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A Universal Musical

by David Quang Pham

DAVID QUANG PHAM (he ★him) | [Resume](#)

David is a musical theater science communicator. Due to youthful trips to operas and space camp, he now writes love letters to science. His notable musicals personifying quantum mechanics, cosmology, and dimensions are respectively: TOUR (2020 DUAF finalist), ELLIPSES (2022 Eugene O'Neill NMTC semifinalist) and PARALLEL UNIVERSITY (2021 NYPL Lab) with [Marie Incontrera](#). He is the composer of [Minka Wiltz](#)'s mixed-media musical *Behind the Veil*. Composer [Janelle Lawrence](#) mentors him, helping to forge his broad range of musical styles including gospel, pop, punk, tango, and Xiqu.

After completing an astrophysics and theatre education at Michigan State University, he studied playwriting as the apprentice of Working Title Playwrights in Atlanta. He is the Literary Fellow of Playwrights Foundation, San Francisco. He is also a proficient trombonist; a critic in Kennedy Center's BIPOC Critics Lab; a moderator at LMDA; a founding member of CreateTheater; a member of ΣΠΣ, ASCAP, and the Dramatists Guild. Be up to lightspeed at [davidquang.com](http://davidquang.com)

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## CAST OF CHARACTERS

**SINGULARITY**, adult, a single parent of six Galaxies

**GRAVITY**, a dog

**SPT0615-JD**, young adult, Singularity's oldest child

**CARTWHEEL**, teen, Singularity's child

**WHIRLPOOL**, teen, Singularity's child

**TRIANGULUM**, teen, Singularity's child

**ANDROMEDA**, teen, Singularity's child

**MILKY WAY**, preteen, Singularity's youngest child

Supporting Characters

**ABELL**, young child, JD's eventual Galaxy, never utters a word

**INVARIANT**, adult, Singularity's parent, appears in Act II

**FIX**, adult, Singularity's parent, appears in Act II

Ensemble

**TIDALS**, tidal forces personified as dogs  
Bark: "Force"                      Howl: "Fall"

**SOLAR SYSTEM**, Milky Way's imaginary friends

**MULTIPLICITIES**, coupled Galaxies in the audience

\*Androgyny Astronomy: Each character resembles the androgynous nature, with open-ended vocal requirements

\*Cast Size {Reading: 10 (includes stage direction reader); Doubling: Cartwheel-Invariant & Whirlpool-Fix / Workshop: 16+ (8 Principal, 3 Supporting, 5+ Ensemble)}

## SYNOPSIS

Spend an eternity in the family musical of epic proportions. In ELLIPSES, the Galaxy family and their dog Gravity sing and dance their way through the Big Bang.

Before the world that we have come to know, there lived a remote family of Galaxies. Singularity is the single parent who locked their six kids in the house. Milky Way is the baby sibling going through galactic puberty. JD is the oldest sibling looking to explore the Universe. This outgrown young adult is perfect for Gravity's manipulation. In a violent altercation, JD strikes down Singularity to run away from home with Gravity (aka the Big Bang). Without their parent, the teenage Galaxies must fend for themselves in the vastness of the cosmos.

Family is everything we know, and so is the Universe. The entire chronology of our Universe is a family drama in play. To live as a family or to leave as anomalies is the heart of this universal coming-of-age story.



In geometry, an "ellipse" is an oval. ○

In punctuation, "ellipses" indicate omissions. ...

"An ellipse in the ellipses" ○ A Stage in the Three Stages of Human Development (Childhood/Teenhood/Adulthood)

"Ellipses" ○ A (divisive) term for Galaxies, besides "Ovals" and "Ellipsoids"

"[The Elliptic](#)" ○ The Dome Home in the Center of the Universe (The Setting)

## DEVELOPMENT HISTORY

Virtually, ELLIPSES has had four table reads, three workshops, and a public concert reading. ELLIPSES was David's apprenticeship project at [Working Title Playwrights](#) in Atlanta, and David got to see the show on its virtual feet this past year. Seeing the readings with an audience was immensely helpful, and his revisions are based on rehearsal feedback and professional responses he got through that yearlong experience. [Aliyah Curry](#) directed the final virtual reading with dramaturg [Jordan Alexandria Ealey](#) leading the talkback. ELLIPSES participated in [Theater Resources Unlimited's](#) How to Write a Musical That Works 3-part workshops (June and October 2021, February 2022) and their Writer-Director Communications Lab in December 2021.

## ACT I

### SCENE 1

#### THE CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE

The Elliptic is downstage center. Light dwells solely within the Dome. Inside is a table with seats and a rug. Outside is a stage that is mainly off limits. Everything upstage is concealed by the side curtains. Equations are teeming flowers in the space.  
(<https://www.ellipsesplay.com/set>)

Outside the home, SINGULARITY hums as they pick equations and place them on a dish. They then head to the rug to meditate.

The MULTIPLICITIES are in the audience.

#### MULTIPLICITIES

Nothing.

Alert, SINGULARITY draws out the Big Bang Taser and ignites it outwards.

The TIDALS distantly whimper.

The lights flicker. The curtains ripple. The field equations loom like a field of flowers. The Universe flashes their wonders.

From the audience, ABELL enters. They sit in a front row seat.

SINGULARITY stows away the Big Bang Taser underneath the rug, returning the Universe back to its void stasis. They look upon ABELL.

#### SINGULARITY

Nothing...

SINGULARITY leaves through a side exit of the home.

JD enters, carrying a monocular. They position themselves at the edge of the home. They scope out.

1. “BOUNCE” (<https://www.ellipsesplay.com/music/1-bounce>)

TRIANGULUM wanders out, holding a snow globe that resembles the home. They head to JD and snatch their monocular to scope out. They toss it behind.

TRIANGULUM

NOTHING.

WHIRLPOOL spirals out. They catch or pick up the monocular. They scope out.

WHIRLPOOL

NOTHING!

CARTWHEEL cartwheels out. They snatch the monocular from WHIRLPOOL. They scope out.

CARTWHEEL

NOTHING!

ANDROMEDA pops out. CARTWHEEL hands the monocular to ANDROMEDA. ANDROMEDA scopes out. They stow away the monocular.

ANDROMEDA

NOTHING!

MILKY WAY, looking disheveled, strolls in.

MILKY WAY

NUTHIN'...

The TEEN GALAXIES – CARTWHEEL, WHIRLPOOL, TRIANGULUM, ANDROMEDA, MILKY WAY – cluster in the center of the home.

TEEN GALAXIES

NOTHING!

The TEEN GALAXIES bounce away from one another. They distinctly dance alongside the wall, posing at certain melodic phrases.

SINGULARITY (OFFSTAGE)

MILKY WAY! ANDROMEDA! TRIANGULUM! WHIRLPOOL! CARTWHEEL!

MILKY WAY lugs their way to the table. ANDROMEDA sails to the table. TRIANGULUM triangulates to and places the snow globe on the table. WHIRLPOOL spirals to the table. CARTWHEEL cartwheels to the table.

## SINGULARITY (O.S) (CONT'D)

JD!

JD remains staring out at the Edge.

JD

ABELL...

ABELL reaches out to JD.

End of "BOUNCE"

All TIDALS prowl in and surround the table.  
SINGULARITY arrives with dishes.

## TEEN GALAXIES

Singularity. Declinations.

The TEEN GALAXIES bow. SINGULARITY places the dishes around the table. GRAVITY narrates.

## GRAVITY

Nothing comes close to family... Except "pets." I'm Gravity. I've been here for infinite dog years. And this is the story of the Galaxy family.

We've long lived in the Elliptic. This Dome is all we've ever known. Singularity has closed off the outside world for quite some time. Eternities, in fact. The kids here aren't much older than a dozen eternities, but one is nearing two. I like this one. The Elliptic is only perfect, with our oldest Galaxy: JD...

JD is on the edge. While their siblings see "nothing" out there, JD sees a future elliptic in the nothingness. Beyond the Edge of the Universe. I sense that their dream is to have an elliptic of their own. JD deserves a life of their own. What adult doesn't want to leave the safety of their home to go explore the Universe?

Singularity does not own us: Galaxies or me, a tidal force. Singularity can't hold us forever. Singularity shall face the Big Bang, even if it's the last thing Gravity does. In Zenith... Force!

SINGULARITY shushes GRAVITY. They set a dish on the ground, for the TIDALS to feast upon. MILKY WAY hugs SINGULARITY. SINGULARITY bows.

## SINGULARITY

Declinations, family.

The TEEN GALAXIES sit, while TRIANGULUM unfortunately sits on the whoopie cushion.

## SINGULARITY (CONT'D)

*Sounds like someone's been eating my gas giants.*

## TRIANGULUM

Quit the snickers, Milky Way.

## SINGULARITY

Has anyone seen my scope? Where could they be? It's got to be in our Elliptic...

SINGULARITY touches the snow globe.

## ANDROMEDA

*Everything in here is a cluster flux.* Wouldn't hurt to look out—

## SINGULARITY

If you escape my gravitational pull and step out onto the space, you'll end up ripping apart the Fabric of Spacetime. Then I, the grandmaster of the Universe, will be out of order. Forget the scope. We got all the cosmic formulas right here in our Elliptic. With my wrists and black-hole heart, I cooked you nebulae something special: nuclear pasta and meteors.

## CARTWHEEL

*Special* for the trillionth millennium, you Bach Ho. ("Bach Ho" is Vietnamese for "white tiger," sounds like "black hole," and implies tiger parenting.)

## SINGULARITY

I, *tiger nomy/mom/dad*, am so glad that this meal is as special as our first. They're heated to over ten million degrees Kelvin and rotated in the cosmic microwave background at the angular velocity of a dozen sine squared its solar latitude minus one sine to its fourth power. Strongest material in the cosmos. A variety of nutrition from the crusts of neutron stars. Dismantle the mantle. But leave the core. I'd love to planet these.

GRAVITY tries to grab TRIANGULUM's dish.  
TRIANGULUM slaps away GRAVITY.

## TRIANGULUM

That's not for you to gravitate to. *Stupid tidal force.* Nothing between those ears but a vacuum.

TRIANGULUM unnervingly scratches  
GRAVITY's ear.

## ANDROMEDA

Throw the tidal dog a meteor. If ye wants a swig, ye can have spaghettification.  
*Fix...?*

ANDROMEDA tosses invisible spaghetti to a  
sitting GRAVITY.

## ANDROMEDA (CONT'D)

Who's a good tidal force? Ye all are!

The TIDALS bark while SINGULARITY tries to  
get them to sit.

## TIDALS

Force! Force! Force! Force! Force! Force!

## SINGULARITY

Fix. Fix. Fix. Fix. Fix. Fix.

MILKY WAY dives into their dish.

## TRIANGULUM

Again, Milky Way?

## ANDROMEDA

Ye mostly photons, Triangulum.

## CARTWHEEL

It takes endless millennia to burn that, Andromeda.

## WHIRLPOOL

A simple nap ain't last any longer, Cartwheel.

## SINGULARITY

Most of you went through a phase where you ate megatons. You want to accrete  
and be a Grand-Design Spiral Galaxy, don't you? Like Whirlpool?

CARTWHEEL mocks WHIRLPOOL's physique.

## WHIRLPOOL

You may be well rounded, but you ain't got spiral arms in this fight. You're full  
of heavy blue stars. Ring a bell, Ring Galaxy?

## CARTWHEEL

*Gal*, I put no weight or stress on myself. All you are are stretched-out circles.  
Y'all are the morbidly spiral Galaxies.

## ANDROMEDA

Least ye not a two-dimensional square, like this Galaxy.

## TRIANGULUM

I'll run faster than light circles around you, Galaxies.

TRIANGULUM tosses the whoopie cushion at  
CARTWHEEL. CARTWHEEL and WHIRLPOOL  
go on the defense.



MILKY WAY

(Mouthful of nuclear pasta)

Kau tau to you, ellipsoids.

CARTWHEEL, WHIRLPOOL, TRIANGULUM

Shut your worm hole, you quasi-Galaxy. At least we're not babies!

SINGULARITY

Oneness, clusters of stars! Gals. Your hearts are all vigorous.

SINGULARITY lovingly pinches MILKY WAY's  
cheek.

SINGULARITY (CONT'D)

Always full of grace. Let us save space.

2. "CRUNCH" (<https://www.ellipsesplay.com/music/2-crunch>)

SINGULARITY and the GALAXIES pray.

SINGULARITY

FEED THAT HOLE IN YOUR HEART.

GIVE INTO INTERNAL DARKNESS.

SHED OUR LIGHT FOR NO ONE.

AS IT'S CRUNCH TIME, GALAXIES.

IN BLACK HOLES, DWELL WISDOM.

FED BY THE SPRINKLES OF STARDUST.

CRUSH THEIR DREAMS IN YOUR PALM.

IT IS CRUNCH TIME, MY BABIES.

TEEN GALAXIES

CONSUME STAR SYSTEMS.

CONSUME WORLDS THAT TEEM.

CONSUMED BY THOUGHTS OF FAMILY. FAMILY...

SINGULARITY

STRING BY STRING IN THEORY.

AND FABRIC BY SPACETIME FABRIC.

HOLD OUR LOVE AS A WHOLE.

IT IS CRUNCH TIME, WE BELIEVE.

WHIRLPOOL

IT IS CRUNCH TIME, SINGULARITY.

TRIANGULUM

IT IS CRUNCH TIME, SINGULARITY.

CARTWHEEL

IT IS CRUNCH TIME, SINGULARITY.

ANDROMEDA

IT IS CRUNCH TIME, SINGULARITY.

MILKY WAY

IT IS CRUNCH TIME, NOMY/MOMMY/DADDY SING.

SINGULARITY

IT IS CRUNCH TIME, JD? SPT0615-JD?

End of "CRUNCH"

3. "CUTTING EDGE" ([https://www.ellipsesplay.com/music/3-cutting\\_edge](https://www.ellipsesplay.com/music/3-cutting_edge))

GRAVITY approaches JD.

JD

NOT THE TIME

TO PUSH ME OVER THE EDGE...

IT IS CLEAR CUT...

I CAN'T MAKE MYSELF CLEAR IN THE...

GRAVITY makes JD face outside.

JD (CONT'D)

CENTER WITH OUR RELATIVES...

OUR TIDAL DOGS.

GRAVITY, ALWAYS GROUNDING ME...

JD nears the edge of the home.

JD (CONT'D)

YOU SEE.

I GO OFF ON A TANGENT.

WHERE THE CUTTING EDGE WILL BE...

JD (CONT'D)

WHERE THE CURVATURE CONCEALS ALL WORLDS LEADING INTO KINSHIP.  
SAIL OUT OF THIS ELLIPSE.  
WHERE THE ASTRAL BEACH WILL MEET AN OCEAN FULL OF CHORAL REEFS.  
SEA WITH OTHER ELLIPSES.

JD takes a jab at their siblings.

JD (CONT'D)

WHY IS THIS CIRCLE LACKING THE CURIOSITY IN ALL?  
STUCK IN THIS HERE, GALA.  
WHY ARE THESE OVALS BENT ON SEEING NOTHING IN MYSTERY?  
LOOK BEYOND THESE GALAXIES.

TEEN GALAXIES

CUT AWAY FROM THE EDGE!

JD (CONT'D)

WHY DON'T YOU MAKE ME?  
ALL YOUR FIGHTS HAVE DRIVEN A WEDGE.  
PLEASE LET ME BE AT PEACE BY THE EDGE.  
GO BACK AND CIRCUMVENT.  
I'LL JUST BE OUT ON A TANGENT—

In JD's mind, the TEEN GALAXIES seem to be  
droning on.

TEEN GALAXIES

SPT0615-JD.

AS WE ARE JUST SAYING BEFORE YOU CUT US OFF.  
NOTHING'S CUTTING OUTTA THE EDGE.  
NO ONE'S GOING OVER THE EDGE.  
JOIN US FOR CRUNCH.

JD

*APPARENTLY, I HAVEN'T MADE MYSELF CLEAR.*  
CUTTING MY EDGES MAKES MYSELF APPARENT AS *YOU*. (*SINGULARITY*)  
AND SHEDS MY LIGHT UPON A *LIGHTLESS GALAXY*. (*ABELL*)  
MY HEART TELLS ME THERE'S A PROMISING FAMILY, OFF—  
END OF THIS TANGENT.

TEEN GALAXIES

SPT0615. CHILD.

NO NEED TO BE APPARENT— (Droning on in JD’s mind)  
JOIN US FOR CRUNCH.

JD

MY FUTURE IS AN ELLIPSE WHERE MY LEGACY IS ABELL...  
TO BE THE ADULT IN THE ROOM.

JD lets GRAVITY ground them.

TEEN GALAXIES

SPT0615-*JADED*—

JD

*JD GOES OFF OF THE TANGENT!*

ALL MY COSMIC POEMS MUST REACH TO THE ENDS OF THIS EPIC TALE.  
*OUR* AUDACIOUS VERSE.  
THERE MIGHT BE A FRIEND WHO WILL FOLLOW IN MY LYRICAL TRAILS  
TO THE EDGE OF THE UNIVERSE...

YOU’LL KNOW.  
I’LL BE CUTTING TO THE EDGE.

End of “CUTTING EDGE (MAKE MYSELF CLEAR)”

GRAVITY

JD (CONT’D)

Force!

Grounded. You’re my tidal force, Gravity.

MILKY WAY dives into their dish.

SINGULARITY

I will spare a millennium to listen to your verse, JD. You are apparent to me.  
Clear and crisp like how I raised you to be.

JD

I love you too, Singularity...

SINGULARITY

You love Gravity, too much. That dog is a bad influence.

JD

You Singularity, raise me physically. Gravity raises my spirit.

## SINGULARITY

Your soul will be dragged down to their level if you keep it up. What are you looking forward to? What's pulling at your heart?

JD

Abell... There is something ringing in mine.

## SINGULARITY

*A bell?* Your astronomical clock must be malfunctioning.

JD

My biological clock remains malnourished.

## SINGULARITY

Our biology has no logic. If you hope for any of your fictitious clock to be functioning and *nourished*, you may... *Galaxies?*

## TEEN GALAXIES

Join us for Crunch—

JD

I'm done with Crunch. I'm sick of the same old dish of photons that we eat and I'm tired of dishing it out with these teen Galaxies.

## MILKY WAY

JD, *who* is Abell?

JD

Abell... May just be a tiny curiosity. Haha. *Like you, Milky Way.*

## SINGULARITY

Even a grownup Galaxy needs to accrete. My babies need to grow. There's *nothing* out there for you.

JD

There is someone for that *nothing*. That someone is me.

## SINGULARITY

You're nothing but a spoiled nebula if you've forgotten all the constants and variables I've picked for you. All the light I shed.

JD

I'm ready to pass on your light. Our light. Nomy/Mom/Dad... *May I go to the Edge of the Universe?*