

GATEWAY REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Don't miss 'The Last 5 Years' at Gateway January 12

Huntington – Gateway students Dawson Atkin, Meg Rock and Parker Atkin shared a vision last summer, which will become a reality on January 12. *The Last 5 Years* was an off-broadway musical that tells the story of the breakup of a 5 year relationship and marriage—with struggling actress Cathy (Rock) singing their story going backwards from the breakup, and novelist Jamie (D. Atkin) telling their story from their meeting forwards. The three dreamed of performing this musical together, and worked through a number of barriers to do so.

The most significant barrier was paying for the license to put on the musical, which came in at over \$1,000. The students wrote an application for funding to the Gateway Education Foundation to front the costs, while they applied for support from the Local Cultural Councils of the Gateway member towns. (As the project was not a Drama Club production, it could not be funded by school or club funds). At this writing, they have so far heard back from the Huntington Local Cultural Council, which agreed to fund a portion of the cost, and wait to hear from the others.

It's an unusual opportunity, brought forward by a uniquely qualified group of students at the small high school.

Senior Dawson Atkin brings a wealth of prior theater performance to the stage. He began his acting career with the Westfield Theatre Group at age 10, and has appeared annually in their musicals including in the roles of Young George Bailey (*It's a Wonderful Life*) and Young Ebenezer Scrooge (*A Christmas Carol*). As an actor with the Gateway High School Drama Club, he has brought the roles of Hortensio in Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* and Jack in Stephen Sondheim's *Into the Woods* to the stage. He has also sung with the Gateway Choir, has been named to the ACDA Honor Choir, and last spring won the award of Best Male Soloist at the New England Show Choir Showdown for his competition performance of "My Shot" from the musical *Hamilton*. He is also a gifted instrumentalist and has won repeated spots in the Western Massachusetts District Concert Band, one year winning for both saxophone and for piano with the District Jazz Band. Atkin plans to attend college for music composition.

Margaret Rock is a junior at Gateway who has also performed with the Drama Club (as The Witch in Sondheim's *Into the Woods*, and as Grumio in Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*). An accomplished dancer, Rock has studied at the Huntington Dance Center and performed her favorite role as the Cheshire Cat in *Alice in Wonderland* with their Floralia company. Last summer, she attended a singing intensive at Amherst College where she was selected for a highlighted trio performance. Last month, Rock appeared on stage as Kerri Stoddard in the Westfield Theatre Group's production of *The Night Before Christmas*. She studies voice with Jasmine Highigatian of Westfield.

Freshman Parker Atkin has been a pianist and trumpet player with the Gateway Middle School jazz Band from grades 6 – 8, and was frequently invited to perform with the high school band while still in middle school. He was in the pit band for the 2017 production of Stephen Sondheim’s *Into the Woods*, performing both piano and trumpet. In addition to singing and acting in several productions with Westfield Theatre Group, he held standout roles in several Gateway Middle School productions, playing Captain Hook (*Peter Pan*), Charlie Bucket (*Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*), and Gilbert Blythe (*Anne of Green Gables*). He studies piano with Roberta Kowal in Westfield, and is scheduled to perform with the Western Massachusetts Jr. District Concert Band on trumpet this winter. He will accompany his brother and Tock on piano in *The Last 5 Years*.

Jerilyn Beauregard has volunteered as an adviser to this project.

The curtain rises at 7 p.m. on Friday, January 12 in the Gateway Performing Arts Center. Admission is free, but donations to the Gateway Education Foundation will be gratefully accepted.

Join us on January 12 for this musical feast by Tony award winning composer and lyricist Jason Robert Brown. *The Last 5 Years* is presented through special arrangement with Music Theatre International (MTI), with authorized performance materials supplied by MTI. This program is supported in part by a grant from the Huntington Local Cultural Council, a local agency which is supported by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency.

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Photo: Pianist Parker Atkin and his brother Dawson rehearsing the music to “The Last 5 Years”, which they will perform with Margaret Rock at Gateway on Friday, January 12.