

## Anthology Foreword

I sometimes think The Civilians are the only necessary ensemble in New York.

That's an exaggeration, to be sure, but not by much. Steve Cosson has led the company over the last decade with a team of collaborators, most notably composer Michael Friedman. They have grown into a group that creates theater that is not only consistently thrilling, but that reflects the world we live in with a passion and depth unmatched by any of their peers. I go to each new Civilians project filled with curiosity and excitement, because I know they make will open up the world in which I live in fresh and brilliant ways.

Their work is growing, too: the beautiful baubles of *Nobody's Lucn* and *Gone Missing* have been expanding to create the extraordinary vista of *This Beautiful City* and *Paris Commune* and the still-in-progress ATLANTIC YARDS. Steve's work as a writer has been getting deeper and sharper and more confident, Michael's music continues to astonish with his range and complexity, and their combined dramatic imagination and ambition continues to expand at a breathtaking rate. They've been very good, so far; where their work promises to take them is breathtaking.

But it's not just Michael and Steve: The Civilians, large and informal as it is, is a real company of playwrights, directors, actors and designers. I can't single out any of the artists who work with them, much as I'd love to, because I'd be leaving out so many who are so amazing. The company attracts actors who, different as they are, seem similar in their ability to radiate a sympathetic intelligence onstage. The depth of their involvement in the creation of the work is evident in their proud, full-blooded ownership of the complex material they embody. It's a brave, beautiful and luminous group that take the stage whenever The Civilians perform.

The ethos of their work combines the best of the British Joint Stock tradition of collective creation with the rawness and immediacy that is so characteristically American. Their work is both of the New York downtown scene, with all the sophistication and hipness that implies, and of a much older American tradition of telling the stories of the people. They are in the world, and of it. Their theater embodies what is best in the form: connection to community and the highest artfulness, playfulness and seriousness side-by-side. They make the American theater a nobler profession; if they didn't exist, we'd be struggling to invent them.

But they do exist, and this book is a record of their first phase. It's terrific work, and they are only getting started.

—Oskar Eustis