



# Writing for Performers

## Part One: Writing for Stars

*by Frank Evans*

During the course of your career, you may be called on to write for a star under a number of conditions.

The first is to create a vehicle for a known performer. "The King and I" was written for Gertrude Lawrence, just as the evergreens "Gypsy," "Annie, Get Your Gun!" and the forgotten "Happy Hunting" were written for Ethel Mer-

man. The second is to tailor an existing part for a star as Lerner and Loewe tailored "My Fair Lady"'s Henry Higgins for Rex Harrison.

The third is create a song or songs for special theatrical occasions, again tailoring for the performer, incorporating the performer's personality, covering weaknesses and writing for strengths.

The bulk of this article will consider "The King and I" and "My Fair Lady," although other shows will be cited.

### GERTRUDE LAWRENCE AND "THE KING AND I"

There's no extant footage or sound recording that captures the magic of Gertrude Lawrence. You must take it on faith that she

*(Continued on page 13)*

### Table of Contents

Works	
In Production . . . . .	.3
In Progress . . . . .	.3
In Cabaret . . . . .	.4
Personals . . . . .	.5
Shelf Life . . . . .	.5
And the Winner Is . . . . .	.6
Opening Doors . . . . .	.8
Richard's Almanac by Richard Engquist . . . . .	.22

# **Special Producer's Evening**

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All workshop members were invited to a **Special Producer's Evening** on **Thursday October 18th** in the **BMI Media room**. Composer-lyricist **Andrew Markus** (Advanced) **moderated a panel of theatrical producers discussing musical theater in the 21st century**. This was the second such panel Mr. Markus assembled. Workshop members had the opportunity to ask questions of the panelists.

At press time, the developing roster of panelists included the married team of **Fran and Barry Weissler**, **Pamela Koslow**, and **Tony McLean** from **Disney Theatricals**.

# **BMI Showcase!**

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This year we are reviving the annual BMI Showcase. It will be held on March 11 at Manhattan Theatre Club's Stage I. It will be an evening of songs by BMI Workshop members. You may submit up to three songs on cassette or CD, preferably from a book show. Include lyric sheets and a short setup (in writing) with each song. The deadline for submissions is December 1st. Submit all material to Jean, Brenda, or Sylvia.

**BMI-Lehman Engel  
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Jane Smulyan  
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# Works

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## In Production

### LITTLE HAM

a musical comedy based on material by **Langston Hughes**, is receiving a new production under the ægis of **Amas Musical Theatre**, on the stage of the **Hudson Guild Theatre**, 441 West 26th Street, Manhattan, from **November 17** through **December 9**. Music by **Judd Woldin** (emeritus), lyrics by Woldin and **Richard Engquist** (Second Year moderator and committee), book by **Dan Owens**, direction by **Eric Riley**, orchestrations and musical supervision by **Luther Henderson**.

### BABY CASE

the world premiere of a musical about the Lindbergh baby kidnapping, with music, lyrics and book by **Michael Ogborn** (Advanced) is running at the **Arden Theatre** in Philadelphia October 11 through November 11.

### FREE TO DANCE

In June 2001 **PBS's Great Performances** series debuted this three part film/documentary, produced, directed and written by **Madison Davis Lacy** with original music composed and performed by **Randy Klein** (advanced). "Free to Dance" traces the African American dancers and choreographers who have sought to establish themselves in the vanguard of modern dance. This film com-

bines performance with striking footage by anthropologists turned choreographers and reminiscences of the pioneers of American Dance from Katherine Dunham to Alvin Ailey. For further information, log onto: <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/gperf/freetodance>.

### THE GIFT

book and lyrics by **Maryrose Wood** (Second Year), music by **Andrew Gerle**, will receive its premiere production in November at **The Catholic University of America** in Washington, D.C. "The Gift" was a finalist for the Richard Rodgers Award.

### JOAN

written and directed by **Donna Kaz** (Librettists) was produced by Endurance Theatre in July at the Mazer Theatre. It was subsequently presented at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in August. In addition, the play was named best production of 2000 by The Scranton Times and was recently awarded a grant from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs—and garnered Ms. Kaz the 2000 Jason Miller Award for excellence in directing.

### THE SURVIVAL COLLECTION

Eight Ten-Minute Plays by **Joan Ross Sorkin** (Librettists), directed by **Merry Beamer**, was produced in September 2001 at the **INTAR 53 Theater**.

# In Progress

## WAR BRIDES

Book by **Ron Sproat** (Librettists), music by **Christopher Berg** (alumnus) and lyrics by **Frank Evans** (Committee) will be presented on **October 22** at **7:00p.m.** by the **Century Theatre** as a staged reading in their **Musical Mondays** series. General admission is \$10, but the phrase "**Code: Blanche**" provides the special BMI rate of \$7. Call **(212) 982-6782, ext. 819** for further information about the show and the series.

## WHAT A PIECE OF WORK IS DAN

previously presented in cabaret venues to sparkling reviews, returned as a developing full-length musical for a June 25 presentation as part of **The York Theatre's Developmental Reading Series**. The reading featured music by **Daniel Shamir** (Second Year), book and lyrics by **Richard Looney** (non-member), additional lyrics by Shamir and **William Shakespeare**, original direction and choreography by **Jason St. Sauver** plus additional direction and stylistic arrangements by Looney, who also appeared in the cast. The York cast additionally featured **Greg Ainsworth**, **Stephen Brockway**, **Tessa Martin**, **Jessica Ordman**, **Anthony Pastore** and **Laura Penney**.

## SLEEPWALKER/JACK

Advanced composer/lyricists **George Griggs** and **Andrew**

**Markus** are having a joint reading on **Thursday November 15th** from **6-8 p.m.** in the **BMI Media Room**. Mr. Griggs will be presenting selections from his musical "**Sleepwalker**" and Mr. Markus will present Act One of "**Jack**," a futuristic adaptation of "Jack and The Beanstalk." All are welcome!

# In Cabaret

## ONE CROWDED HOUR OF GLO - RIOUS STRIFE

a song by Advanced composer **Howard Levitsky** from his cycle "**Scenes from Parenthood**" —text by **Phyllis McGinley** (non-member)—will be performed by singer **Sarah Rice** and pianist **Barbara Irvine** on a program called "**The Other Side of Broadway Gets Vocal: An Art Song Cabaret**," directed by **Tom O'Horgan**. The show will be presented at the **Firebird Cafe** in New York City on **November 4, 11 and 18** (all Sundays) at **7p.m.**; and at **Wittenberg University** (Springfield, Ohio) on Friday, **November 9**. The program will also contain songs by Advanced Workshop member **Jennifer Giering**, as well as by **John Kander**, **Leonard Bernstein**, **Mary Rodgers**, **Robert Waldman**, **David Wolfson** and **Jay Alan Zimmerman**.

## PUT A LITTLE LOVE IN YOUR MOUTH! AMANDA GREEN'S TONGUE-IN-CHEEK SONGS

was presented Monday, July 16 at the **Second Stage Theatre**. The Advanced workshop writer was joined by cast members **Mario Cantone**, **Billy Stritch**, **Lea Delaria**, **Mary Testa**, **Brooks Ashmanskas**, **Jonathan Dukachitz**, **Jesse Tyler Ferguson** and **Kim Lindsay**; and backed by the **Tom Kitt Band**.

### RICHARD B. EVANS

a new member of the First Year, was a featured composer when **Arts and Artists at St. Paul's** presented the September 25 installment of their "**Songbook**" series at the **Donnell Library Theatre**. Lyrics were provided by **Frank Evans** (Committee and Bock Award Winner), **Charles Leipart** (Kleban Award Winner), **Rocco Ruggiero**, **Franco Pascale** and **Morris Bobrow** (Backstage Bistro Award Winner). Singers included **Cindy Marchionda**, **Tracey Moore**, **Heather MacRae**, **Jim Busterude** among others; and the pianist was **Beth Falcone**.

# Personals

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### LYRICIST OR LYRICIST/LIBRET-TIST WANTED

Composer (and pro theater musician) with a growing reputation for quality work, newly promoted into the Advanced BMI Workshop, seeks simpatico collaborator(s) with command of the craft, a perfectionist streak, a serious ambition to write for musical theater...and maybe even an idea for a project. Call **Howard Levitsky** at (212) 740-8866 or email **HowLevMuso@aol.com**.

### LOOKING FOR A LYRICIST

to provide lyrics to a song already composed. This song is being considered for my wife's opening at Don't Tell Mama, the last weekend of October. Will send a tape of song to interested lyricist. Contact **Robert Pellacani** at (973) 838-6317 or at **pianoman@nji.com**.

### LYRICIST/COMPOSER NEEDED

to collaborate with accomplished author on original musical comedy for fall/winter workshop production. Strong composition skills required. Director in place. Contact **Tina Posterli** at (212) 462-3284 or via e-mail at **tposterli@earthlink.net**.

# And the Winner Is...

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## THE JERRY HARRINGTON MUSICAL THEATRE AWARDS

The BMI Foundation is proud to announce the winners the **2nd Annual Jerry Harrington Musical Theatre Awards** in recognition of Outstanding Creative Achievement in the **BMI-Lehman Engel Musical Theatre Workshop**. Certificates and cash prizes were given out on Tuesday, June 26 at BMI's New York office.

This year's winners, chosen by the Workshop Steering Committee, include First Year Workshop student **Timothy J. Mathis**, Second Year student **James Allen Ford**, Advanced Workshop student **Jeff Blumenkrantz** and Librettists Workshop student **Craig Fols**.

Established through the BMI Foundation by Harrington's long-time friend and colleague, **BMI Assistant Vice President and Counsel Evelyn Buckstein**, the awards are given each year in Harrington's honor to celebrate the late attorney's lifelong love of musical theater.

Founded in 1985 by BMI Senior Vice President **Theodora Zavin**, the BMI Foundation, Inc. offers grants which make possible the continuation and development of creative programs for the composition of new music and the performance of these new compositions. With the aid of the distinguished writers, composers and publishers who serve on the Foundation's Advisory Panel, the Foun-

dation's grants offer a platform of support that fosters the growth of young composers and ensures the continuation of the heritage of American musical ingenuity for generations to come.

## JERRY JAMES...

whose short story "**Hope**" has won third prize in a national contest sponsored by the **Troubadours' Writing Group** of Woodstock, IL. The prize includes a small cash award and publication in the September/October 2001 issue of their literary magazine **The Lantern**. The contest judge wrote, "A wacky, intelligent, and surprising story...lush, imaginative prose."

In addition, Mr. James (of the Librettists class) has won a rave review from critic **David Voss** for his play "**The Once and Future Web**," commissioned by the National Library of Medicine in conjunction with its year-long exhibition of the same name. The excerpted passages below are from the June 29, 2001 issue of **Science**:

"Riding an encouraging trend that enlists theater to dissect and comment on technology (as in Michael Frayn's *Copenhagen*), the Library of Medicine commissioned a short play to accompany their exhibit. Playwright Jerry James has deftly packed a lot of history into a witty 40 minutes. Minimal in design, the piece is staged in a corner of the Library's History of

Medicine reading room, and that provides all the backdrop that is needed. Cast for four actors, the play begins with an amusing account of an 18th-century experiment with a line of Carthusian monks holding copper wires, and a jolt of static electricity—the first demonstration that electric pulses could travel great distances and carry pain, if not information. James follows this with a rapid-fire tour through Morse's invention, the dawning of computers, and the creation of the Internet. Despite a few tired notes (such as a chorus line of 'nerds' wearing taped-up glasses), the play wins by wit; how often do you get to see the founder of IBM as The Godfather? While not heavy lifting, the work does offer some provocative commentary on how sometimes outsiders make the breakthroughs: Morse started as a portrait painter, and the man who bankrolled the first transatlantic cable admitted not knowing a 'telegraph from a tulip.'

"It makes sense that the National Library of Medicine, an information technology organization of increasing sophistication, would host an exhibit such as this. One hopes for more cross pollination between scientists, museum curators, and performing artists—a vital way to reach the public that rides the infotech roller coaster. To update a famous quotation of Santayana, those who ignore the past are doomed to be swallowed by the type of the present."

## **DONNA KAZ**

See "**Joan**" under **Works In Production** .

## **MARYROSE WOOD**

In loving memory of his wife, **Robert Holof** has endowed a fund through the **O'Neill Theater Center** to present the **Georgia Bogardus Holof Lyricist Award** to a lyricist in residence at the **Music Theater Conference** each summer. Georgia Bogardus—a longtime member of, and friend to, the Workshop—was in residence at the Conference in 1985 and 1986 during the development of "**Fahrenheit 451**" with her collaborators **Ray Bradbury** and **David Mettee** . In honor of her bountiful talent and courageous spirit, the purpose of this award is to encourage and support a promising, talent lyricist in his or her career.

The award was presented to its first-ever recipient, **Maryrose Wood** (Second year) on August 10. Ms. Wood was at the conference in residence with composer **Andrew Gerle** , working on their new musical, "**The Tutor** ." which they plan to continue developing in the Second Year workshop, under the direction of **Richard Engquist** .

# Opening Doors

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## “Artists in the Branches”

New York Foundation for the Arts (NYFA) presents : 10 free artist events in the New York Public Libraries throughout the five boroughs.

NEW YORK, NY (October 1, 2001) — New York Foundation for the Arts' (NYFA) **Artists in the Branches** program will present ten free arts events at ten libraries between October 14 and December 8, 2001. NYFA hopes that the Artists in the Branches events will give our communities a bit of comfort and pleasure in this disheartening time. Each event will consist of a performance or presentation by two or more past recipients of NYFA's Artists' Fellowship Program. Artists in the Branches is a collaboration between NYFA and the three public library systems in New York City: Brooklyn Public Library, Queens Borough Public Library, and the New York Public Library. *Please see attachment for a complete list of events.*

### **Artists in the Branches**

Artists in the Branches seeks to bring a variety of free arts events into neighborhoods, promote artists as integral members of the community, and provide the artists with a forum to present work and receive feedback from an audience. Artists participating in the program are past recipients of

NYFA Fellowships—\$7,000 grants awarded annually to 161 artists in all artistic disciplines chosen from as many as 4,000 applicants by a peer panel review process. Nearly 200 Fellows applied to participate in Artists in the Branches. The 20 artists chosen represent a talented group whose innovative work ensures a provocative and thrilling series of events. Events range from dance workshops to jazz performances to Web-based art presentations.

“NYFA's Artists in the Branches not only gives artists another venue to explore and perform their work, but it also gives the public a great opportunity to experience ground-breaking art.” said Theodore S. Berger, Executive Director of NYFA. “We are thrilled to be collaborating with all three New York City public library systems—institutions dedicated to providing the public with free access to knowledge and culture.”

All events are free and open to the public. This program is supported, in part, with public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs Cultural Challenge Program and with matching funds from Con Edison, Lily Auchincloss Foundation, and

Heathcote Art Foundation.

## **NYFA**

Now celebrating its 30th anniversary, New York Foundation for the Arts (NYFA) gives more money and support to arts organizations and artists of all disciplines than does any other comparable organization in the country: nearly \$11 million in grants and services annually.

Its Fellowships of \$7,000 each go to more than 150 New York State artists every year from a field of 16 disciplines, covering the visual, performing, media, and literary arts. NYFA also gives grants and services to strengthen small arts organizations and provides artists with career development support through workshops, hotlines, and print and electronic publications.

NYFA's annual budget of nearly \$12 million comes from individual, corporate, foundation, and public sources, as well as NYFA's fiscal sponsorship services for artists and emerging organizations.

To learn more about NYFA and its programs and services, [www.nyfa.org](http://www.nyfa.org).

# **Richard Rodgers Awards 2002**

**Administered by the American Academy of Arts and Letters, 633 West 155th Street, New York, NY 10032. A verbatim reproduction of the guidelines for this competition follows:**

These awards, created and endowed by Richard Rodgers in 1978 for the development of the musical theater, subsidize full productions, studio productions, and staged readings by nonprofit theaters in New York City of works by composers and writers who are not already established in this field. The winners are selected by a jury of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

## **Conditions**

1) The term "musical theater" is understood to include musicals, plays with songs, chamber operas, thematic revues, or any comparable work. The submission of innovative and experimental material is encouraged. Only completed works will be accepted.

2) Composers and writers who have previously had musicals produced will be eligible to participate if they have not yet achieved significant recognition in the field of musical theater.

3) The rights to material submitted shall remain the property of the author(s); the Academy will not retain any control over, or rights in,

the work after the award production.

Application forms may be obtained by sending a self-addressed, stamped envelope to the above address.

**DEADLINE: November 1, 2001**

## City Theatre calls for scripts! Looking for short plays!

**DEADLINE EXTENDED THROUGH OCTOBER EXCLUSIVELY FOR BMI WORKSHOP WRITERS!**

**CITY THEATRE**, a professional Equity company, is soliciting scripts **now through October 2001** for its 2002 production consideration. City Theatre concentrates on the production of shorts—plays running 5-12 minutes in length. It produces these plays in its annual **WINTER SHORTS festival** in February at the Colony Theatre on Miami Beach, and the annual **SUMMER SHORTS festival**, which is performed at City Theatre's artistic home, the University of Miami's **Jerry Herman Ring Theatre** in Coral Gables, Florida, throughout the month of June, and the **Broward Center for the Performing Arts** in Ft. Lauderdale, in July. Main Stage plays are presented in a two-program repertory format. In addition to its festivals, City The-

atre tours more works as part of its ongoing **SHORT CUTS** tours, into schools, libraries, and community centers. Scripts are also considered for City Theatre's monthly free readings series (two venues), and the **SUMMER SHORTS Festival Wednesdays Series**. City Theatre's award-winning festivals are full Equity productions, with a multicultural ensemble. City Theatre pays royalties for its productions, and sometimes provides travel opportunities in conjunction with its CityDialogues festival programming.

**GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSION:** *Scripts must run no longer than two to twelve minutes.* Plays and monologues will be considered. We look for lively, adventurous, and thought-provoking material to be performed by a multicultural ensemble of professional actors. A company of directors also participate in the festival. A playwright whose work is selected for the Festival's Main Stage will receive royalties and full productions. Some playwrights may also receive an invitation to the festival to participate in the CityDialogues Series activities.

Plays are considered that represent a diverse mix of subject matters, styles, and genres. We produce comedies, dramas, farces, and musicals (musical tracks on cassette must accompany these submissions). Bilingual plays (Spanish/English) are encouraged. City Theatre prefers original material but also produces plays with earlier productions, and published

material. Up to 7 plays are offered in **WINTER SHORTS** , while 14-16 plays are selected for production in **SUMMER SHORTS** .

Manuscripts must be typed and bound or stapled and must include on the title page name, address, and phone number/e-mail address. A page with cast of characters and ages and set requirements, and a brief author's bio and play production history must also be included.

**Playwrights may submit only two scripts. Do not include an SASE; no scripts will be returned. Deadline for submission for 2002 is October 30, 2001. City Theatre will notify *only* those playwrights whose scripts are under consideration for production.**

Please send scripts to:

**Literary Department  
CITY THEATRE  
P.O. BOX 490083  
MIAMI, FL. 33149**

Thank you for your interest.

Susan Westfall, Producing Artistic Director  
Lauren Feldman, Literary and Educational Development Coordinator  
[www.citytheatre.com](http://www.citytheatre.com)

# **A Funny Thing Happened...**

## **You've Been Where?**

The following comes from Bob Gustafson who was conducting "Les Miserables" at the time. At one point in the show, the character of Javert enters and sings:

"Listen, my friends  
I have done as I said  
I have been to their lines  
I have counted each man  
I will tell what I know"

At one memorable performance, the actor playing Javert forgot the lyrics. He came on stage and sang:

"Listen, my friends  
I have done as I said  
I have been to their homes  
I have watered their plants  
I will tell what I know"

## **A Play to Remember**

In the beginning days of the Theatre Guild, Harold Clurman was in charge of reading scripts. He found them dismal. One he treasured to the end of his days began:

"Act One: Ten thousand years before the creation of man.  
Act Two: Two weeks later."

# Class Schedules 2001-2002

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## First Year

Monday evenings from 6:15 to 8:30. Due to legal holidays, certain sessions have been shifted to Wednesday evening at same time. Those specific sessions are followed by "-W". Dates listed merely as numbers are Mondays.

September 10, 19-W, 24  
October 1, 10-W, 15, 22, 29  
November 5, 12, 19, 26  
December 3, 12-W, 17  
**HOLIDAY BREAK**  
January 7, 14, 23-W, 28  
February 4, 11, 20-W, 25  
March 4, 11, 18, 25  
April 1, 8, 15, 22, 29  
May 6, 13, 20, 29-W  
June 3, 10, 17, 24

## Second Year

Tuesday evenings from 5:15 to 7:30.

September 25  
October 2, 9, 16, 23, 30  
November 6, 13, 20, 27  
December 4, 18  
**HOLIDAY BREAK**  
January 8, 15, 22, 29  
February 5, 12, 19, 26  
March 5, 12, 19, 26  
April 2, 9, 16, 23, 30  
May 7, 14, 21

## Advanced

Officially meets Mondays from 4:00 to 6:00, but owing to the high volume of sign-ups, the class will often begin at 3:30. Please monitor

the start time on a week-to-week basis.

September 24  
October 1, 15, 22, 29  
November 5, 12, 19, 26  
December 3, 10, 17  
**HOLIDAY BREAK**  
January 7, 14, 28  
February 4, 11, 25  
March 4, 11, 18, 25  
April 1, 8, 15, 22, 29  
May 6, 13, 20

## Librettists

Monday evenings from 6:00 to 8:00.

September 24  
October 1, 15, 22, 29  
November 5, 12, 19, 26  
December 3, 10, 17  
**HOLIDAY BREAK**  
January 7, 14, 28  
February 4, 11, 25  
March 4, 11, 18, 25  
April 1, 8, 15, 22, 29  
May 6, 13, 20

## Monday Holidays

Following is the list of Monday holidays during which the BMI offices will be closed:

September 17: Rosh Hashanah  
October 8: Columbus Day  
January 21: Martin Luther King Day  
February 18: President's Day  
May 27: Memorial Day

## "Writing for Performers" (continued from page 1)

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defined enchantment. Her voice sounds tinny and flat on vinyl; her films are difficult to watch. Julie Andrews portrayed in her in the lavish film "Star," which was cut to shreds for general release. Most recently Twiggy portrayed her off-Broadway in a biographical musical, "If Love Were All," (British title "Noël [Coward] and Gertie.") Theatregoers were dazzled by her sophistication, wit, beauty and sexiness. Before "The King and I," she held Broadway audiences captive in "Lady in the Dark," with a book by Moss Hart, music by Kurt Weill and lyrics by Ira Gershwin.

Hollywood rumor has it that Lawrence's lawyer, Fanny Holtzman, turned down an offer for Ms. Lawrence to play lead in the film "All About Eve"—and would not reconsider without the rewrites that would *guarantee* that she not appear in a drunken state...and would, additionally, be able to sing *Bill* in the party scene. Recent discoveries debunk this. Lawrence refused the film knowing it would conflict with "The King and I." She was banking that the show would be family entertainment and with the team of Rodgers and Hammerstein writing, assumed a long run and a show she could tour with forever.

Lawrence held the stage rights to the original book, "Anna and the King of Siam"—Margaret Langdon's work of fiction based on historical fact—which tells the story

of a Welsh widow who migrated to Siam to work as instructor to the children of the King's harem. After Holtzman brought the book to Rodgers and Hammerstein, the team was wary for two reasons. The first: Lawrence had a reputation for unprofessional behavior and had developed increasing pitch problems. The second: The novel rambled.

But after R&H screened the film version of the book (screenplay by Sally Benson and Talbot Jennings, starring Rex Harrison as the King and Irene Dunne as Anna), they felt ~~the show could work~~. Benson and Jennings had created the following for the 20th Century Fox screenplay: the introduction of the King's children to Anna, the unique spoken English for the King and most importantly, a buildup of the unspoken romance between the King and Anna. Hammerstein softened some of the elements from the film, but the musical basically follows the film's shape. 20th Century Fox, partners with Rodgers and Hammerstein since the screen musical of "State Fair," invested in the stage production and acquired the rights to produce the film version.

What is most interesting in examining the score of "The King and I" is how the songs for Lawrence are written within a relatively easy range. *Hello, Young Lovers*, for example, has the range of an octave plus a minor second. The accompaniment also leaves Lawrence room to breathe, cleverly sidestepping any need for her to hold high notes. And the climax

notes that are held are also easily singable and don't expose the weaknesses in her range. The song contains no key changes, no modulations. The verse is in the same key as the body of the song—as is the reprise at the end of the scene. There are, however, key changes in *Shall We Dance*, which modulates twice. But Rodgers never has Anna sing after the modulations kick in.

Rodgers and Hammerstein were not writing for Yul Brynner when they wrote the part of the King. They had offered the role to Noël Coward, who accepted it on condition that he would only need to play the show for six months. But the songwriters must have envisioned a larger-than-life performer with a limited range in any event. "A Puzzlement" is an octave plus a third, starting at middle C.

Rodgers makes up for the lack of range with his other characters, who have greater vocal demands and fewer acting chores. Take a look at Lun Tha's Second Act *I Have Dreamed* and how it builds. The second A section is up a whole step from the first and the third A section is a third above the first. There's no bridge: the third A does the work and then it goes into a glorious coda. But this kind of musical writing could have and would have thrown a talent like Lawrence.

We now must consider personality and temperament. Out of town, Lawrence was petrified, and Brynner was her rock. Three men were holding the show together and in effect served as director.

Brynner, Hammerstein and choreographer Jerome Robbins filled the deficiencies of billed director John Van Druten (better known as a playwright, author of "I Am a Camera" and "The Voice of the Turtle"). Three numbers were dropped on the road and two added: *We Kiss in a Shadow* to Act II and *Getting to Know You* to Act I. In Mary Martin's autobiography, she claims to have seen the show out of town and to have suggested a number for Anna and the children whose melody might be that of *Suddenly Lucky*, which had been cut from "South Pacific." "Suddenly Lucky" did indeed become "Getting to Know You," but no other source except Martin's book credits the idea to her.

Depending on the production, either Anna or the King is the star. Since the original staging, there have been two Broadway revivals as well as a long tour starring Brynner—in which Brynner added dialogue that had been written for the film by Ernest Lehman. The most recent revival with Donna Murphy, then Faith Prince, then Marie Osmond, shifted the emphasis back to Anna. During the first Brynner revival, Angela Lansbury went on as Anna when Brynner was on vacation; Brynner's standby, Michael Kermoyan, took the role of the King for that two week stint. Oh, if Brynner and Lansbury had ever shared the stage. Would that have been something wonderful!

## MARY MARTIN IN “LADY LIZA”

Rodgers and Hammerstein passed on the project. So did Frank Loesser—as did Cole Porter, the team of Dietz and Schwartz and Noël Coward. Shaw’s “Pygmalion” would never make a successful musical, they thought. Again, let’s go back to the clincher that got Rodgers and Hammerstein involved in “The King and I”: the film version. Lerner and Loewe refused to go to work on “Pygmalion” unless they could get the rights to the film (written by George Bernard Shaw himself, and which contained the Ascot scene as well as the ball, and hinted a much more romantic ending than the play) and interest Mary Martin in playing the role of Eliza Doolittle. The film rights were secured.

Lerner and Loewe subsequently auditioned for Martin, and her famous reaction—“The boys have lost their touch”—was not entirely unreasonable. Martin and her husband, Richard Halliday, had heard a total of five songs, three of which would eventually be cut. What Lerner and Loewe had presented was Higgins’ then-title song, *Lady Liza*; a ballad for Eliza called *Please Don’t Marry Me*; and *Say a Prayer for Me Tonight* (cut in New Haven but eventually used in the film “Gigi”). The only audition material that would remain in the final show was *Just You Wait* and *The Ascot Gavotte*.

Imagine Mary Martin singing *Just You Wait* and you can well imagine why she turned down the

part. Judy Holliday turned down the role too and went with “Bells are Ringing” instead. Audrey Hepburn, who had proven herself a very sweet singer in the film of “Funny Face,” was in the running for the part of Eliza on Broadway (the part she would play in the film with some vocal aid from Marni Nixon). And if Audrey Hepburn *had* been the first Eliza, the vocal demands would have shifted to Higgins and the show would have had a significantly different score.

## REX HARRISON AND JULIE ANDREWS IN “MY FAIR LADY”

The ploy changed. Get a star to play *Higgins*.

Auditioning with the same material as before, a turndown came (again) from Noël Coward. John Gielgud and Michael Redgrave were negotiating, but Redgrave would not sign a two-year contract with producer Herman Levin.

When Rex Harrison heard the songs, he hated them, but deigned to sing for the writers so they could get an idea of his range. As Harrison became more and more interested in the project, the writers remembered his reaction. *Please Don’t Marry Me* was replaced by *I’m an Ordinary Man* and *Lady Liza* went to the trunk. The phrase “Why can’t a woman be more like a man” (*A Hymn to Him*) was inspired by an offhand remark made by Harrison himself.

Lerner and Harrison had a certain simpatico, Lerner with eight marriages under his belt, Harrison

with six. Lerner is supposed to have said "Together, we've supported more women than Playtex." Higgins' misogyny is as much due to Lerner capturing Harrison's persona as it is to Lerner adapting Shaw's tone faithfully.

During rehearsals, Harrison was difficult. He had a Penguin paperback edition of the original play (which fortunately contained the scenes from the film) and if he felt a line had been altered from the original, would demand "Where's my Penguin?" Lerner contacted a taxidermist and the next time Harrison made the demand, Lerner rolled a stuffed bird across the stage to him. The company as well as Harrison delighted in the joke and Harrison kept the bird in his dressing room.

Harrison threatened to quit unless Julie Andrews' performance improved. (Harrison's contract allowed him leading lady approval.) Andrews had been performing since childhood and had delighted Broadway in "The Boy Friend." But her role in "The Boy Friend," a twenties pastiche, had few acting demands; personal commitments had kept Andrews from rehearsing "My Fair Lady" until the entire company assembled, so there was no early way to develop any intimate interplay between Harrison and Andrews on stage. Director Moss Hart closed down rehearsals and worked Andrews round the clock for two days, demonstrating how the part should be played, and how she must play the part as a star. It worked and the musical did

indeed make her a headliner.

The first rehearsal with orchestra proved impossible. Harrison demanded that every note of the orchestrations be rewritten. A compromise was reached when a solo clarinet was assigned to double Harrison's melodic line.

Opening night in New Haven, Harrison threatened not to go on. Cooler heads finally prevailed and theatrical history was made. During the New Haven run, Higgins's song to Eliza, "Come to the Ball," was cut and Lerner wrote an extra line for "You Did It." The night the line was to be added, Harrison totally froze and couldn't remember a single line of the song. The new line was jettisoned. (Actors have asked me for replacement lines in lyrics; unless I can come up with a vast improvement or have to replace an absolutely unsingable word, I try to be mindful of the "You Did It" anecdote.)

Harrison behaved himself reasonably until the show opened in London, where he refused to rehearse. After he was threatened with replacement by the above mentioned Gielgud and Michael Redgrave, who were eagerly standing by, Harrison finally gave in and rehearsed with the London cast. By the way, you can hear Jeremy Irons deliver the cut line from "You Did It" on the London label studio recording with, yes, John Gielgud, playing Colonel Pickering.

Loewe was concerned with Harrison's practical range, but not with his ability to negotiate intervals. (Interval problems can be

best illustrated by the story about Jerry Herman dealing with Lucille Ball for the film of "Mame." Ball could not sing the minor second on the word "door" in the phrase "open a new window, open a new door." She constantly went for a major second, which blows the melody completely. But, since a pre-recorded piano scratch track was being used—the orchestra would record later—Herman had Ball sing up to "new" on one day and on the next, started her at "door," and spliced the two takes together.) What Harrison lacked in range, he had in musical nuance. If you listen to the progression of recordings from Broadway to London to the film, you'll hear how he sings more and more notes with each incarnation and usually on pitch. (Significantly, too, Harrison refused to pre-record his songs for the film. He delivered his vocals "live," to a piano accompaniment piped into a wireless earphone.)

## **DON'T MAKE THESE MISTAKES**

"A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" is about a ne'er-do-well father, his wife and his daughter. The wife's sister, Cissy, is a subplot character. But in the musical, Shirley Booth was cast as Cissy and was, of course, top-billed. The show lost focus because Cissy needed to be pumped up and the other elements were hacked away.

"Jamaica" was written by E.Y. "Yip" Harburg, Fred Saisy and Harold Arlen as a vehicle for Harry Belafonte. Once the show was written, Belafonte ankled, insecure about his voice, having become

used to performing into a hand-mike. Harburg refashioned the show in three weeks, switching the prominent lead from the male character to the leading lady, and took it to Lena Horne. "Jamaica" recouped its investment but is rarely, if ever, revived.

There is, however, an exception to every rule. This practice did work for "Take Me Along" (which Lehman Engel conducted). Jackie Gleason was top-billed as Uncle Sid in this musical version of O'Neill's "Ah, Wilderness"—which, in the straight-play version, is a coming of age story about a young man, the adult Sid decidedly of secondary status. Yet the book (by Joseph Stein and Robert Russell) was restructured so that the main romance was between Sid and his long time fiancé, Lily. And composer-lyricist Bob (then billed as Robert) Merrill gave the memorable title song to Gleason and Hollywood veteran Walter Pidgeon, who played the father of the teen-age boy (Robert Morse.)

## **MY LIFE IN ART**

I've been fortunate enough to write for Marni Nixon (the singing voice of Audrey Hepburn in the film of "My Fair Lady," and Deborah Kerr in the film of "The King and I")—and for Judy Kaye and her husband, David Green. In both cases, I studied recordings of Nixon and Green. (Didn't have to study Judy Kaye—her effective range famously traverses alto Broadway belter to coloratura soprano.) Composer Jim Merillat and I based our song for Marni on

an interview in the Times with one of the surviving Ziegfeld beauties. For Judy and David, Ben Schaechter and I tried to capture the couple's relationship in song. I believe we succeeded in both cases.

When we were casting the workshop of "Dinner at Eight," our director suggested Tammy Grimes for the role of Carlotta Vance. Ms. Grimes is a two-time Tony winner who created the title role in "The Unsinkable Molly Brown" and had Noël Coward both write for her and sketch her portrait (which became cover art for one of her Columbia albums). "Dinner at Eight" is set in the 1930's and Carlotta is a star of the gaslight era. Hers is a supporting—but showy—role. Ms. Grimes asked that copies of the script be sent to her and to her agent. Following that, she asked us to hold an informal reading, in which she would assay Carlotta. We rounded up dear friends who had done the roles in previous readings as well as some new cast members—Ben Schaechter would do the singing for the newcomers.

It was a revelation. Grimes was the Carlotta of our dreams. Every word from her mouth had the exact nuance the character needed.

A few days after, my phone rang and she asked me for specific changes which I relayed to our bookwriter, Julie Gilbert. (Julie could not attend the reading.) The changes she wanted addressed the character's through-line. She was not asking for the part to be

built up, merely clarified. Fair enough. Julie went to work.

Bick Goss (our director), Julie and I cabbied up to Ms. Grimes's apartment which overlooks the East River. The Noël Coward portrait is on the wall, a second portrait of her as Molly Brown (taken from the set, I believe) on another wall. Ben was not available. We read her scenes and, as Ben was not available to sing the additional song we'd written for her, I sang a *capella*.

"You've given me a little Christmas present," she told us. "But there's something in the wind, so I'll have to let you know."

There was something in the wind all right, and she turned us down (I've kept the answering machine tape: "Hello, Words, this is Tammy Grimes...")

Tovah Feldshuh, may God bless her forever, took on the role and did a wonderful job for us. Nonetheless, Ms. Grimes's requests had made us solidify and clarify the role in such a way that any actress would benefit. And several drafts later, the Carlotta pages from what we call "The Tammy Grimes Dinner at Eight Script" remain, for the most part, intact.

# Writing For Performers

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## Part Two: Writing for Virtuosi and The Second Best Solution

by David Spencer

The more you write for the theatre, the more you're likely to do it, even if only to satisfy a personal desire—write for specific actors. Sometimes you'll write for a star even if s/he doesn't create the role (Jerry Herman said that when he wrote "Hello, Dolly!" he heard Ethel Merman in his head); sometimes you'll just write for a performer you admire, or have worked with. Other times—arguably the best times—you'll write for the performers you're actually working with as a natural and exhilarating part of the rehearsal-production process.

It's great fun to do, and it helps facilitate the specificity that is at the heart of musical theatre writing. Hearing a combination of timbre, locution, accent, style, technique and persona in your mind's ear—seeing it with your mind's eye—often inspires richness and texture. And of course, it tends to be very rewarding when the performer for whom you write actually *does* play the part or sing the song—*especially* so when he or she brings even more unique nuances to the table than you'd imagined, enhancing your original vision.

But remember also that—in most cases—other performers will assay the material too; you have

to be careful not to write yourself into a corner.

Years ago, the venerable Mr. Sondheim was giving me advice and criticism, as he has with so many young writers, and he had a very particular reaction to a song I'd written in which the range was nearly two octaves. "What you want to try to do," he said, "is stay within an octave and five, better yet an octave and three; that way you get a nice round sound." Then he added that he didn't always follow his own advice. "When I wrote the role of Anne in 'Night Music,' I wrote [difficult passages] specifically for [virtuoso soprano] Vicky Mallory and sabotaged myself for any performer who would follow her." (This was even before he tailored "Sunday in the Park With George" for Mandy Patinkin—an even *more* extreme indulgence, given that *that* actor has an effective *three-octave* range.)

Certainly, despite the maestro's advice, I have at times willfully eschewed sensible conservatism: I recently finished demo-ing a new score in which the main character is described in the script as a hunchback dwarf; but the particular virtuosic tenor capabilities and sharp comic/dramatic sensibilities—and to some degree even the

contradictory picture in my head—were, right from the writing of note one, those of a my close friend, Daniel Marcus: an unusually smart, nuanced, versatile character actor who *does* have a distinctive physical profile, but who is nowhere *close* to being a “Little Person.” So of course I hired him to play the lead role on the CD. And in his typical fashion, Daniel exceeded my wildest expectations. His performance was in fact so striking that one knowing early listener said, “How the *hell* are you going to find anybody else, much less a dwarf, to sing the role as well as *Marcus*?”

It’s a damned good question (even if we don’t eventually hold to the physical conceit in casting the actual show). And one I’ve faced variations of before: I can cite several shows in which I wrote passages “on” original cast members who were distinctly gifted, instinctive and musical—only to discover that trying to find replacements made for exhaustive casting sessions...and that in making higher demands on lesser performers, there might subsequently even be longer (in some cases more expensive) musical rehearsals for producers to grumble about.

On the one hand, when an available performer inspires you with rare treasure, you can’t deny so powerful a muse: the thrill-factor, and indeed, a primary motivating force behind art itself, is the aspiration toward singularity and excellence.

So where’s the middle ground?

The middle ground is a pact you make with your soul—and your score—to encompass flexibility

and practicality. Call it your Second Best Solution.

If that high note—and/or the sequence of notes providing its musical context—proves beyond the capacity of a certain performer who might otherwise rewardingly play the role, see if it’s not worth devising an alternate note or line.

If the passion, pulse and muscle of a number seems to unavoidably *require* that rangier but forbidding tessitura—ask yourself if the range would work as well in a lower or higher key.

If a specific spin or sound doesn’t translate from your ideal performer to your *present* performer—look toward some other, more “globally friendly” choice that other thespians who assay the role can make their own. (Among the worst environments to create for an actor is one in which s/he senses that s/he’s living in the shadow of a better memory; among the worst to create for yourself is that moment in which you cringe a bit inside, because the actor can’t quite deliver what you’ve written and never will, and you feel some absurdly purist obligation to “bear up” and hope against hope).

If a certain passage that boasts dexterity turns out to be technically beyond the reach of an otherwise able performer—ask yourself what’s lost if you concede the moment to something less showy. If the answer is: “What the audience doesn’t know won’t hurt them”—or you—or the show—or the story—or the actor—then you have no practical (or even com-

pellingly artistic) reason to be intractable.

Your compromise doesn't have to be the best moment in the world—merely the best one you can make and still live with.

Never kid yourself about the difficulty-level of your material. What may seem easy and straightforward to you, because you understand it organically and internally, may remain perpetually elusive to someone trying to work it from the outside in. Not all actors—and I include some exceptionally good ones—are equally or optimally intuitive. There's no reason to compromise *unduly* or even *roustinely*—but there's every reason to keep an open mind. Have a backup version (or at least a backup *concept*) ready—one that will still satisfy the needs of the dramatic moment and your needs as an author.

A final story about something I witnessed during my first major gig—which was writing the English adaptation of “La Bohème” for the Public Theatre:

One of our two alternating Rodolfos was David Carroll. He was struggling with the role, dramatically he seemed weak, perpetually circling the runway, which was very much at odds with his intelligence and artistry—and the opening was fast approaching. Most of us who observed from the creative staff or the cast thought David, and thus the show, were vulnerable. But our director, Wilford Leach, had an instinct, which he expressed to his longtime colleague, our musical director William Elliott.

“It's the high C in that first aria,” he insisted. “It's intimidating David. Lower the aria a third.”

Elliott objected. Rodolfo's high C, he said, was a signature moment of the opera. A moment all opera buffs craved. And certainly David had it in him to reach it.

“Yes,” argued Leach, “but he's killing himself in the process. And lowering the key is not without precedent, even in the big opera houses, even with star tenors.”

“But it's not what Puccini wrote or intended!”

“And what difference does that make if David's uncomfortable and distracted by it? He's in trouble! *Lower the key!*”

It was one of the very few times I ever saw Wilford heatedly impatient with anyone—and that it was a close friend made it even more remarkable. The directive made its impression on Bill too. For as instructed, and without further discussion, he lowered the aria a third.

And David...just...*opened up*. Not only musically, but as an actor. *Literally* overnight, his performance attained such breadth and power that it was as if someone new had walked into the room. And in a way, someone new had. As for that high C—no one missed it. No one even *thought* about it. We were all too busy crying. And this was the performance that catapulted David onto the A list of musical theatre leading men.

Wilford, Bill and David are, alas, all gone now—but the lesson remains indelible. The second best solution is often your first best choice...

R<sub>1</sub> I<sub>1</sub> C<sub>3</sub> H<sub>4</sub> A<sub>1</sub> R<sub>1</sub> D<sub>2</sub> S<sub>1</sub>  
A<sub>1</sub> L<sub>1</sub> M<sub>2</sub> A<sub>1</sub> N<sub>1</sub> A<sub>1</sub> C<sub>3</sub>

*by Richard Engquist*

Acts of unimaginable cruelty like the terrorist attacks of September 11 leave us shocked to the very core of our beings. Then begins a long process of grieving, and sometimes the reexamination of long-held beliefs and illusions.

Enormities such as this murderous attack have been usual throughout human history—only the scale varies—but because we've not seen them "up close and personal" until now, it's difficult even to grasp what has happened and what may ensue.

In this chaotic situation, creative artists have been so shaken that many have questioned the importance of their life's work. A typical reaction: "With so much horror in the world, it seems frivolous to [sing, play, dance, clown, write, laugh, etc]." As if the existence of barbarity should lead to the death of creativity.

We've got to get beyond this negative thinking, and fast. Humanity's need for joy and beauty is as great as ever—perhaps greater—and there is joy and beauty to be found in every one of the arts, from the grandest to the most elementary. Remember the

Preston Sturges comedy "Sullivan's Travels" (1942)? A filmmaker decides to do only "serious" work because of a world at war. Only when his life is virtually destroyed does he understand the healing power of laughter—laughter inspired by a silly animated cartoon.

There's no need to apologize for what we do, for the breezy and insubstantial, the popular and escapist and sentimental. "I'll be seeing you in every lovely summer's day/In everything that's light and gay,/I'll always think of you that way..." (Irving Kahal, 1938; one of the great Broadway lyrics that saw us through World War II).

Majestic requiems like those of Mozart, Verdi, Bach, Brahms, Britten and Faure—works which come out of enormous faith and pain—have almost limitless therapeutic power, but so may a simple Sondheim song like "Not While I'm Around."

Painful times, in fact, are precisely the times when we are most needed—those of us who understand the transforming power of music and words. Beautiful things *do* spring from ashes and rubble.

If you've forgotten this, go back and read Anne Frank's diary. Listen to music written in death camps. Try to find a copy of the TV movie "Playing For Time." Think about Myra Hess playing Beethoven in a London concert hall as bombs rained down all around. Check out the movie "Privates on Parade," which can make you laugh until you cry. Hum a tune from "Hair."

I guess what I'm trying to say is that there's nothing about being a creative artist that doesn't matter. To be creative is, of course, difficult—especially when we're stunned and mourning—but the difficulty of being creative is far preferable to the ease of being critical. To build requires talent, craft, hard work, optimism, dedication, love. To destroy requires nothing, not even thought. Especially not thought.

So if someone says to me, "I can't get back to working on my little musical farce. It's so frivolous," my reply is, "What's bad about frivolous?"

If we can't sustain the ability to live, love and laugh, then what's the point?

"Ev'ry time it rains, it rains  
Pennies from heaven. . . .  
So when you hear it thunder,  
Don't run under a tree,  
There'll be pennies from heaven  
For you and me."

—Johnny Burke, 1936

"I used to walk in the shade  
With my blues on parade,  
But I'm not afraid,  
This rover crossed over. . . ."  
—Dorothy Fields, 1930

"Walk on, walk on with hope in  
your heart  
And you'll never walk alone. . . ."  
—Oscar Hammerstein II, 1945

"People who need people  
Are the luckiest people in the  
world."  
—Bob Merrill, 1963

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