

## THE WAVE - SYNOPSIS

In 1967, high school teacher Ron Jones set out to demonstrate the mentality of the average German citizen during WWII. He devised an experiment in discipline, community, action, and pride. Within 5 days, his entire high school became a proto-fascist movement.

As the show begins, a pre-recorded anthem plays in complete blackout. An unseen Chorus sings along (*'Prologue'*). They represent all of the 'ordinary men' throughout history who have participated in atrocities. The anthem concludes, and lights come up to reveal the chorus along the perimeter of the stage, all wearing ideantical clothing and masks which conceal their faces.

A music/movement overture takes over. James, Robert, Ella, Stevie, and Jess enter. They are all sophomore high school students in the same class. The montage depicts a few days in the life of the high school. James, Stevie, and Jess are a trio of old friends. Ella and James share a romantic link. Robert is a loner. He always has been, and believes he always will be. The montage comes to an end, and Robert is left alone onstage (*'It Isn't So Hard'*).

The Chorus addresses the audience, and speaks of the collective dream of community. It is attainable, as long as the right person comes along to spark the magic. Ron Jones enters the stage. He is a history teacher at the same high school as the students, and answers the siren call of the Chorus (*'Written in Pen'*).

It is now Monday in Ron Jones's history class. Ron has been pondering a question asked by one of his students the previous week: "how could millions of people in Nazi Germany participate in something so terrible". Ron introduces his class to the satisfaction of order and efficiency through an experiment he calls 'Strength Through Discipline'. The class responds positively, especially Robert, who typically does not participate (*'Happier, Stronger'*).

Later that night, James and Ella are together in her room, sharing an intimate moment (*'Something About You'*). Ella is a straight-A student and independent thinker; she is memorizing a set of poems by Langston Hughes. Following their scene, Stevie and Jess come onstage. They sing about the systems in their environment which have repeatedly failed them (*'Slide it Home'*).

On Tuesday, Ron ups the stakes of the experiment through a lesson he calls 'Strength Through Community'. He demonstrates the power of working together, and informs the class that they are now working towards a communal grade (*'Build a Barn'*). This news thrills most of the students but upsets Ella, who feels her superior position in the class at risk. Ron prompts the class to all get together that evening at the local construction site, and get closer as a group.

At the construction site, everybody shows up but Ella. It is Robert's first time spending time with his peers outside the school. They each, in turn, confide in one another and share vulnerable secrets. Robert feels like part of a community for the first time in his life (*'Just Being Clouds'*).

On Wednesday, Ron urges the group to start making changes around the school, in a mantra he calls 'Strength Through Action'. Ella opposes this, and is sent to the library with an F (*'Fine'*). Ron gives the group a name - The Wave. They create a salute with which they are to greet one another. Ron has the class clean up a dilapidated construction site (*'One Construction Site at a Time'*). He prompts each member of The Wave to sacrifice a personal artifact, symbolically giving up a piece of their individuality. As the act comes to an end, members of The Wave have built a totem from their personal artifacts which they bring back to the classroom.

The second act begins with a moment in limbo; Ella sings of the importance of being free, even at the sacrifice of being completely alone. The rest of the company surrounds her, all wearing identical masks, as they did in the prologue. They sing of the beauty in finding a community (*'Alone and Free'*).

The song comes to an end, and the stage is set back to the school. The class initiates new members (the chorus) into The Wave. They hand out membership cards and teach them the salute (*'Initiation'*). On Thursday, Ron teaches a lesson in 'Strength Through Pride' to an ever-growing class of Wave members. Together they create a set of commandments and an anthem. Ron assigns informants whose job it is to monitor anti-wave behavior (*'Commandments'*). That evening, Ella confronts Ron about the happenings in the class. He shrugs her off, and she goes to the classroom to try and put an end to it (*'Thursday Night'*). Jess, who has been following Ella, gathers members of the Wave. James refuses to join. Led by Robert, Wave members confront Ella in the classroom. She threatens to break their totem, and they assault her.

Ella, bruised, is left alone onstage. She begins to collect her things. As she is about to speak, all members of The Wave storm the stage and fill it with posters and artifacts promoting The Wave (*'Through My Veins'*).

On Friday, James confronts Ron about Ella's assault. Ron promises to put an end to The Wave. During the class, he attempts to disband the group, but the students refuse and things turn violent. James gets kicked out of the class, and Ron realizes he has lost control of them. In a moment of desperation, he has an idea. Ron explains that his response to Ella's assault was a test of their loyalty, and that they have passed. As a reward, The Wave can now move into its final phase which will be announced at a special rally that evening.

James finds Ella and she urges him to help her stop The Wave. Meanwhile, the class - led by Robert - is preparing for the rally (*'Tip-Toe / All That They Stand For'*). The Wave members all put on identical masks, which they wear through the end of the piece.

At the rally, hundreds of Wave members dressed in uniform and carrying signs sit in absolute silence, anticipating Ron's news. Ron announces that The Wave is a nationwide movement, and a new national leader is about to address them through a private television channel (*'The Rally'*).

Ella and James have been intercepted by members of The Wave, and are brought into the auditorium, tied up. After long agonizing moments, Ron finally turns on the television. As the entire auditorium jumps to their feet and salutes their new leader, the television blares footage of Hitler at the Nuremberg Rallies. Millions of 'ordinary men' raise their arms to the famous 'Heil' salute in a perfect mirror of the students at the rally.

The students all break down, realizing what they have become. Robert is shattered more than anyone else, and violently shoves Ron before escaping from the auditorium. The rest of the company exits, leaving Ron alone. He addresses the audience, but immediately gets confronted by Ella, who refuses to let him have the last word. After a heated argument, she implores him to leave. Finally alone onstage, Ella sings of the decision we must make to stand against the grain, even in the most dangerous and frightening of circumstances (*The Extra Step*).