

# Q&A with *The Play That Goes Wrong* Producer J.J. Abrams

Creator of pop culture cult classics *Lost* and *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (among others like *Felicity*, *Armageddon* and 2019's *Star Wars: Episode IX*), J.J. Abrams also happened to co-produce the upcoming hilarious Broadway smash *The Play That Goes Wrong*. Running in Morsani Hall from Oct. 16-21, *The Play That Goes Wrong* follows an erstwhile ensemble of actors having the worst performance of their lives. It's a long way from *Mission Impossible: III*. In this interview from the show, Abrams talks about his involvement with *The Play That Goes Wrong*.



**Q** You're well-known for your film and television work and this is your first venture as a theater producer. As you say in your *Playbill* bio (paraphrased), "you have no idea what you're doing here." How did you become a lead producer of *The Play That Goes Wrong* on Broadway and on the U.S. tour?

**Abrams:** I was shooting *The Force Awakens* in London, and I had a free night. I checked out what was playing in the West End, and I saw something called *The Play That Goes Wrong*. It sounded like a funny premise so I bought a ticket. When I went to see the play, I was amazed by the whole construction of it. The way it was put together. The rhythm of it. The cleverness. The brilliance of the performers. And I met one of the producers – Mark Bentley – at intermission. He was an incredibly nice guy, and I found myself asking if there were plans to take this comedy to the States. He said they were considering it but had no definitive plans so I said if I could be of any help, I'd like to be. And that's how it started. From there, I talked to my agents about getting involved, and they put me in touch with a veteran Broadway producer named Kevin McCollum who did much of the heavy lifting in negotiating terms and figuring out how to do it since I had never done anything like it before. And together we brought the play to Broadway with the original cast.

**Q** When the play opened in New York, you did some public appearances to promote it, including, memorably, taking the entire audience of *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* to see the production. Tell me a little bit about how you and the other producers went about establishing the brand? And how you continue to promote the brand.

**Abrams:** I became involved with this play when it was already fully formed. Beside the financial investment, my only real contribution was giving some suggestions for the American audience. It was the least I could do and my pleasure to help promote the play. One of the things we did was go on my friend Stephen Colbert's show which was an incredible thrill because we did something insane in surprising the audience by inviting them to the performance immediately after the taping. We walked hundreds of people – I think it was over 400 people – through Times Square to the theatre where they got to see the play. It was an unforgettable night.

**Q** Why do you think this comedy is important for our current times?

**Abrams:** It's too easy to find reasons to be depressed and terrified and unsure and disheartened in this moment. And finding something that is such a pure, unadulterated, hysterically funny and big-hearted piece of entertainment is no small thing. I think one of the reasons that people are laughing as hard as they are at this show is not just that it is so funny, but that people are so desperate to have a good time. It's not just about being distracted by the world, it's about remembering that one of the great reasons we are alive is to come together and to laugh. And *The Play That Goes Wrong* does that.