

# RING OF FIRE

The Music of JOHNNY CASH



**WCT** WESTERN  
CANADA  
THEATRE

February 23 to March 4, 2017  
SAGEBRUSH THEATRE

**STUDY GUIDE**

# RING OF FIRE

## A Study Guide

### Production Personnel

#### *Featuring*

Timothy E. Brummund  
Scott Carmichael  
Andrea Cross  
Samantha Currie  
Mark Macrae  
Jonas Shandel  
Zachary Stevenson  
Kraig Waye

#### *Creative Team*

Mark Dumez	Director
Zachary Stevenson	Music Director
T. Erin Gruber	Set and Projection Designer
Crystal Hanson	Costume Designer
Rebekah Johnson	Lighting Designer
Paul Tedeschini	Sound Designer
Doug Perry	Sound Engineer
Melissa Young	Movement Coach
Dani Fecko	Stage Manager
Christine Leroux	Apprentice Stage Manager
Brett Rayner	Tour Technical Director

## Behind the Scenes

### *Johnny Cash*

Johnny Cash (born John R. Cash; February 26, 1932 – September 12, 2003) was an American singer-songwriter, guitarist, actor, and author. He was widely considered one of the most influential musicians of the 20th century and one of the best-selling music artists of all time, having sold more than 90 million records worldwide. Although primarily remembered as a country music icon, his genre-spanning songs and sound embraced rock and roll, rockabilly, blues, folk, and gospel. This crossover appeal won Cash the rare honor of multiple inductions in the Country Music, Rock and Roll, and Gospel Music Halls of Fame.



Cash was known for his deep, calm bass-baritone voice, the distinctive sound of his Tennessee Three backing band, a rebelliousness coupled with an increasingly somber and humble demeanor, free prison concerts, and a trademark look, which earned him the nickname "The Man in Black." He traditionally began his concerts with the simple "Hello, I'm Johnny Cash," followed by his signature "Folsom Prison Blues".

Much of Cash's music contained themes of sorrow, moral tribulation and redemption, especially in the later stages of his career. His signature songs include "I Walk the Line", "Folsom Prison Blues", "Ring of Fire", "Get Rhythm", and "Man in Black". He also recorded humorous numbers like "One Piece at a Time" and "A Boy Named Sue"; a duet with his future wife, June Carter, called "Jackson" (followed by many further duets after their marriage); and railroad songs including "Hey, Porter", "Orange Blossom Special" and "Rock Island Line". During the last stage of his career, Cash covered songs by several late 20th-century rock artists, notably "Hurt" by Nine Inch Nails and "Personal Jesus" by Depeche Mode.

Source: Wikipedia

## *Creator of the Play*

Richard Eldridge Maltby Jr. (born October 6, 1937) is an American theatre director and producer, lyricist, and screenwriter. Maltby was born in Ripon, Wisconsin, the son of Virginia (née Hosegood) and Richard Maltby, Sr., a well-known orchestra leader. He has conceived and directed the only two musical revues to ever win the Tony Award for Best Musical: *Ain't Misbehavin'* (1978: Tony, N.Y. Drama Critics, Outer Critics, Drama Desk Awards, also Tony Award for Best Director) and *Fosse* (1999: Tony, Outer Critics, Drama Desk Awards). He conceived and directed *Ring of Fire*, which originally ran on Broadway in 2006.

## *Conceived by*

Bill Meade began his career as a musician. He has been a featured soloist with numerous orchestras, including the Zurich Philharmonic, Prague Philharmonic and Jacksonville Symphony. He has produced concerts throughout the U.S. and Europe. On Broadway, he has been involved with more than 50 musicals and on such television shows as The Super Bowl Halftime Show, Sesame Street and the Miss America Pageant. He is a Grammy-nominated record producer with a wide range of theatrical releases.

## *Synopsis*

*Ring of Fire* is a jukebox musical that also takes a biographical look into the life of Johnny Cash. The show features eight actors/musicians who tell the story through 34 different Johnny Cash songs.

## Activities in the Classroom

### *Activity*

Johnny Cash has quite a repertoire of songs that he wrote, performed and recorded. Have your students research the songs he released and choose one on which to do a more in depth study. Students could do this on their own, in pairs, or even groups, if you wish for the activity to be more in depth.

Students will then be asked to play the song for the class, followed by a short presentation. This can include the origins of the song (which may include Cash's history, so be aware of the challenges he faced along the way that will certainly arise for your students as they research), what it means, and/or why it may have been important to him and to his listeners. They can include what his intentions were or what their feelings for the song are. Play the song for the class again and discuss what they have just learned.

Further Study: After seeing the play, ask the groups if their ideas of the songs changed in any way. Did researching a song help them to understand the life of Johnny Cash? Was it helpful or did it mean more when they heard the song they had researched?

### *Post-Show Discussion*

1. Discuss the play with your class. What did they like, what did they find challenging? Why? Ask for specifics to generate a more intense conversation.
2. What was your favourite song performed and why?
3. What did you think of the ending of the play? Have students discuss or write down alternative endings. How would changing the ending effect the rest of the play? How would it change your final feeling about the play?

### *Curriculum Connections*

Drama	Historical and Aesthetic Context Exploring, Drama Forms Performance
Arts Education	Social and Cultural Context
Language Arts	Oral Language, Reading and Viewing, Speaking and Listening