

***Fun Home* and Broadway's Ghostly Queer Kids**

Despite the reputation of theater, especially musicals, as a safe space for queer youth, and despite the growing visibility of queer theater kids in literature, film, and television, explicit performances of queer childhood on the mainstream theatrical stage are often ghosted, with the presence of queer kids only tangentially acknowledged, carefully coded, or narratively denied. Kathryn Bond Stockton describes the queer child as historically unavailable to itself in the present, appearing retrospectively as the “ghostly gay child” in memories of queer adults after the “death” of the (presumptively proto-heterosexual) child. This lurking queer child, whose presence cannot be fully acknowledged, haunts the theater, which, according to Marvin Carlson, is always populated by the ghosts of prior performances. Both the category of “theater kids” and the roles available to them are ghostings of the queer child.

Fun Home, the 2015 Broadway musical adapted from Alison Bechdel's autobiographical graphic novel, is a rare instance of a musical portraying a child's awakening into queer identification and provides an opportunity to see kids negotiating the ghosting of their identities onstage and off. Performed in the round and in a non-linear form with three differently aged Alisons' stories intertwined, *Fun Home* seems to make its queer story fully visible, but there remains a ghostly quality to the youngest Alison, who, aged 10, disappears for most of the last third of the show while the adult Alisons take center stage. In the song “Ring of Keys,” Young Alison observes and identifies with a butch lesbian. Unable to articulate her desires precisely, she sings lyrics that cut off in silence where the words are unavailable. In an intriguing instance of the ghosting of young people's queer sexuality in/as theater, Sidney Lucas, who played the role Young Alison, drew on her experience of discovering and identifying with theater kids to inform her performance of queer identification. This performance strategy suggests that, while the ghostly queerness of theater kids in some ways limits their representation on the stage, it also leaves them room to make choices about revealing their own identities.