

# I Wrote a Musical I'll Never Hear

*A Deaf queer composer, a jazz-fueled rebellion, and a story that refused to stay quiet.*

*By Waymon Hudson*

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When I tell people I wrote a musical, they usually light up.

When I tell them I'm Deaf, they usually... glitch.

Their eyebrows go up. Their head tilts. Their mouth forms that tight little "oh wow" shape like they're trying not to say something offensive.

And then, inevitably, comes the question — usually slow and careful, like they're walking across a cultural landmine:

"Wait... how can you write music if you can't hear?"

It's not meant to be mean. But it *is* revealing.

Because what they're really saying is: *You don't seem like the "right kind" of person to be a musical theater composer.*

Not hearing makes people assume I can't understand pitch. Or melody. Or rhythm. Or beauty.

Then they hear the demo tracks from my musical, *Speakeasy* — lush harmonies, syncopated jazz, a soaring eleven o'clock number — and they do a double take.

Wait, you wrote this?

Yes. I did.

And it's damn good.

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## Before the Silence: A Life in Song

I've been in love with music for as long as I've had ears to hear it — and long after. And I did hear it. You see, I wasn't born Deaf.

My love for music started the way a lot of queer kids in the South survive: by turning the volume up and finding themselves between the lines of a showtune.

I was raised in a small farm town where difference wasn't celebrated, it was warned against. But musicals? They were my loophole. They were where misfits had power, where outsiders found love, and where emotion was allowed to take center stage.

I found myself in the dust-covered cowboys of *Oklahoma* (okay, fine, I found them dreamy). I saw my future in the mascara-smearing defiance of *Rent*. I understood myself through songs long before I had words for who I was.

The first time I stole the spotlight, I was eight years old. It was the Christmas pageant at church, and I lobbied hard to play the Angel Gabriel. Not Mary. Not Joseph. *Gabriel*. The angel with the entrance, the announcement, and the solo.

Traditionally played by a girl. I didn't care.

I got the part.

And when it came time for the solo, I didn't sing it sweetly like I was supposed to. I gave a full-blown, Whitney-Houston-style performance with jazz hands, melisma, and choreography. I wanted to be unforgettable — and I was.

From there, music became my identity. I majored in it in college. I sang and danced at Disney. I built a life around expressing myself through song — performing, coaching, choreographing, harmonizing with every emotion I couldn't say out loud. Music wasn't just my career. It was my mirror. My memory.

I don't remember the names of half the people I dated in my twenties, but I remember exactly what song was playing during every breakup, hookup, and road trip. People talk about "the song of the summer." I have a *song of the every-damn-life-milestone*.

One moment that still lives in my bones: I was auditioning with Sondheim's "Being Alive." Just an audition. But something clicked. I hit that perfect, rare, sacred moment singers talk about — being in the pocket — when the voice lines up with the emotion, when the vibrato is right, the belting is fearless, the breath is effortless, and the room just *stops*. I felt the music coming *through* me, not just from me.

It was holy. I'll never forget it.

I thought I'd have a lifetime of moments like that.

Then my hearing started to disappear.

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## The Genetic Bomb I Didn't Know I Was Carrying

But hearing loss wasn't something I expected — or had any time to prepare for.

I have a rare genetic mutation that causes deafness — a sneaky one. It stayed “off” my entire life. I had no clue it was even there.

Then one year, I got the flu. A normal, everyday, run-of-the-mill fever and chills situation. But that fever triggered the mutation into full swing. Within weeks, I was losing my hearing.

Doctors originally said I had 3–5 years before it would be gone. Then they said maybe a year or two. Then less than a year. Then six months.

My body betrayed me in under six months.

As my hearing rapidly collapsed, my brain couldn't keep up. It started misfiring, misinterpreting sounds in strange and surreal ways. A dog barking sounded like a car alarm. A doorbell rang like a train whistle. Everything was distorted — like the world was melting through a funhouse speaker.

And then: silence.

Total.

Devastating.

I fell into a depression. I cried. I raged. I locked myself in my room. I didn't want to speak. I didn't want to write. I didn't want to exist in a world that felt like it had suddenly muted me — or maybe I'd muted myself.

Until one day, something shifted.

Not emotionally. *Physically*.

My body — the same one that betrayed me — decided it wasn't going to give up.

My brain rewired itself. Fast. Almost freakishly fast.

Suddenly, I could feel vibrations in new ways. Tiny, nuanced vibrations. A song on the car radio? I couldn't hear it, but I could tell you what it was by how it felt through the seat. Bad karaoke? I could tell it was off pitch just by the way the hairs on my arms stood up in protest.

It's hard to describe unless you've lived it, but my body can now *feel* music. Literally. I sense the pitch of a note based on how it vibrates against my skin, through my jaw, inside my chest. It's

not just boom-boom bass. It's detail. Nuance. I can tell the difference between a G and a Bb based on how it *buzzes*.

It's weird. It's science. It's magic. I learned to not question it too much. Just be thankful.

And my mind? It wouldn't let the music go — the rhythms, the intervals, the way a harmony lifts you right out of your chair. I couldn't hear external sound anymore, but I could *still hear internally*. Vividly. Specifically. Perfect pitch memory, lodged deep in my bones.

My brain held onto music like a steel trap. I can still sing every word and melody to “No Scrubs” like it's 1999. Meanwhile, I couldn't tell you what I had for lunch yesterday. My brain made a choice — *music stays*. Everything else was optional.

It was the second time music saved me.

The first time was when it gave me a window beyond the repressive, joyless world I grew up in. The second time was when it handed me a rope and pulled me out of the silent prison I thought I'd be stuck in forever.

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## How I Wrote a Musical I've Never Heard

So, how does a Deaf man write a full-scale Broadway-style musical? How do I know something is good even if I've never technically “heard” it and never will?

Let me walk you through it.

### 1. The Words Come First

Always. I start with lyrics. I write the story through rhythm and rhyme — where the emotion rises, where the tension cracks, where the chorus needs to land like a punch or a prayer.

So, I scribble down lyric ideas constantly. On post it notes, in chats, on random slips of papers or napkins. I text myself phrases that randomly come to me. I have the webster's dictionary “what rhymes with” page on bookmark.

I've lived inside musicals my whole life. I *know* when a line needs to swell, and when it needs to break.

### 2. Then I Sing — to Myself

This part sounds like magic but feels totally normal to me: I hum the melody I hear in my head. I *still* hear melodies, crystal-clear. I'll sing them out loud, quietly, usually into a voice memo on my phone. (My Notes app looks like I'm haunted by a jazz ghost.)

Sometimes I sway and dance around the room to let the rhythm of the melody find its perfect spot. Other times I get an earworm melody that won't leave and I know I've struck gold.

And I sing it. I can tell when something's in or out of key just by the way it sits in my mouth, my throat, my chest. I can *feel* when it's just right in my body — just like I felt in that audition singing “Being Alive.”

It comes from memory, intuition, and muscle.

### **3. Then I Transcribe**

Using software like StaffPad or ScoreCloud, I sing or input those melodies, and the program helps map it onto sheet music. Then I layer in everything else — time signature, key, tempo, dynamics, orchestration — all the things my music theory nerd brain still remembers from high school choir and decades of stage work.

I know the theory. I know the math. The magic is in how it all fits together without me ever hearing it.

### **4. Then the Computer Sings to Me**

I feed that sheet music into playback software that turns it into full musical demos — piano, strings, brass, even vocals. I listen with high-powered, studio-grade vibrating headphones that help me *feel* every note through bone conduction.

I sit still. I close my eyes. I let the music move through me. Through the headphones, through a speaker pressed to my chest, through pure stubborn joy.

It's not sound, but it's *sensation*. And sensation, I've learned, is a powerful composer.

I can feel a flat note in my gut. I can feel a harmony soar in my chest.

I tweak. I adjust. I make changes until it feels like the truth. I cry a little when it finally *feels right*.

And then I move on to the next number.

### **5. And Then I Just... Know**

I trust the process. I trust the muscle memory. I trust the internal pitch I've carried since childhood. Every number in *Speakeasy* — from the bombastic jazz opening to the eleven-o'clock belt-your-face-off anthem — was crafted this way.

I may not *hear* the music in the traditional sense.

But I feel every beat of it in my bones.

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## The Joy Is the Point

Writing *Speakeasy* wasn't just a technical challenge. It was personal. Deeply.

I wrote it because I had to. Because I still had music inside me. Because I wanted to tell a story about queer joy and chosen family and the revolutionary act of being fully, audaciously *seen*.

The show takes place in a secret 1920s queer nightclub where joy itself is rebellion. It's about outsiders who are told to stay silent — and choose, instead, to sing. It's about found family. Queer love. Living out loud in a world that wants you erased.

Sound familiar?

These characters — the ones defying expectations, refusing shame, dancing through danger — they're me. They're what I've lived. What I've fought for. What I've lost. And what I still believe in.

In a world that keeps trying to legislate us out of existence, *Speakeasy* insists: we were always here.

We are still here.

Glittering, grooving, grieving, loving.

I may not hear the music the way I used to. But I know what it should *feel like*.

*Speakeasy* is that feeling.

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## And a Final Note

So no — I don't compose the way you're used to.

I don't sit at a piano and plunk out chords I can hear.

But I already proved that my disability doesn't disqualify me from being a composer.

I'm just a different kind of composer — one who writes from memory, vibration, muscle, and magic.

One who refuses to let silence be the end of the story.

So stop trying to gatekeep art with your expectations of what a musician *looks* or *sounds* like.

Because the next time someone asks,

“Wait... how do you write music if you can't hear it?”

I'll just smile and say:

*“I don't need to hear it. I already know how it goes.”*

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 **Want to feel what I felt?**

Listen to demo tracks and learn more about *Speakeasy: A New Musical* at [www.waymonhudson.com/musical](http://www.waymonhudson.com/musical)

Follow me on Instagram: [@waymonhudson](https://www.instagram.com/waymonhudson)