Writer’s Note

The Troupe grew out of both sides of my relationship with high school theatre. I was a drama kid myself, and the theatre was where I found my place. Years later, I worked with a large and very active high school drama department and watched another generation of students find the same thing.

What struck me most was how fiercely those students protected one another. Outside the theatre, high school could still be a jungle. I saw students who were teased, singled out, or made to feel different elsewhere in the school walk into the theatre and immediately become part of something. They could be themselves there. The students looked out for one another, and the troupe became a genuine community. It was one of the things I loved most about working with them. They certainly had conflicts with one another, but when it mattered, they always came back together around their shared love of theatre.

I also spent a lot of time around adults who simply did not understand this generation. Sometimes they mocked the language students used, the things they cared about, or the ways they expressed themselves. I don't think most of those adults were bad people. Often they were just speaking a completely different generational language and didn't know how to bridge the distance.

That was where Frank Fenwick began. Frank isn't a villain. He's an aging actor who walks into a high school theatre believing that decades of experience mean he understands acting, art, and probably young people better than they understand themselves. Sometimes he's right. Sometimes he's spectacularly wrong. He makes mistakes that hurt his students, but he also recognizes real talent in them and pushes them toward work they didn't know they were capable of doing.

I wanted to play with the familiar inspirational-teacher movie where one brilliant adult arrives, reaches a classroom of difficult kids, changes their lives, and sends everyone into the final act transformed. Teaching never felt that simple to me. The students were already interesting, talented people before the teacher walked into the room. They didn't need someone to rescue them.

In *The Troupe*, both generations have something to learn. Frank has to understand that listening is part of teaching, that good intentions don't automatically erase the harm you cause, and that decades of experience don't make your way the only way. The students have their own assumptions challenged too. They begin to see that discomfort is not always the same thing as harm, and that work written generations before they were born can still speak directly to them.

I also didn't want either side to receive a neat victory. The choices these characters make have consequences. The theatre itself becomes something worth fighting for, but the real troupe was never the room. It was the people inside it and the trust they built with one another.

My own history with theatre is inseparable from the story. I've been an actor, director, technician, drama teacher, and the kid who once needed that room himself. I wanted *The Troupe* to be funny about the enormous distance between Frank and his students without making either generation the joke. More than anything, I wanted to write about what can happen when people who are certain they understand one another finally stop talking long enough to listen.