

In Advance of 'The Notebook' Musical, Nicolas Sparks Accused of Homophobia After Release of Damning Emails

 [rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/nicolas-sparks-notebook-musical-broadway-reacts-lgbt-848293](https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/nicolas-sparks-notebook-musical-broadway-reacts-lgbt-848293)

By EJ Dickson

June 13,
2019

Vanessa Hudgens is set to appear in a staged workshop reading of 'The Notebook' musical, adapted from Nicolas Sparks' popular book.

This week, the Daily Beast reported that Nicholas Sparks, author of the hugely popular romance novels *The Notebook* and *A Walk to Remember*, had tried to ban LGBT clubs and student protests at the Epiphany School, a Christian academy Sparks founded that is located in New Bern, North Carolina. Saul Benjamin, a former headmaster at the Epiphany School, is suing Sparks, claiming that he and other school board members “unapologetically marginalized, bullied, and harassed members of the School community whose religious views and/or identities did not conform to their religiously driven, bigoted preconceptions.”

Emails obtained by the Daily Beast seemed to confirm this to some degree, showing that Sparks attempted to ban student protest at the school, berated Benjamin for attempting to foster an environment of diversity and tolerance, and accused him of having “an agenda that strives to make homosexuality open and accepted.” Benjamin has also accused Sparks of racism, claiming that Sparks told him the school had few African-American students because they are “too poor and can’t do the academic work.”

Sparks has roundly denied the allegations, writing on Twitter that the Daily Beast story repeats “false allegations and claims” that have already been discredited in a court of law. (In August, the U.S. District Court will issue a ruling on other claims Benjamin made against Sparks in the lawsuit, such as that he defamed him by telling other Epiphany board members that he suffered from dementia.)

But they come as a tremendous blow to the reputation of the wildly successful romance author, whose books have sold more than 100 million copies, many of which have been adapted into equally popular films. To make the timing even worse, the latest adaptation of Sparks' work, a musical version of *The Notebook*, is expected to come to Broadway this year, featuring a book by playwright Bekah Brunstetter and music by singer/songwriter Ingrid Michaelson.

In fact, just a day before the Daily Beast story was published, it was confirmed that Vanessa Hudgens would appear in a staged workshop reading of *The Notebook* musical adaptation at the Powerhouse, an incubator run by Vassar and New York Stage & Film; the June 23rd production will be directed by Michael Greif, who is best known for having helmed the

original production of *Rent*. (He also directed Hudgens in *Rent Live*, the live television production of the musical.) Greif is LGBTQ, and Hudgens is a vocal ally for the LGBT community.

In light of the allegations of homophobia against Sparks, and Broadway's reputation as a haven for members of the LGBTQ community, a handful of members of the theater and LGBTQ communities have harshly criticized the productions on social media, including PFLAG, the LGBTQ advocacy organization.

I wonder how [@VanessaHudgens](#) feels about this, as she begins rehearsals for the NOTEBOOK musical? <https://t.co/SyuVEKpzYv> <https://t.co/0qOCQJ15Sj>


— PFLAG National (@PFLAG) [June 14, 2019](#)

Hey, Broadway: Stand with the LGBTQ+ community and [#cancelTheNotebook](#) musical. [@BroadwayWorld](#) [@playbill](#) [@theatermania](#) <https://t.co/AyJ1i4nb52> via [@AV_Newswire](#)

— Justin Gregory Lopez (@JGregoryLopez) [June 14, 2019](#)

So glad I never spent a dime on any Nicholas Sparks books or movies. I can't imagine the Broadway community moving forward with the Notebook play knowing it's author is a homophobe POS. <https://t.co/jVYKRfE0eK>

— Talent (@Talentiest) [June 13, 2019](#)

i'm not sure if any money from the notebook musical is going directly to nicholas sparks but he tried to ban the lgbt club at the christian school he helped make soo.. do with that info what u want but 

— brandon uranowitz's tony's suit (@booksndbroadway) [June 14, 2019](#)

Hudgens, Greif, representatives for the Powerhouse and producers Kurt Deutsch and Kevin McCollum did not immediately reply to requests for comment.

Sparks' full statement is below.

pic.twitter.com/y4nZX6TByD

— Nicholas Sparks (@NicholasSparks) [June 13, 2019](#)