Writer’s Note

How to Be Human: A Musical With No Songs began with a challenge I gave myself: write something completely absurd, unusual, and hopefully unlike anything else I had written.

One of my creative starting points was David Byrne. I've been a huge fan of Byrne and Talking Heads for years, particularly the peculiar way ordinary life can look completely strange when viewed from a slightly different angle. A house, a road, a billboard, a haircut, a workplace, a relationship, or simply the way people move through the world can suddenly become fascinating and bizarre. There is humor in that perspective, but also loneliness, anxiety, awkwardness, and a genuine curiosity about why human beings behave the way we do. I wanted some of that off-kilter observational feeling in the movie without writing anything actually about David Byrne or Talking Heads. Naming my main character David was a small tribute.

From there I created a slightly futuristic alternate world obsessed with predictability. Everything has an approved color, purpose, schedule, procedure, and instruction manual. People eat the correct foods on the correct days, drive identical cars at identical speeds, maintain approved lawns, follow scripts for conversations with their spouses, and work for companies devoted to removing uncertainty from everyday life.

It's ridiculous, but the impulse behind it doesn't feel all that ridiculous to me. We measure productivity, track ourselves, and increasingly look for instructions about how to eat, sleep, work, communicate, exercise, parent, relax, and be happy. There is an app for every one of those things!

I like convenience as much as anyone. What made me laugh was imagining a society that had become so successful at eliminating inconvenience, risk, and unpredictability that it had accidentally eliminated much of the fun of being alive.

David fits perfectly into that world because he writes instruction manuals for a living. Then he encounters Product X, a defective object that serves no apparent purpose. It simply vibrates. That vibration becomes rhythm, and soon David begins noticing rhythm in places nobody around him considers musical: traffic, machinery, footsteps, windshield wipers, rattling cans, squeaking wheels, even the cadence of instructions printed on a shampoo bottle.

I especially liked the idea that the thing capable of disrupting this “perfect” society would be something completely useless. Product X doesn't do anything, except make them want to move.

How to Be Human behaves like a musical, but there are no traditional songs. The ordinary noises of the world gradually become the music.

I wanted the movie to be funny, visually strange, philosophical, and accessible enough that different ages could enjoy completely different things about it. I also know some people may simply find it too weird, and I'm comfortable with that. Part of the reason I wrote it was to see how far I could follow a peculiar idea without sanding away everything that made it peculiar in the first place.

For me, *How to Be Human: A Musical With No Songs* is a celebration of all the imperfect, unnecessary things people do that can't be justified with a metric or explained by an instruction manual. We make noise. We dance badly. We waste time. We get distracted. We do things simply because they make us happy.