

BEHIND THE SCENES

We have never taken Kyle to a live performance of anything. For a long list of reasons, it didn't seem doable.

He is different now. He's been on such a spectacular roll lately particularly enjoying music related outings. So when I heard that Detour Company Theatre was performing South Pacific, I decided it was time. Kyle has already seen the video South Pacific and enjoys the music.

"Detour Company Theatre: Making a journey in the arts possible for all."

"Mission: provide quality and authentic arts education and performance opportunities for adults with developmental and other challenges, including deafness, blindness, and autism, through the magic and miracle of theatre."

Perfect. Surely this was an arena where people would be accepting. The venue was Scottsdale Center for the Arts, a local amphitheater style venue where professional performances and concerts are held. I was impressed that Detour was going to be performing there.

SCENE 1 - ALL IS WELL

Tammy and I decided to take Kyle together. We knew it would be a stretch for Kyle, but also knew he could do it. So could we. Many times what's a stretch for Kyle is a stretch for us too.

Without hesitation, he entered the building and then the theatre. We opted to sit in the last row so Kyle wouldn't have to do the motor planning to get down the stairs in an unfamiliar environment. Though Kyle is physically capable, the stress of motor planning down those widely

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Written by Gayle Nobel

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spaced steps potentially added another level of uncertainty and could be a large obstacle. Even lowering himself into the theatre style seats is a challenge but one that he has been able to overcome faster and with more ease each time.

It wasn't long before Kyle was comfortably seated waiting for the show to begin. He hummed softly, looked around, checked out his program and was relaxed. Announcements came first. Then a moment of silence. Kyle was silent during the entire moment ! Phew! And whoo hoo!

The audience was invited to sing along. Kyle was most certainly going to take advantage of that invitation. Words are not necessary. Humming in harmony is where Kyle excels.

During the dialogue parts, Kyle was still humming at times. Was the music still playing in his mind? Or was this a calming device? Perhaps some of both. On a scale of Kyle noise 1-10, his humming was approximately a 2. Though not constant, it was definitely more on than off.

Kyle loves to listen and music speaks to his entire body and soul. That is a beautiful thing. But some other things were happening here too. He was also WATCHING! Yes, he was looking at what was relevant..... down at the stage with the show going on. It was lit up and we were sitting in the dark above it with a birds eye view. At times, Kyle went out of his way to look, craning his head over the low wall that was in front of our seats. He was just plain into it! This is a huge triumph for Kyle. For most of his life, visual attention to what 's relevant has been tough and almost non-existent.

I'm talking about a breakthrough here. Huge growth! Tammy and I were thoroughly delighting in the whole experience of watching Kyle enjoy the show.

The play was a great production. The singing and acting was awesome. It was evident a tremendous amount of work and rehearsal went into this show. An effort was clearly made to include a wide variety of individuals. It was really touching and inspiring to watch and listen to this performance. The scenery was awesome too, complete with live music played on a baby grand piano in the corner of the stage.

SCENE 2 - KICKED OUT

It was 30-40 minutes into the show. We were mesmerized by the production and by Kyle's response to it. One of the theatre ushers tapped Tammy on the shoulder. Huh? Tammy then told me we were being asked to LEAVE! Kyle is making too much noise. They are trying to make a recording of the show. Kyle's humming is interfering with that. REALLY??

I talked to the man, the usher. He told me the same thing and then added that he (Kyle) is ruining it for EVERYONE. REALLY? His grade 2 humming is ruining it for everyone?

OK. Hmmm. I sat in disbelief for a moment and then got up and spoke to the usher again. "You are telling me in a show put on by a theatre company comprised of ALL people with special needs that a person with autism is being thrown out... or ok, asked to leave? Do you see the irony in that?" He just smiled.

I sort of understood the recording situation (though there were two more shows from which conceivably they could have gotten the "perfect" recording.) Trying to be understanding, I asked if there was another area to which we could move. "No, he is ruining it for everyone." I was told again.

I wanted to shout. I wanted to cry. Clearly, this man did not get it. Who was he speaking for? He was not at all open to trying to find a way for us to stay.

Just to clarify, I am very sensitive about bringing Kyle to public places. It has taken me years and years to feel comfortable about it. This relates to my own issues and Kyle's difficulty with self control. I have never wanted him to be disruptive during important events. I have been extremely cautious and gun shy, sometimes to a fault. Kyle has missed out on some things because of this.

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I am super sensitive about his noisiness because he can get pretty darn loud in his enthusiasm. That is part of his communication and when he's feeling good, he's been known to belt out an exuberant and loud whoop or two. He can also be noisy when overloaded or stressed. So I am very conscious about whether he could be a disruption in different situations. That is why we have not taken him to a concert at the Musical Instrument Museum yet.

When I heard about this play, my first thought was that it was safe. It would be a safe place for Kyle if he were to get a little excited and vocalize. The irony was that he was keeping it together. The humming was on the quiet side. I don't know how many people could hear him in the theatre. Maybe it was the entire theatre, given the way sound can carry in an amphitheater. Or not. But in any case, it was soft. Soft for Kyle standards, that is. I suppose any noise above silence during a play could be considered inappropriate.

I assumed everyone in this setting would be understanding and compassionate.

SCENE 3 - EXITING THE SCENE

We had no choice but to leave. I am not the type of person to make a scene though it did cross my mind. Just after exiting the theatre, Kyle got very loud... in a happy, excited, "this is great fun" kind of way. Clearly he was holding it together, big time, while in the theatre. Another gold star for Kyle that evening.

I was still in disbelief. Kyle was ok with leaving. Who knows, maybe that was just the right amount of time for him to be there. However at the rate he was going, it seemed as if he might have been able to sit for the entire show.

No matter how much we talk about inclusion, the world is not quite ready for my Kyle. I might have expected this to happen at any other performance but didn't expect it to happen during this one. If Kyle had gotten very loud or needed to be up and walking around, we would have gone outside for awhile.

I texted my friend who's daughter was in this production. It is through her on facebook that I heard about the show. She was mortified and suggested this man was probably a volunteer for the theater and not connected to Detour Company.

SCENE 4 - MAKING IT RIGHT

Early the next morning I received a phone call from the board president of the non-profit, Detour Company Theatre. Her daughter was also in the production. Coincidentally, she is someone I know from Kyle's first day program years ago. Apparently, news travels quickly.

She was profoundly apologetic. She encouraged us to come back for one of the other performances that weekend. Detour is all about inclusion for the actors/actresses and also for the audience, she informed me. She really wanted us to give it another chance. Later on she even called me back after speaking to the director. She invited us to sit down near the stage where Kyle could be more part of the action. She offered to save us some seats. The motor planning issue about getting down there could be overcome by using the elevator.

FINALE- AWARENESS

Clearly, the usher and the person doing the recording had not been given the memo about what this show was truly about and that there conceivably could have been some people with special needs in the audience.

We could have been asked to step outside and come back in a little later. And/or we could have been redirected to some other seats. I can understand the recording issues though with today's technology, it seems that unwanted sound could be taken out of a recording.

But the comment that he was ruining it for everyone. This just comes from ignorance and insensitivity. Once I got past that, pulling the dagger directly out of my heart, I was able to bask in Kyle's many accomplishments that evening. And mine.

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ENCORE?

We did not end up going back for another performance. By Sunday, Kyle was tired after a very busy Friday and Saturday. He needed to rest. So did I.

We will try for Detour's next production. Now we know where the good seats are.

I am now a supporter and invite you to check out the great stuff they are doing. [Detour Company Theatre](#)