

# ASBURY & PARK PRESS

## Red Bank's Two River Theater receives \$125,000 grant

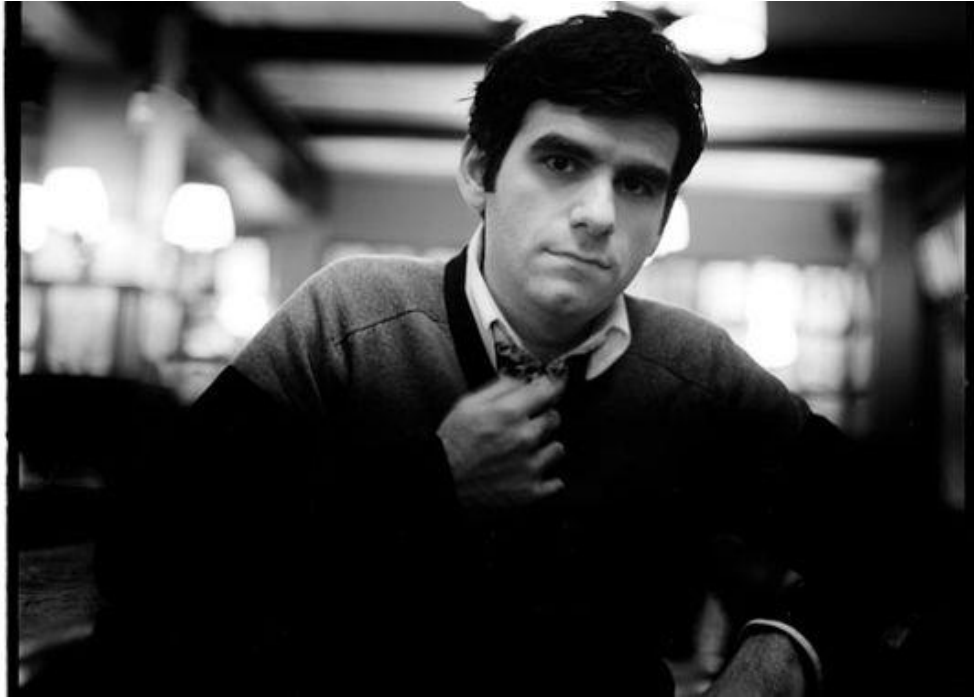


*(Photo: COURTESY OF TWO RIVER THEATER)*

By Bill Canacci

Two River Theater in Red Bank is among five theaters in the country to receive a grant through the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation's new Theatre Commissioning and Production Initiative. The DDCF announced the first grant recipients on Tuesday. Five theaters are each receiving \$125,000 to produce a new, large-scale work by an American playwright and to commission an additional new work from that same writer.

Each grant is composed of three parts: \$75,000 to support a production, \$25,000 to be awarded to the playwright, and \$25,000 to support a new commission and potentially develop activities between the theater and the same playwright.



Joe Iconis is writing the music and lyrics for “Be More Chill,” which opens May 30 at Two River Theater. *(Photo: COURTESY OF TWO RIVER THEATER)*



Joe Tracz is writing the book for “Be More Chill,” which is based on the novel by Ned Vizzini.

Two River Theater received the money for its collaboration with Joe Iconis and Joe Tracz — the creators of the stage musical adaptation of the Ned Vizzini novel "Be More Chill."

The show, about a geeky suburban New Jersey teenager who wants to figure out how to be cool, opens at Two River on May 30 and runs through June 21.

John Dias, artistic director at Two River, said they have been working with Iconis (music and lyrics) and Tracz (book) on "Be More Chill" for three years.

It's "an ambitious project for the theater," Dias said.

After all, musicals cost significantly more money to produce than plays. And they take longer to develop.

But Dias believes in the power and importance of the American musical. Most of the new shows are being created for Broadway now, but it doesn't have to be that way, Dias said.

"We should be making sure that form keeps evolving and that we keep adding to that canon of great work," he said.

According to the grant specifications, \$25,000 will be used to support a new work by Iconis and Tracz that could find its way to the Two River stage. What that show could be has yet to be determined. Other grants named in the first round will support Denver Center Theatre Company in its collaboration with playwright Eric Schmiedl, including the production of "Benediction"; Looking Glass Theatre in Chicago, in its collaboration with playwright David Catlin, including the production of a new version of "Moby Dick"; The Public Theater in New York, in its collaboration with playwright Richard Nelson, including the production of "The Orange Plays"; Oregon Shakespeare Festival in its collaboration with playwright Lynn Nottage, including the production of "Sweat." "We're in amazingly good company," Dias said.

The foundation will award an additional five grants during the second round of the initiative, culminating in \$1.25 million of funding.

"We are thrilled to support these remarkable theaters in their continuing alliances with playwrights to bring ambitious new works to the public," said Ben Cameron, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation program director for the arts. "Through this new initiative, the foundation aims to help address the historically poor compensation of playwrights, to encourage long-term relationships between theaters and writers, and to support the production of plays that serve theaters' nonprofit missions, even if such plays do not have immediate commercial appeal."

More information is available by visiting the Theatre Commissioning and Production Initiative page at [www.ddcf.org](http://www.ddcf.org).

More information on Two River Theater is available by visiting [www.tworivertheater.org](http://www.tworivertheater.org)