of pills. She forces a pill into IRIS' mouth.

What if you'd locked up like this in the middle of the road? *(to herself)* Jesus, Ruth, it's not her fault. She has no idea.

IRIS

(glowingly)

Jesus!

RUTH

Do you have an idea, Mother?

Music begins (#2).

Is anything in there? Anything?

RUTH waits, then starts to guide her down the hall, but IRIS won't go.

Lights dim.

IRIS' hand slowly starts to fall as the meds kick in.

Song (#2)—“SEE-THROUGH”

IRIS

(singing)

COME AND GO,
EBB AND FLOW,
LOOK THROUGH THE GAP,
SEE THE SHOW.
OVER THEN,
STARTING NOW,
YOU CAN'T REACH IT;
TELL ME HOW.

COVER ME IN CELLOPHANE.
PUT ME UNDER GLASS.
SET ME IN THE WINDOW.
PEOPLE LOOK RIGHT PAST.

RUTH

WHERE DID YOU GO?
THE ONE THAT I KNEW?
WHAT DO YOU KNOW?
I CAN'T SEE THROUGH.

IRIS

HERE AND THERE,
OFF AND ON,
PUNCH THROUGH THE SHADE,
THERE'S THE DAWN.
WHEN IT'S BRIGHT
YOU CAN SEE
IT'S ALWAYS THERE
AND IT'S FREE.

COVER ME IN CELLOPHANE.
PUT ME UNDER GLASS.
SET ME IN THE WINDOW.
PEOPLE LOOK RIGHT PAST.

RUTH

WHERE DID YOU GO?
THE ONE THAT I KNEW?
WHAT DO YOU KNOW?
I CAN'T SEE THROUGH.

IRIS

COVER ME IN CELLOPHANE.
PUT ME UNDER GLASS.
SEE ME IN THE WINDOW.

Music continues.

RUTH

Let's put you to bed.

Lights down.

SCENE 4

Lights up.

Later that night. ETHAN's hospital room. EVE stands over him, listening to his breathing. She's in shock, not quite connected to reality, and she speaks from some place deep, low, and quiet.

EVE

Ethan? *(she waits; nothing; she puts her hand on his chest to feel it rising and falling)* You be okay, Ethan. *(with scary intensity, as if willing it to be true)* That's the only way to be. Because I don't know what I'll do. You ran away like that, like we never even talked about it. We had an agreement. God, you're so smart. My smart boy. But it's like you don't understand everything is you. Because you're all curious. And careless. And your daddy fell. And you do things. You do things. You can't be careless. There's no place for it.

Lights up concurrently on another part of the stage.

IRIS's bedroom. RUTH sits at her mother's bedside, having just gotten her to sleep.

RUTH

Maybe I should have put you in a home, Mother. Would you like that?

Pause.

Can you hear me, Mother?

No answer.

EVE

(wiping her face, pulling herself together, steeling herself)

Can you hear me, Ethan?

Song (#3)—“HERE I AM”

EVE

HERE I AM, ETHAN.
WE'RE ALL WE'VE GOT.
YOU'VE GOT TO HEAR ME, THOUGH;
YOU'LL KEEP ON GROWING, SO
YOU'LL HAVE TO LEAVE ME, THOUGH...

RUTH

HERE I AM, MOTHER.
TAKE YOUR BEST SHOT.
YOU'D HAVE TO HEAR ME, THOUGH;
YOU'D HAVE TO KNOW ME, THOUGH;
YOU'D HAVE TO WANT ME, SO...

HOW DID I GET HERE?
SO FAR AWAY FROM WHERE I'M CLEAR:
WORK IS MY CENTER AND RELEASE.
FULL DAYS CAN CHASE
AWAY OLD MEMORIES.
BUT HERE IT'S JUST MOTHER AND ME,
SWALLOWED
BY OUR HISTORY, SO—

RUTH/EVE