

•OH: BENZENE AND VINYL LIVE IN OHIO

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A Chemical Musical

By David Quang Pham

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## DAVID QUANG PHAM (he★him)

David Quang Pham is a musical theater science communicator, who authors regionally and Off-Broadway-produced science musicals. His notable musicals personifying astrophysics, quantum mechanics, and botany are respectively: [ELLIPSES](#) (2023 Musical Theatre Factory, SigSpace Concert, Signature Theatre; 2023 MilkyWay Theatre Company, Industry Reading, Theatre 71; 2022 Colorado New Musical Festival; 2022 Eugene O'Neill Theater Center semifinalist), [TOUR](#) (2020 Downtown Urban Arts Festival finalist), and [TURNOVER: A NEW LEAF](#) (2024 Queer Theatre Kalamazoo). [MilkyWay Theatre Company](#) produced a sold-out industry reading of [ELLIPSES](#) in Theatre 71 at Blessed Sacrament during their 2023 Off-Broadway New Works Festival. [Queer Theatre Kalamazoo](#) is producing [TURNOVER](#) to close out their tenth season from May 9-19, 2024.

After completing an astrophysics and theatre education at Michigan State University, he studied playwriting as the 2020-2021 New Play and Dramaturgy Apprentice of [Working Title Playwrights](#), Atlanta. He was the 2021-2022 Literary Fellow of [Playwrights Foundation](#), San Francisco. Composer [Janelle Lawrence](#) mentors him, helping to forge his broad range of musical styles including pop, punk, tango, and quan họ. [Harriet Tubman Effect Institute](#) commissioned his music. His interviews with composers for Kennedy Center and The Public Theater's [BIPOC Critics Lab](#) are published in The Public and [TheaterMania](#). He also consults on stories that explore STEM. His recent dramaturgical credits are [Millennials are Killing Musicals](#) by [Nico Juber](#) (2022 29-hour reading, [Open Jar Studios](#)) and [Allies](#) by Michael McGoldrick (2022 [PPADC](#) Hamilton Arts Festival). His recent stage management credits are [BĀS](#) by [Janelle Lawrence](#) and [Sugar Vendil](#) (2023 [JACK](#)). He is a moderator at [LMDA](#); founding member of [CreateTheater](#) and the International Dramaturgy Lab; member of [ΣΠΣ](#), [ASCAP](#), and the [Dramatists Guild](#). He plays trombone in the [Queer Big Apple Corps](#) Marching Band. His moonbase is in Washington Heights. His earth is in Wyoming, Michigan. Be up to lightspeed at [davidquang.com](#) [@sciencetheatre](#)

CHRONOLOGY OF •OH:

## PLOT SUMMARY

•OH: BENZENE AND VINYL LIVE IN OHIO is a romantic black comedy about a couple passengers of a stalled train trapped in Ohio.

A train contains a couple of working people: Benzene, a nature magazine editor needing a break from Midland, and Vinyl, a songwriter looking for their big break in New York City. The train pulls their emergency brakes and stalls ("I Need a Break"). Suddenly, Benzene and Vinyl are stuck in Ohio.

After Governor Hydroxyl declares there is no further assistance needed, Benzene and Vinyl choose to walk out of Ohio ("No Agency"). Benzene and Vinyl have a buddy system. They absolutely hate Ohio ("Take It Out on Ohio").

They come across a river with a canoe. They take a chance at it. It turns into a date where as they touch the waters, rainbow emerges from it ("Chemicals in the Water"). Unfortunately, they run into a waterfall.

Together, their biggest enemy is Mother Nature ("Kick Mother Nature In"). Mother Nature keeps getting the couples lost. Over time, they get on each other's nerves as their hearts starve more than stomachs could ("A Toxic Relationship"). Benzene runs off into the foggy darkness and gets mortally injured falling into soil ("I Can't See Myself With You").

Instead of striking a chord, Vinyl strikes a match and sets the wildlife alight. They comfort Benzene by declaring that the fire is normal and that they will be seen ("The Fire is Normal").

Adapting the 2023 Ohio train derailment into a romantic black comedy, physicist-turned-dramatist and Michigander David Quang Pham interrogates small-town redlining, lack of environmental regulations, malpractice in governance, and Ohio with his musical, •OH: BENZENE AND VINYL LIVE IN OHIO.

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

**BENZENE**, adult, a nature magazine editor from Midland, Michigan  
Reactive, Sweet

**VINYL**, adult, an aspiring songwriter from Detroit, Michigan  
Reactive, Heated

**HYDROXYL**, older adult, the Governor of Ohio ///

**CONDUCTOR**, older adult, the train conductor and announcer ///

**MOTHER NATURE**, older adult, the mother of Nature

☢ Androgyny Chemistry: Each character resembles the androgynous nature, with open-ended vocal requirements

☢ People of the Global Majority most represent the experiences of these chemicals; cast accordingly

## MUSICAL NUMBERS

1. "I Need a Break" Benzene, Vinyl, Conductor
2. "No Agency (No Further Assistance Needed)" Benzene, Vinyl, Hydroxyl
3. "Take It Out on Ohio" Benzene, Vinyl
4. "Chemicals in the Water" Benzene, Vinyl
5. "Kick Mother Nature In" Benzene, Vinyl, Mother Nature
6. "A Toxic Relationship" Benzene, Vinyl
7. "I Can't See Myself With You" Benzene, Vinyl
8. "The Fire is Normal" Benzene, Vinyl

SCENE 1

TRAIN

1. "I NEED A BREAK"

BENZENE and VINYL sit in different areas of the train. They are about to exit Ohio.

BENZENE & VINYL

OHIO...

I WILL NOT STOP TO SAY GOODBYE...

BENZENE

I CANNOT WAIT TO END MY CAREER.

I HAVE HAD STATED ALL OF THIS ENOUGH.

VINYL

I CANNOT WAIT TO START MY CAREER.

I HAVE NOT STATED ALL OF THIS ENOUGH.

BENZENE (CONT'D)

MAGAZINES...

I WILL NOT WRITE FOR YOU NO MORE.

I CANNOT MAKE OF THESE LONG HOURS.

I WILL NEVER EVER LET THAT BREAK ME.

VINYL

MUSICIANS...

I AM HONORED TO JOIN YOUR RANKS.

I SHALL WRITE SONGS IN THESE LONG TOURS.

I WILL OPEN MY LIFE WITH A BIG BREAK.

BENZENE

I NEED A FRIGGIN' BREAK.

A FUCKING BIG BREAK.

LET ME BREAK IT DOWN FOR YOU:

I NEED A BREAK!

VINYL (CONT'D)

I NEED THE BIGGEST BREAK.

A FUCKING BIG BREAK.

LET ME BREAK IT DOWN FOR YOU:

I NEED A BREAK!

The train journeys through. Then, the train suddenly stops.

CONDUCTOR (PRE-RECORDED)

EMERGENCY BRAKES!

End of "I NEED A BREAK"

BENZENE

Y'all need a break.

VINYL

I will break you!

CONDUCTOR (PRE-RECORDED)

Thank you, Benzene. Fuck you, Vinyl. I can hear you all. Your words and song moved me more than trains ever could. I need a break. A permanent one. Before I go, here is a message from the Governor of Ohio

2. "NO AGENCY (NO FURTHER ASSISTANCE NEEDED)"

HYDROXYL (PRE-RECORDED)

Sorry, not sorry your plans are derailed. The federal government has failed you all. They have no agency. Despite that, the local government will not fail you. The EPA, or East Palestine Authorities, will cheer you on. I am Hydroxyl, your esteemed Governor of Ohio. Your godsend.

BENZENE  
Hell no.

VINYL  
Go to Hell!

HYDROXYL (PRE-RECORDED)

I do not see any problems.

BENZENE  
Look in the mirror!

HYDROXYL (CONT'D)  
I'll smash your face into a mirror!

HYDROXYL (PRE-RECORDED) (CONT'D)

I see solutions. Solvents in Ohio. Stay well.

BENZENE & VINYL

We shall poison your well!

HYDROXYL (PRE-RECORDED)

I'm poised to say... There is no further assistance needed.

The intercom hangs up.

End of "NO AGENCY (NO FURTHER ASSISTANCE NEEDED)"

BENZENE & VINYL

We need you!

HYDROXYL (PRE-RECORDED)

Tough shit!

Awkward silence.

VINYL

That's it! I'm walking.

BENZENE

Stupid... Wait up!

**SCENE 2**

OHIO

VINYL

Oh shit oh.

BENZENE

*Ohio...* You mean.

VINYL (OFFSTAGE)

I'm mean. I'm sick. I'm tired. I'm done.

BENZENE

I'm done with Ohio, too.

VINYL

We're so close to Pennsylvania.

BENZENE

We're far from Michigan.

VINYL (OFFSTAGE)

Where in Michigan?

BENZENE

Midland. You?

VINYL

Detroit.

BENZENE

Were you trying to get out of there?

VINYL

I'm getting out there. To New York. You?

BENZENE

Oh... Anywhere.

VINYL

OK...

BENZENE

Oklahoma... Definitely not three.

VINYL

My oh my.

BENZENE

Michigan... Ohio... Michigan...

VINYL

What do you have against Michigan?

BENZENE (OFFSTAGE)

I'm distancing away from my work life.

VINYL

Work and life don't rhyme together. Work and life don't go together.

BENZENE

So, Vinyl, you're a musician?

VINYL

Shut the fuck up. What job didn't strike a chord in you but instead a match?

BENZENE

I am a magazine editor at Dow Magazine.

VINYL

The nature magazine?!

BENZENE

Nature isn't what it seems...

VINYL

Benzene? What is your dream?

BENZENE

To be on the magazine.

VINYL

As a model? Clean and above us?

BENZENE

Nah... Dirty and soiled.

VINYL

Like Ohio.

BENZENE

It beats Michigan.

### 3. "TAKE IT OUT ON OHIO"

VINYL

OH NO.

BENZENE

OHIO, YES. TAKE IT IN.

BENZENE and VINYL take in a deep breath.

BENZENE (CONT'D)

THERE IS NOT ANYTHING OUT THERE QUITE LIKE OHIO.  
THIS STATE HAS LEFT ME IN A SPEECHLESS STATE OH OH OH...

VINYL

*BECAUSE THERE'S NOTHING IN OHIO.*

BENZENE

PLEASE STOP TAKING IT OUT ON OHIO.



THERE IS NO ONE QUITE LIKE THE CITIZENS OF OHIO.  
THESE PEOPLE LEFT US IN A THOUGHTFUL STATE OF BEING OH OH OH-

VINYL  
BECAUSE THESE PEOPLE ARE ASSHOLES.

BENZENE  
DON'T TAKE YOUR ANGER OUT ON OHIO.

VINYL  
FUCK YOU AND OHIO!

BENZENE  
DON'T TAKE IT OUT ON ME.

VINYL  
QUIT SHITTING ON MICHIGAN!  
FUCK THE PEOPLE OF OHIO!  
LET'S TAKE IT OUT ON OHIO!

BENZENE  
OH NO NO OH...

VINYL  
FUCK THEM! FUCK OHIO.

BENZENE  
THERE IS NOTHING QUITE AS LOW AS THE TAXES IN OHIO.  
THEIR ECONOMY DOES NOT LEAVE ME IN A TAXING STATE OH OH OH...

VINYL  
BECAUSE THE WEALTHY CLASS OWE-

BENZENE  
DO STOP TAKING IT OUT ON POOR I WON'T. OH NO.  
OHIO-

VINYL (CONT'D)

BENZENE (CONT'D)  
FUCK ME! FUCK THE WHOLE WORLD...

VINYL  
DON'T TAKE IT OUT ON THE WORLD.  
START TAKING YOURSELF SERIOUSLY.  
BLAME EVERYTHING ON OHIO!

BENZENE  
LET'S TAKE IT OUT ON THEIR SOIL.

VINYL  
(Falling for BENZENE's passion)  
OH OH OH OH...

BENZENE & VINYL  
FUCK OH. FUCK OHIO!

End of "TAKE IT OUT ON OHIO"

BENZENE and VINYL come across a stream.

BENZENE  
And fuck the Ohio River!

VINYL  
Nothing compares to the Grand River.

A canoe becomes present nearby.

BENZENE  
Is that a raft floating by?

VINYL  
An empty canoe.

BENZENE & VINYL  
Take it out!

BENZENE and VINYL pull out the blanketed canoe.

VINYL  
What do you know...

BENZENE  
There's something in Ohio.

VINYL  
Hmm... A water source.

BENZENE  
Water usually leads to civilization!

VINYL  
Yeah, civilization...

BENZENE  
What's wrong?

VINYL  
Nothing. This is the right of way.

BENZENE gets in the canoe.

BENZENE  
Get yourself right in!

VINYL gets in the canoe.

### SCENE 3

OHIO RIVER

4. "CHEMICALS IN THE WATER"

Colors of all sorts project upon  
the landscape and even water.

BENZENE feels the water. They grab  
ahold of VINYL's hand and have  
them feel the water.

BENZENE  
THE WATER'S CHEMISTRY...  
IT'S GREATER THAN WE CAN EVER IMAGINE.

VINYL  
WHILE OUR CHEMISTRY...  
IT IS NOT SOMETHING THAT I IMAGINED.

BENZENE  
THE WATER'S CHEMISTRY...  
IT'S SO REACTIVE WITH ALL ITS HYDROGEN.

VINYL  
OH OUR CHEMISTRY...  
MUST I EXPLAIN IT TO YOU AGAIN?

BENZENE  
NOTHING'S IN THE WA-

VINYL  
WHAT I NEED TO FISH OUT OF MY SOUL...  
OUR DIVING BOARD IS READY.  
THE COLORS ARE NOW ALTERING MY BRAIN CHEMISTRY AND MY BELIEFS.  
OUR SPECTRUMS ARE ALIGNING.

BENZENE  
I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU ARE SAYING THIS-

VINYL  
THERE'RE CHEMICALS IN THE WATER TURNING MY HEART GAY!

BENZENE  
JUST HOW GAY?

VINYL  
FRIGGIN' GAY!  
THERE'RE CHEMICALS IN THE WATER TURNING MY HEART GAY! SO GAY.

BENZENE  
ARE YOU OKAY...?

VINYL  
THERE'RE CHEMICALS TURNING THE WATER FRIGGIN' GAY!  
COLORFUL!  
JUST LOOK AT THE RAINBOWS!

Oil sheen is projected in water.  
The touch of Benzene and Vinyl's  
hands into the water cause a  
ripple rainbow.

BENZENE

OH WELL. I NEED TO GET IT OFF MY CHEST.  
YOU'RE DRIVING ME SO INSANE.  
YOUR QUEERNESS IS NOW OPENING MY MIND UP TO ALL POSSIBILITIES.  
OUR FEELINGS ARE ALIGNED.

VINYL

I CAN BELIEVE IN LOVE AND SCIENCE!

BENZENE & VINYL

THERE'RE CHEMICALS IN THE WATER TURNING OUR HEARTS GAY!  
FRIGGIN' GAY! QUEER WATER!  
THERE'RE CHEMICALS IN THE WATER TURNING OUR HEARTS GAY!

BENZENE

LIKE ALL FROGS!

VINYL

OH, RIPPIT!

BENZENE & VINYL

THERE'RE CHEMICALS IN THE WATER TURNING OUR HEARTS GAY!

A waterfall nears the canoe. The  
canoe capsizes at the bottom of  
the water.

BENZENE & VINYL (CONT'D)

THAT IS SO GAY!  
WATERFALL!  
THE END OF THE RAINBOW!

BENZENE and VINYL get to land.

End of "CHEMICALS IN THE WATER"

#### **SCENE 4**

OHIO

5. "KICK MOTHER NATURE IN"

BENZENE

Mother Nature, you can be so pretty.

VINYL

Mother Nature, you are just so petty.

MOTHER NATURE (PRE-RECORDED)

Benzene, you're so sweet. Vinyl, you're so heated.

VINYL

Expose yourself!

MOTHER NATURE (PRE-RECORDED)

You've one too many exposures, chemicals.  
What are you doing lying around on my turf.

BENZENE & VINYL

So sorry for anyone that does.

MOTHER NATURE (PRE-RECORDED)

Oh, you'll be sorry-

BENZENE

What Vinyl meant was that we hate Ohio!

VINYL

It's only natural that you hate it, too.

MOTHER NATURE (PRE-RECORDED)

Mother Natures loves all her children, even  
Ohio most of the time. Now, are you here to  
harm my children?

BENZENE & VINYL

We come in peace. We just got off on the wrong  
track.

MOTHER NATURE

What track was ever right? What airplane was  
ever up and away?