

Michael P. Northey, author of Green Thumb's hit play [CRANKED](#), a hip hop musical dealing with crystal meth addiction, sat down to chat about writing, inspiration, and new projects.



What was the first play you ever wrote?

The first official play I wrote would be a one man show you are required to do as your thesis at studio 58. You have to write, produce and perform the piece yourself. I had written plays in high school and a few others but this was the first that was completed and taken to the stage. It was called "Rip Out Your Eye Lids", and it was about a gang banger who has just killed someone and hides out in a deserted warehouse. It turns out the warehouse isn't deserted and there are "people" watching him from behind a one way glass. In the end we discover he has murdered his best friend.

It's funny because the new project for GT is about gangs. I have written a few other drafts of different plays with that theme, so perhaps this project has been many years in the making. It's always been something I was interested in writing.

I've always felt compelled to tell the stories of young men who have landed on the wrong side of "right". I'm always interested in how they got there and what made them take that path. I always felt I was close to going down a bad path myself when I was young. I was around many who did go to jail etc. So I have lots of stories waiting to get out with that theme.

How did you get involved with Green Thumb?

Originally I acted for Green Thumb in their production of "Problem Child" by George F Walker. We did a few different runs of that show and it was quite successful. Patrick became very knowledgeable about my interest in writing and Hip Hop at that time and so he approached me to write Cranked. It was a good fit. I had been wanting to write a show incorporating Hip Hop for almost ten years, so I was very grateful when I was given that chance... now twice.



Kyle Cameron as Stan in CRANKED

How has writing Cranked help you develop as a playwright?

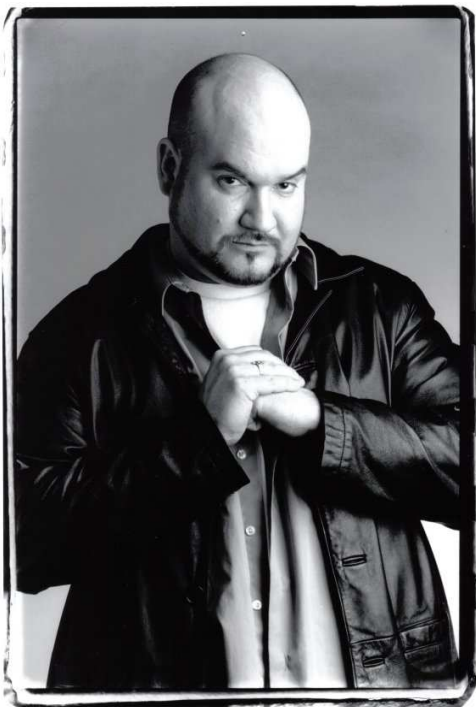
Cranked showed me that a show is developed through many stages and that performance and direction play a huge part in the process. Or should. It's ideal. You don't always have that opportunity. You may workshop a show before it goes into production, which again is ideal, but that doesn't always happen. You never really know what works and what doesn't work though until a show is running in front of an audience. I was given lots of opportunities to make script changes after seeing audience responses. It was integral to getting the script to where it is now. I only wish I could use that process with every script I write, but sometimes there just isn't the time or resources. Mostly I do re-writes in rehearsals and once the show opens, it is what it is. That sucks if you suddenly realize it wasn't really ready, and you can't make changes. It helps to have performers who are eager and willing to accept script changes, and don't get thrown off by them. Or pissed off by them.

What are you working on at the moment?

I am currently working on a yet to be titled play for Green Thumb about gangs. It's a 4 hander, which again incorporates Hip Hop into the story. It is the early stages, but basically it is about a group called "Sick Daze", who are preparing for a big Hip Hop competition. One of the group's members begins to explore gangster rap and the gangster lifestyle and ends up becoming a prospect for a street gang. Essentially it is about blurred identity and the thin lines between Hip Hop genres and their connection to young people. Specifically young men.

In our story the one group's member puts it all on the line with a gang in an effort to legitimize his place in hip hop.

I'm always working on many different things at once it seems. But recently I have also begun reading and compiling my journals which I have kept for the past 20 years, in order to write my autobiography. It is a life long dream to write it and I feel I am close to starting. It is called "The Boy from Bolivar heights", and will be about growing up in Whalley and becoming an Actor/Writer. You know, about my life.



MICHAEL P NORTHY

Any advice for aspiring playwrights?

Write, write, write. I have tons of stories and scripts that are sitting in my computer or on disc or old scripts in crates that may never see the light of day. But I have learned that that doesn't mean they don't have value. It's all practice for, "The real thing". WP Kinsella (One of my writing heroes), says that being a writer is writing 50 stories and not one is read by anyone but you, but you still sit down to write number 51 almost knowing for sure that that too will never be read by anyone, but you write it anyway, because you always have the hope that that will be "the one". I've misquoted him terribly there but you get the gist.

If you don't have that drive and need to write...if you have to force yourself all the time to do it...if you only want to write if that particular piece is going to be produced...then fugettaboutit!

Write! The rest will come.