

Fun home by alison
bechdel: turning a
tragic childhood into a
hit musical



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Combining two genres, comic and memoir, Alison Bechdel's graphic novel *Fun Home* is now showing as a musical at Young Vic in London. This wonderful production is adapted by Lisa Kron, composed by Jeanine Tesori, and directed by Sam Gold. With the resonant music and detailed stage, Bechdel's story comes into audiences' view brilliantly.

In *Fun Home*, Bechdel describes two stages of her life. In the childhood, she lives in a small town in Pennsylvania with two younger brothers, her mother Helen who is an English teacher and her father Bruce who is a high school English teacher, a funeral director and a crazy artificer. When she goes to college, she finds out her homosexuality and meets her first girlfriend Joan. After a few months of her revelation and two weeks of her parents' divorce, Bechdel is told that Bruce is hit by a truck and died. The story is organized around the exploration of Bruce's death and his secret homosexuality. There is also a hidden third stage, where adult Bechdel starts memorizing her family tragedy and narrates it.

The three Alisons do great jobs to present three stages of Alison. This musical is in the form of story-telling as the adult Bechdel (Kaisa Hammarlund) stays on the stage all the time narrating the memory of her family. The scene of the young Bechdel (Brooke Haynes) playing the "airplane game" with Bruce (Zubin Varla) and unwillingness of wearing a dress to the party suggest her tomboy personality. The memorizing process is quite real as Hammarlund is holding a silver teapot when she recalls the happiness of her artificer father when he finds this beautiful article. When she goes to college, the medium Bechdel (Eleanor Kane) standing in front of the door of Gay Union awkwardly shows her hesitation and fear of confronting

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her homosexuality from the very beginning of her new discovery of herself. After having sex with Joan (Cherrelle Skeete), the surprise and delight on Kane's face suggest that Bechdel embraces her lesbian sexuality completely.

Music is an art form which uses sounds to express ideas and emotions to audiences so that people can understand those feelings better. Though Fun Home which is referred as Bechdel's family-run funeral business is about a family tragedy, there are times when Bechdel is having fun with her two younger brothers. When kids come out from the casket and sing the funny song "Welcome to the Fun Home", audiences laugh all the time. It seems that their happiness infects the crowd successfully with the amusing music. When Varla is standing in a dark room, singing the moving song "Edges of the World" emotionally, he shows the desperation and helplessness of a man, a father, and a gay clearly. His confusion of his complex identity is revealed in the heavy and speedy music and the lyrics "Who am I now? Where do I go?" explicitly. Though when he sings "But when the sunlight hits the parlor wall", the music becomes softer, making audiences think that he might yearn for the family, the last chord symbolizing him hit by a truck is heartbreaking.

This adaptation shows the desire of Bechdel to know her father very well as it depicts the memory of important moments of Bruce's secret to the audiences: his velvet clothing, going out to buy newspaper late at night and the concealed joy after knowing that Bechdel is a gay. At the end of the musical when three Alisons sing "Flying Away" together, recalling three different relationships with Bruce, it shows a moment of balance perfectly.