

# Sigmund Fuchs' play 'In the Closet' took a 16-year journey to the stage

By [Thomas Floyd](#)

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Sigmund Fuchs knows now that his younger self was a little too ambitious for his own good.

When Fuchs was a student at the Cleveland-Marshall College of Law in the early 2000s, he figured he'd pursue a full-time career as a playwright and work in law on the side to help fund those creative dreams. In 2002, he began writing a metaphysical comedy called "In the Closet."

"Then being a lawyer became hard," Fuchs says. "And the show kind of got put on the back burner for a significant amount of time."

A number of obstacles slowed "In the Closet's" journey to the stage. Originally a one-man show, the play grew into a more complicated story about four gay men of different ages — in their teens, 20s, 40s and 60s — retreating into a metaphorical safe space that, appropriately, takes the form of a closet. In a happy inconvenience, Fuchs' law career took off and he landed a time-consuming job in the Justice Department. At one point, a computer crash erased half the script.

"I would [write] maybe a little bit here, a little bit there," the D.C. resident says. "I kept doing that and putting it away, doing that and putting it away. Finally, I was like, 'I need to finish this thing.'"

Fuchs completed "In the Closet" in 2015, submitting the play to writing contests around the country and winning awards at theater competitions in Denver and Baltimore. After a handful of workshops and readings, "In the Closet" landed an intercity "rolling premiere": an initial run last fall in the 41-year-old's hometown of Cleveland, and now a Rainbow Theatre Project production that starts Thursday at the DC Arts Center.

When Fuchs first found himself considering the idea for "In the Closet," the coming-out trope felt "a little not interesting anymore" — in other words, his ideal storytelling challenge. So he built the play's narrative around an 18-year-old who rushes into the closet after his first gay sexual experience. There, the character finds the three older gay men, all of whom have issues to work through and advice to impart.

"I would like people to walk out understanding a little bit more about what it's like to feel scared because of your sexuality," says Fuchs, himself a member of the LGBT community. "Straight people, I find, are coming to me and saying, 'I never thought about it. I never sat down for two hours with somebody who is struggling with this to really understand it.'"

Within his story, Fuchs navigates familiar themes of marginalization and loneliness but also tackles the less-treaded topic of ageism within the gay community. He also used that framework to set up a universal narrative about the safe spaces all people retreat to when times are tough. If audience members of different ages, backgrounds, races and sexual orientations can see themselves in the characters, Fuchs will have achieved what he aspired to do 16 years ago.

“Hopefully, I have four characters that the audience becomes invested in,” he says. “When each one decides at the end if they’re going to open that door, [I hope] that it matters to the audience.”

### **Thomas Floyd**

Thomas Floyd is the entertainment editor at The Washington Post Express. He writes about TV, film, theater and comedy, and also covers soccer for Express sports. Before joining Express in 2018, he was a senior editor at Goal.com and a copy editor and sports writer at the Washington Times. [Follow](#) 

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