



Special “A Class Act”/ Lehman’s Children Issue!

It Isn’t Called “A Class Act” For Nothing

by Frank Evans

“A Class Act,” which opened March 11 on Broadway to a sheaf of rave reviews, is a biographical musical about **Ed Kleban**, the BMI writer and Workshop veteran who wrote the Tony- and Pulitzer Prize-winning lyrics for “**A Chorus Line.**” For eight performances a week, Broadway theatregoers at Broadway’s Ambassador Theatre are getting an insider’s look at the BMI-Lehman Engel Musical Theatre Workshop.

The new show comes to Broadway directly from its sold-out run at the **Manhattan Theatre Club**. The original cast recording on RCA Victor was released while the Broadway show was in previews.

The ensemble cast participates in a highly stylized, discreetly fictionalized version of the workshop as it was run when its founder, the late **Lehman Engel**, often called “The Dean of Broadway Conductors,” helmed the workshop, and

Kleban was one of his star writers. Kleban joined the BMI Workshop as a composer but was encouraged by Engel to write lyrics as well. Kleban’s classmates in the workshop included a number who went on to establish

<u>Table of Contents</u>	
Works	
In Production	3
In Progress	3
In Cabaret	5
Personals	6
Shelf Life	6
And the Winner Is	7
Lehman’s Children	8
Spotlight On Linda Kline . . .	10
Richard’s Almanac by Richard Engquist	14

themselves firmly in the mainstream, among them **Alan Menken** ("Beauty and the Beast", "Little Shop of Horrors"), **Maury Yeston** ("Nine", "Grand Hotel", "Phantom" and "Titanic"), **Judd Woldin** ("Raisin") and **Carol Hall** ("Best Little Whorehouse in Texas").

After mastering the craft of lyric writing at the BMI Workshop, Kleban was hired to collaborate with **Marvin Hamlisch** to create the score for "A Chorus Line" and the rest is theatrical history. The show played 6,137 performances in New York, went on to win the **Olivier Award** in London and inspired a spate of books about the making of the show.

The BMI Workshop is more than a setting for "A Class Act"—it is virtually a character in the show. Not only is Kleban on stage (played by director and co-librettist **Lonny Price**) but the venerable curmudgeon, **Lehman Engel**, is also represented (and portrayed by **Patrick Quinn**, who during off-stage hours, is President of Actor's Equity). Co-librettist **Linda Kline**, who, contrary to popular belief, did *not* meet Kleban at the BMI Workshop when both were honing their writing skills, claims there is a little bit of herself in every one of the female characters she created with Price for this part-fact/part-fiction theatricalization of Kleban's life.

After Engel's death on August 29, 1982, several of the BMI Workshop members got together and concluded that nothing would honor this master of the theater

more than keeping the workshop alive in his honor. It was re-christened **The BMI-Lehman Engel Musical Theatre Workshop** and moved into a new era. Kleban actively served the Workshop, by preserving its integrity and refashioning the workshop's thrust—along with his then-colleagues and fellow members Yeston, Menken, **Richard Engquist** ("Kuni Leml"), **Ellen Fitzhugh** ("Grind", "Paper Moon", "Herringbone"), **Walter Edgar [Skip] Kennon** ("Time and Again", "Herringbone", "Feathertop"), **Carey Gold** (composer, "Ryan's Hope") and **David Spencer** ("La Bohème", "Weird Romance", "The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz", Theatreworks USA versions of "Phantom of the Opera" and "Les Misérables"). The workshop would continue to flourish, encouraging more new voices in the theatre such as **Lynn Ahrens** and **Stephen Flaherty** ("Ragtime", "Seussical") and **Michael John LaChiusa** ("The Wild Party", "Marie Christine", "Hello Again").

Maury Yeston recalls that Engel "provided loving attention to writers who otherwise would be separate and alone and without the foggiest idea how to get ahead or pursue their craft. He was really one of a kind. He created a forum for friendly criticism—and he offered it in the most avuncular and giving way. He brought into being a marvelous thing. And we refused to let it die with him."

(Continued on page 13)

Works

In Production

CHIPPER

a gender-reversed Cinderella musical by **John Thomas Oaks** (Advanced) was produced at **Lees McRae College** in Banner Elk, NC, directed by **Dr. Janet Speer** .

A CLASS ACT

a musical about the life and work of composer-lyricist and Workshop legend **Ed Kleban** , featuring Kleban's songs and a libretto by **Linda Kline** and **Lonny Price** (who also directs and stars), opened to rave reviews at the **Ambassador Theatre**, following a sold-out limited run at The Manhattan Theatre Club. [See related articles.]

FERDINAND THE BULL

Music and lyrics by **Jeff Marx** and **Robert Lopez** (both Advanced), book and direction by **Rob Barron** (non-member), produced by **Theatreworks/USA** , is, at press time, having its Spring 2001 mini-tour (a tryout in local venues) preparatory to a full cross-country tour in the Fall. Marx and Lopez, best known in the Workshop for their satirical, self-described "'Sesame Street' for twentysomethings," "**Avenue Q**" (currently being prepared for off-Broadway), were co-winners of the **2000 Kleban Award** for lyrics; and Barron was director-librettist for the award-winning TW/USA versions of "**The Phan-**

tom of the Opera" and "**Les Mis-érables** ," both in collaboration with composer-lyricist **David Spencer** (Committee and also a 2000 Kleban co-winner).

LOVE AUSTIN

(See this entry under "**Shelf Life.**")

MAKING TRACKS

a musical tracing the history of Asian Americans, by co-librettist/lyricist **Brian Yorkey** (Advanced), co-librettist/conceiver **Welly Yang** (non-member) and composer **Woody Pak** (non-member), recently finished a three-week tour of Taiwan. The tour opened February 21 in **Taipei** at the **National Theatre** , and then played in **Kaoshiung** and **Hsinchu** . A concept album was released in Taiwan by **Sony Music Asia** to coincide with the tour. The CD will be released stateside in May.

NEW YORKERS

a revue about life in the Apple, featuring songs by alumni **Stephen Weiner** (composer) and **Glenn Slater** (lyricist) is [at press time] in previews at the **Manhattan Theatre Club** . The director is **Christopher Ashley** .

In Progress

ALL OF THE PEOPLE, ALL THE TIME

a play about magic and magi-

cians conceived for the stage by **Patrick Cook** (Committee and First Year moderator), and written by Cook in collaboration with magicians **David Roth** and **Darwin Ortiz** (who also star), received its first developmental staged reading under the auspices of **The Manhattan Theatre Club** on March 22, 2001. Cook directed, and supporting characters were played by **Susan J. Jacks** and **John Jellison**.

BARNSTORMER

a play by **Cheryl L. Davis** (Advanced) received two staged readings at **Ensemble Studio Theatre** as a part of the **Going to the River Festival**, celebrating African-American women playwrights. The Festival took place from **March 18-31, 2001**. "Barnstormer" is about **Bessie Coleman**, the first African-American woman flyer. The play has received previous readings at **Women's Project & Productions** and at the **Actors Theatre of Louisville** under the auspices of the **Juneteenth Festival of New Works**.

BITE

a new play by **John Driver** (Advanced, Librettists) received an in-house reading on February 26 by the **Hypothetical Theatre Company** (best known for their development and presentation of Michael Weller's plays, most recently "Buying Time.") "Bite" is the story of a learning-disabled young man who wants to be an on-camera reporter.

THE CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY CHORUS

has commissioned **Scott Nathan Louis** (Second Year) to write a choral piece. It will be 3-5 minutes in length and will receive its premier in New York in May 2001.

THE HAPPY PRINCE

book, music, and lyrics by **Frank Shiro** (Advanced), directed and co-developed by **Shawn Churchman** (non-member), based on a short story by **Oscar Wilde**, had a reading at **TADA** on April 2nd and 3rd.

THE APPRENTICESHIP OF DUDDY KRAVITZ

A new version of the Broadway-bound musical, book and lyrics by **David Spencer** (Committee and Advanced), music by **Alan Menken** (emeritus), directed by **Christopher Ashley**, based on the novel by **Mordecai Richler** (basis for the 1974 **Richard Dreyfuss** film), was given an invitation-only staged reading at the 42nd Street Studios on Starring in the lead roles were recent Olivier award-winner **Daniel Evans** and **Jenny Giering** (alumna), with featured performers including **Tony Roberts**, **Ron McLarty**, **John Horton**, **Gerry Vicchi**, **Robert Lupone**, **Dashiell Eaves** and **Michael Stone**.

In Cabaret

LEW AND THE NIGHT AND THE MUSIC

a retrospective of songs by **Lew Spence** (alumnus), whose standards include *That Face* and *Nice 'n' Easy*, was produced on March 12 in Los Angeles at **Cinegrill** in the **Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel**. The songwriter performed with special guests **Wesla Whitfield**, **Mike Greensill**, **Thomas Griep**, **Evelyn Halus**, **Benoit Grey** and surprise guest **Robert Wagner**. In the fifties, when Spence was an L.A. and N.Y. nightclub performer, Wagner used to join Spence onstage whenever he performed a song called *About That Girl*. Agents saw Wagner, called Spence for the actor's number, and the rest is Hollywood history. Needless to say, Bob and Lew reprised their duet for this show, which was a benefit for **Cabaret West**.

NUTHIN'

the self-described "knee-slap-pin'. toe-tappin', twelve-steppin', Broadway, pop, gospel, country, boot-stompin' musical romp" with lyrics by **Tony Buckley** (Advanced), who stars, and music by **Mark York** (Advanced), who musical directs, played Sunday nights, through April 1, at **Don't Tell Mama** (343 West 46th Street, between 8th and 9th Avenues). Also featured: **Dawn Dominy**, **Janet Dunn** and **Meredith Suttles**.

THE VALENTINE'S CABARET

performed on February 5, 2001, at the **Players' Club**, featured songs by several Advanced workshop members: **Amanda Green** (accompanied by **Tom Kitt**) performed her songs *Who's That Guy...?* and *When You Know Me Better*; composer **Bruce MacRae**'s *Coffee, Cigarettes and Chocolate*, from his show "Little Man," with lyrics by **Leslie Gerchick** (non-member), was performed by **David Gurland**; and **Davia Sacks**' song, *Love Is*, was performed by **Rob Gallagher and Marie Danvers**. The evening was presented by **The Genesis Guild** in association with **Sandi Durell Productions**.

SONGBOOK CABARETS

at **Alice Tully Hall** on the evenings of March 23 and March 24 featured songs by **Jenny Giering** (alumna), performed by her and **Michael Winther**.

Newsletter Staff

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Personals

COMPOSER WANTED

for a dance musical about the life of choreographer **Matt Mattox**. Must work in jazz and 60's/70's pop/Broadway [styles] and compose extended dance sequences that are strong in rhythm and drama. Email **Bob Boross** at rboross@uci.edu.

LYRICIST WANTED

Wendy Fang Chen, a Juilliard trained pianist and composer and graduate of the BMI-Lehman Engel Workshop is searching for a lyricist. "My musical theater background includes writing five children's operas with the Metropolitan Opera Guild as well as progressing through the BMI program to the Advanced Workshop. I would love to find a professional partner with a talent for words to work together towards the collaboration on future projects." Call **(212) 799-5000 extension 7313**. Email: wfchen@juilliard.edu.

SINGER SEEKS SONGS!!

Mezzo seeking new material for upcoming and future shows. Looking for both up-tempo and ballads in all genres. Strongest with funny-wordy-character songs and big "showy" numbers, but also looking to expand repertoire with some good ballads. I would love to look at anything you're willing to share. Please phone **Kelly McGree** at **(212) 946-6562** or email me at itzmemcgee@aol.com. Thank you!

LYRICIST OR LYRICIST/LIBRET-TIST WANTED:

Composer (and pro theater musician) with a growing reputation for quality work, now in 2nd year of 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.

Shelf Life

LOVE AUSTIN

a cast recording of the rodeo musical by **John Thomas Oaks** (Advanced) was, in December, released and distributed through **Original Cast Records**. A student-directed cabaret version of the show will be produced at **Lees McRae College** April 26-28 of this year, directed by **Christopher Galloway**.

BED, BOYS & BEYOND

The original cast recording of the acclaimed new musical revue, with music by **Alfredo Alvar ez** (Advanced), book and lyrics by **Jeff Dobbins** (alumnus) was released nationally on the **DINK Records** label in February 2001. Featuring an original score of 19 songs, "Bed, Boys & Beyond," which explores the confusing, poignant and often hilarious lives of five young men facing the challenges of being "Gay Today," garnered considerable critical acclaim and was selected as "Critic's

Pick" by both *Time Out New York* and *The New York Post*. *Playbill* described the score as "Beautiful, comedic, empowering, titillating and sweet"; *Theatremania.com* cited the show as "One of the best-written revues we've seen in a long time," and *The New York Daily News* praised the show as "One of the best revues in town. A witty and terrifically tuneful look at gay life." Produced for records by **Joey Menodza**, the album is distributed by **Allegro-Music Corp** and available in all major music retailers in North America including Virgin, HMV, Tower Records and on-line sites such as Amazon.com and CDNOW. For mail order direct from Allegro, call **(800) 288-2007** or visit **www.dinkrecords.com**.

MAKING TRACKS

(See this entry under **Works: In Production**)

And the Winner Is...

Patrick Cook, moderator of the First Year Workshop, is a co-winner of the 2001 **Kleban Foundation Award** for outstanding work by a lyricist. Cook, whose credits include the book and lyrics for "**Captains Courageous**" (written in collaboration with composer and associate First Year moderator **Frederick Freyer**), is currently working on a play about magic and magicians, being developed

by the **Manhattan Theatre Club**, entitled "**All of the People, All of the Time**."

Cook's win represents the second consecutive year that the Kleban Award has gone to Workshop members; last year the co-winners included the team of **Jeff Marx and Robert Lopez** (Advanced), **Marion Adler** (alumna) and **David Spencer** (Committee).

Richard Culver (Librettists) has received an **Individual Artist Award** in playwriting from the **Maryland State Arts Council** for 2001. The award, which includes a \$1,000 grant, is for his play, "**The Annunciation of Sarah**," based on the **Mary Wilkins Freeman** short story, "**The Revolt of Mother**." An earlier version of the play titled "**Welcome to Freeman**," was workshopped at **Salisbury (MD) State University** last year.

Culver began writing the script as a libretto for BMI classes. "I'm particularly grateful to Nancy Goladay, Susan Schulman, Marilyn Stasio and Skip Kennon for their teaching and insights," he writes. "I still want to turn it into a musical. I'll use the grant for that next step of development."

Lyricist **Amanda Green** (Advanced) and her collaborator, composer **Curtis Moore** (alumnus), have been nominated for an **L.A. Drama Critics Circle Award** under the category of **Best Score** for their original musical comedy, "**Up the Week Without a Paddle**," which played in Los

(Continued on page 9)

Lehman's Children

The Legacy of Broadway's Greatest Teacher

Broadway's top composers and lyricists honored **Lehman Engel**, the founder of BMI's legendary Musical Theater Workshop with songs and reminiscences at New York's **Merkin Hall** on Monday, April 2. The evening was entitled "**Lehman's Children**." Those appearing included both Engel's former students and a number of members who joined the Workshop after Engel's death in 1982. The evening's host: Engel's close personal friend, Broadway musical star **Sally Ann Howes**.

At press time [prior to the event], scheduled to appear were **Alan Menken**, Oscar-winning composer of "**Little Shop of Horrors**," "**The Little Mermaid**," "**Aladdin**," and "**Beauty and the Beast**"; **Maury Yeston**, Advanced Class Workshop moderator and Tony-winning composer-lyricist of "**Titanic**," "**Nine**," and "**Grand Hotel**"; **Carol Hall**, known for "**The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas**"; and **Gerard Alessandrini**, writer and creator of the acclaimed "**Forbidden Broadway**" series.

Also scheduled: **Stephen Flaherty** and **Lynn Ahrens**, partners in creating "**Ragtime**," "**Once on this Island**," and the current "**Seussical**," calling on performers **Kevin Chamberlain** (of "**Seussical**") and **La Chanze** (of "**Once...**" and "**Ragtime**") to help perform

their work; **Donna Bullock** of "**A Class Act**" joining co-librettists **Linda Kline** and **Lonny Price** in songs from the musical biography about Ed Kleban (Tony and Pulitzer Prize winning lyricist for "**A Chorus Line**") [see related articles.]; and Broadway-cabaret veteran **Michael Winther** performing work by **Michael-John LaChiusa** ("**Hello Again**," "**Marie Christine**," and "**The Wild Party**").

Workshop faculty, performing work from their shows, join the roster: **Richard Engquist**, moderator of the Second Year Workshop and his writing partner, composer **Doug Katsaros** ("**Elizabeth and Essex**," "**Moby Dick**," "**Abie's Island Rose**"); plus **David Spencer** ("**The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz**," "**Weird Romance**," Public Theatre "**La Bohème**," Theatreworks/USA versions of "**Phantom**" and "**Les Miz**").

Finally, there are two notable "second [post-Lehman] generation" writers: lyricist-librettist and First Year moderator **Patrick Cook** and his writing partner, composer **Fredrick Freyer** ("**Captain's Courageous**"), performing a medley of songs from shows for which Lehman Engel was musical director.

The evening inaugurated the new Merkin Concert Hall series entitled "**Broadway Close Up**,"

which continues on **Monday, May 7** at **8 p.m.** with "**Comden and Green: The Art of Collaboration**" and concludes on **Monday, June 18** at **8 p.m.** with "**Bound for Broadway**," a showcase of new work from members of the BMI Musical Theatre Workshop.

Merkin Concert Hall is located in the **Abraham Goodman House** at **129 West 67th Street**, between Broadway and Amsterdam. Single tickets to the remaining events are \$20 and can be obtained by calling **(212) 501-3330**.

Librettists Workshop Notes

Application deadline reminder and auditing guidelines

A reminder to anyone currently in a BMI Theatre Songwriters Workshop who is interested in also joining the Librettists Workshop: Your completed application form and script materials must be submitted to the office **no later than May 1st**. In the past, there's been some confusion because the deadline for the First Year Songwriters Workshop is three months later, and that's the date that tends to stick in people's minds. Exact information about appropriate submission materials is on the application form, which Jean, Sylvia, or Brenda will be happy to give you.

Any songwriter in the 2nd Year or Advanced may *audit* the Librettists Workshop, and even present script material if time permits. However, auditors presentation slots are not guaranteed, and you are likewise usually not allowed to participate in group assignments. (You are also not likely to learn anything much about bookwriting unless you attend often and present regularly.)

Competition for space in the Librettists Workshop last season was especially severe. Several writers who were accepted beat out an equal number of qualified applicants with solid resumes by only one scoring point. Be aware, therefore, that it's probably futile to apply if you do not already have *some* skills in the basics of scriptwriting, since you will be competing with seasoned playwrights for the available spaces. However, songwriter members are always welcome to audit, whether your goal is to improve the skills you have or to collaborator-shop for future projects.

"And the Winner Is..."

(continued)

Angeles this past Summer and Fall. (Also nominated are the scores for "James Joyce's The Dead" and "Bare.") The Awards took place in L.A. on April 2. Ms. Green has also been nominated for **Outstanding Musical Comedy Performer** for the 2001 **Mac Awards**, given by the Manhattan Association of Cabarets and Comedy Clubs—that ceremony took place on April 1.

Spotlight On...

Linda Kline

by Frank Evans

[Editor's Note: As pointed out in this issue's lead article, Linda Kline, a Workshop alumna, is the co-librettist of "A Class Act," the Broadway musical that celebrates the life and work of Ed Kleban—she was also Ed's "significant other" for most of the last decade of his life.]

Q: Did you and Ed Kleban meet in the BMI Workshop?

A: I met Ed at a party at his rented house in East Hampton, Memorial Day, 1978. I asked if Mr. Karp, the officious teacher in Ed's song "Nothing" in "A Chorus Line," was based on my homeroom teacher at Performing Arts, Larry Olvin? Yes, said a very surprised Ed. I launched into a defense of Mr. Olvin, who had taken a bunch of P.A. students to Harlem, to see *Simply Heavenly*, a play based on Langston Hughes stories. Mr. Olvin taught me that "theatre" was not just Broadway and off-Broadway.

In 1978 I was a divorced mother, earning a living writing educational films, industrials, and most recently, as a staff writer for "Captain Kangaroo." I'd had a play produced in Soho, another by the Westbeth Playwrights Feminist Collective, and Lehman Engel had just accepted me into the librettist's workshop at BMI. [Interviewer's note: Kline's classmates

included Howard Ashman, librettist, lyricist and director of "Little Shop of Horrors."]

Ed invited me over to hear his music. Music and romance: "a thrilling combination." Over the next months, years, I listened to Ed playing and singing his songs, several of which became part of "A Class Act."

Q: What was the spark that got you involved with the workshop?

A: I learned about the workshop from Tom Topor [author of the play and film "Nuts," and the screenplay "The Accused"], who had been in Lehman's librettist workshop. I first wrote the book for a musical—a children's musical—when I was 18, a Junior at Barnard. It was produced at The Martinique Theatre—very successfully. After that, I went on to write the book for several other musicals for the same company, Peppermint Players. Bob Moss was the stage manager; Bob Livingston directed one of the musicals. When I joined the workshop, my kids were growing up, I had a stable job, I was thrilled to "get back to my roots."

Q: Did the workshop ever meet on Fridays at Four?

A: No, the workshop never met on Fridays. It's the conceit of the song. I found it amusing that in one of the books about *A Chorus Line* a well-known musical theater maven

wrote that the workshop met Fridays at Four, as in Ed's songs. Clearly, the writer had gotten hold of a tape of Ed's memorial where Alan Menken sang the song.

Q: You told me that you were one of the few wise librettists who stayed around for the composer-lyricist workshop.

A: The gang in the composer/lyricist workshop were fun—and talented. I wanted to be in the composer/lyricist room to learn to write musicals—I also wanted to hang out with the fun crowd.

Q: Your relationship with Lehman?

A: I connected with Lehman on another level: I'm a Southern Jew. My mother was raised in Abbeville, Alabama (the first town in the U.S. alphabetically) and in Dothan, Alabama. She was [just like] Amanda Wingfield [in "The Glass Menagerie"]. I was raised in Forest Hills—Queens—as a southern belle. Lehman didn't always take to women. My southern/Jewishness [created] a bond. Also, I think, I had a knack for writing books for musicals. Never could figure out why. Still can't. Just find it fun, satisfying.

Q: Are there particular salient words from Lehman which are showing up nightly at the Ambassador?

A: "A charm song has a steadier sense of rhythm than one finds in most ballads." "Abyssinia." [As for] the line about a charm song being "the southern belle of musicals—it don't have to do a lick of work, it just makes the audience smile"—[that's] not Lehman's, it is a "con-

juring" of him, as is the "Mississippi sissy" line.

Q: Are there words of Ed's (lyric or otherwise) that have kept you going through this incredible process?

A: Yes. Ed wrote "Words and music—I love them. And especially what happens when you put them together into songs. And sing them, in a large building, in a central part of town, as part of a play, with a lot of people listening, who have all paid a great deal to get in." He also wrote "I love writing songs. I love that the next day they're still there." One thing I was fierce about: not letting the book "step on the lyric."

Q: Did you grow up with musicals?

A: The first musical I saw was "South Pacific." I was probably seven? My mother told me there would be words I shouldn't listen to. According to my mother, the next day I kept saying to my doll: "You dirty basket." In "A Class Act," "South Pacific" is the first show Ed saw. I have no idea if that's true. It was chosen because it seemed year-appropriate for someone born in 1936.

Q: Was Lehman helpful in getting Ed the job at Columbia or is the "relative who works in the Record club" more the truth?

A: No, Lehman had nothing to do with getting Ed the job at Columbia Records. I doubt they knew each other at the time. Ed's father's first cousin, nee Leona Kleban, was married to Norman Adler, a Columbia Records attorney who created the Columbia Record Club. When Paul Simon

and Art Garfunkel were deciding what to call their “group”—they had been Tom and Jerry, I believe—it was Norman Adler who said, “the time has come: Simon and Garfunkel.”

Q: Ed was very silent about “Irene” [the 1972 revival of the old musical for which Ed wrote new and revised lyrics] except to say “Never take a blanket payment for work. Always get a percentage.” Did work of his remain uncredited in “Irene?”

A: Ed never said much about Irene, except to tell me about an opening number for Debbie Reynolds (playing a piano tuner) on a piano, “Give Me An A.” However, I have all his notes and lyric drafts for the project. Some quite amusing.

Q: There’s been much speculation about your being the model for the character Lucy.

A: A flattering assumption: Donna Bullock (Lucy on Broadway) and Carolee Carmelo (Lucy at Manhattan Theatre Club) are beautiful actresses with great voices. Trust me: had I sung “Broadway Boogie Woogie” at Ed’s audition for Michael Bennett, as Lucy does, Ed would never have gotten the job writing the lyrics for “A Chorus Line.”

Q: You’ve said that all the women in the show reflect some aspects of your personality.

A: In 1981 I became Head Writer of ABC-TV’s “FYI” with Hal Linden, a 37-second, breezily-informational program. Little did I know that the concise, entertaining writing required for “FYI” would help me in writing the book

of “A Class Act,” or that the ABC Daytime executives—the “iron butterflies”—would help mold the character of Felicia, Ed’s boss at Columbia Records. Lonny Price [co-librettist, director, star] and I based her on an executive both of us knew. Who? Ask Felicia. The character of Sophie: lover, friend, the doctor who diagnoses Ed’s illness is an amalgam of several women in Ed’s life; all smart, Ivy League, devoted to Ed, as he was to them. Ed even sent Ellen, his girlfriend during the writing of “A Chorus Line,” through medical school. Ed’s seductive song “Mona” inspired the character of Mona. Note that Mona becomes a writer at “Captain Kangaroo.” Make of that what you will.

Q: And finally, is there anything inside the Olivier award on stage? [At Ed’s memorial, his Olivier Award, a large Wedgewood vase, shared a spotlight with his oversized photo. His ashes were in the award.]

A: First of all, it’s a plastic mock-Olivier. A prop: the magic of show-biz. Ed’s ashes, for the record, are in Sagg Pond

[And here’s] an answer to a question you didn’t ask me: The question: how have people in the workshop reacted to “A Class Act”? How have Ed’s friends reacted? Answer: One of my greatest joys has been the loving response to the show—finally getting songs “out there.” The letters, notes, kind words from friends—from people I have only met a few times—have been warm and generous. I didn’t know when I was struggling, writing the show for so long that THIS—the connection to

community—is one of the most important reasons to write. For me, anyway. I haven't gotten round to thanking everyone, but I will. Judd Woldin looms in my mind—he wrote the most beautiful letter. I can't wait to start another show—after a bit of rest.

"A Class Act"

(continued)

Kleban's life was cut short at the age of 48 by cancer. But before his death, he took pains to establish the **Kleban Foundation**, an entity independent of the Workshop, which gives yearly grants of \$200,000 to lyricists and librettists for the musical theatre. (Kleban believed that composers had plenty of awards to apply for, but that lyricists and librettists were a much-neglected breed in this regard.) This year's prize has been awarded in part to **Patrick Cook** ("**Captain's Courageous**") who serves as moderator of the Workshop's First Year Program; and last year, part of the prize went to Committee member and Newsletter editor David Spencer as well as Advanced Workshop members **Jeff Marx** and **Robert Lopez** ("**Avenue Q**," **Theatreworks/USA's "Ferdinand the Bull"**), and Workshop alumna **Marion Adler** ("**Enter the Guardsman**", "**Gunmetal Blues**").

"A Class Act" is exposing 20 previously unheard Kleban songs—unless you were fortunate enough to be a member of the

BMI Workshop, where almost every song in the show was demonstrated by Kleban himself. Kleban also insisted upon thus presenting every number from the then-developing "A Chorus Line," over Marvin Hamlisch's initial objections. (And actor-songwriter **Jeff Blumenkrantz**, who portrays Hamlisch in "A Class Act" is not only a current BMI Workshop writer, but has had his work performed and recorded by **Audra McDonald**.)

"A Class Act" may well have two break-out hit songs. **The Next Best Thing to Love**, originally written for the unproduced **Michael Bennett** show, "**Scandal**"—and **Better**, a joyous song of celebration, originally recorded by **Barbara Streisand** but not released. **Phyllis Newman**, however, *did* include and record the song in her one person show-and-CD "**Madwoman of Central Park West**." (And to complete the circle, **Amanda Green**, daughter of Newman and her husband, lyricist-librettist **Adolph Green**, is a current member of the BMI Workshop.)

As for "A Class Act"'s balance of fact with fiction—one of Lehman Engel's guiding principles was to ignore the truth of historical situations, when it made for dull theatre. Engel would undoubtedly be pleased that he outlives Kleban in the musical, when in fact he predeceased Kleban by five years. (The short, slightly pudgy, bespectacled Engel might be even more pleased to find himself played by a tall, dashing, young man—a casting contrast to real life not unlike that of Cary Grant as Cole Porter

Special Event!

All workshop members are invited to a **Special Producer's Evening** on **Thursday April 19th** from **6-8 p.m.** in the **BMI Media room**. Composer/lyricist **Andrew Markus** (Second Year) will moderate a panel of theatrical producers discussing musical theater in the 21st century. Workshop members will have the opportunity to ask questions of the panelists.

The panel includes; **Kyle Renick** (WPA Theatre), **James Nicola** (New York Theatre Workshop), **Arnold Engelman** (Westbeth Theatre Center), **Sue Frost** (Goodspeed Opera House), **Michael Bush** (Manhattan Theater Club), **Jordan Roth** ("The Rocky Horror Show"), **Marty Bell** ("A Class Act", "The Sweet Smell of Success") and **Fran and Barry Weissler** ("Seussical", "Chicago").

A reception will follow the event.

in the whimsically "biographical" film "Night and Day.")

It might be parenthetically noted that Kleban's former career at Columbia records was not as dreadful as the musical makes it out to have been. He and **Thomas Z. Shepard** (also a member of the BMI Musical Theatre Workshop and now one of the most accomplished producers of cast albums) were being groomed by Columbia president **Goddard Lieberson** to take over the Original Cast Division. Kleban produced the albums of "**Hallelujah, Baby**", "**Jaques Brel is Alive and Well and Living in Paris**" and **Herschel Bernardi** sings "**Fiddler on the Roof**" (a novelty bestseller featuring Broadway's *third* Tevye, that he was especially proud of, citing that, as a rule, "Re-creation albums never make money")—as well as some of the first albums by the team of **Gretchen Cryer** and **Nancy Ford**. (Composer Ford, by the way, is currently an active member of the Workshop too.)

Rarely does an advanced Workshop session go by without Yeston or another veteran from the Kleban years citing a rule of Ed's creation. And Ed had a lot of rules—rules for writing and rules for life. Among the latter were these three, which Ed cited as absolute certainties.

- (1) Actresses leave you.
- (2) Good work cannot be written at a resort.
- (3) The rich die in private planes.

The lead character onstage at the Ambassador would no doubt concur...

A Funny Thing Happened...

A Noisy Bunch

Mel Brooks was once asked what he thought of critics. "They're very noisy at night," he replied. "You can't sleep in the country because of them." When the interviewer tried to explain that he was asking about critics, not crickets, Brooks went on: "Oh, *critics!* What good are they? They can't make music with their hind legs."

Simonized

Few critics have aroused as deep if negative passions as John Simon. According to friends, Simon enjoys and cultivates his reputation for being acerbic. A good part of actress Sylvia Miles's legend in the theatre centers on her heroic stand against the critic. According to Ms. Miles in an issue of *Theatre Week*, she met John Simon at a party after he had seen her in a play called "Nellie Toole and Co." Instead of reviewing her performance, he characterized Sylvia Miles as "a Warhol actress and a gatecrasher." So the actress deliberately dumped a plate of food on the critic.

"I'll send you a bill for the suit," Simon said.

"Good," said Sylvia, "it'll be dry-cleaned probably for the first time."

Below the Belt

There was a great deal of tension during rehearsals of the Broadway production of Neil Simon's "The Odd Couple" between director Mike Nichols and one of the stars, Walter Matthau. At one particular rehearsal, Nichols was ridiculing and belittling Matthau's efforts in a particularly abusive manner, so the actor stopped and said:

"Okay, Mike, can I have my balls back?"

"Certainly," said Nichols and snapped his fingers: "Props!"

Expert Witness

Al Hirschfeld remembers a run-through of William Saroyan's "Hello Out There" where the author papered the house with his friends. One of them was a sidewalk artist called Bill Cody, who tried to dress the part. After the show, Saroyan asked him how he liked the play.

"It's the greatest goddamn show I ever saw," sobbed Buffalo Bill.

"How many plays have you seen?"

"This is the first show I ever saw," said Cody

Richard Rodgers Award 2001

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

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.

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.

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

Kleban Award Application Guidelines

In honor of Edward Kleban, this award is given annually to both a librettist and a lyricist. The award will be in the amount of \$100,000 to each recipient and will be payable in two annual installments of \$50,000 each.

Qualified Applicants:

Applicants must meet either of the following criteria:

(a) A work by applicant has previously been produced on a stage or in workshop performance.

(b) The applicant is or has been a member or associate of a professional musical workshop or theater group, i.e., ASCAP or BMI Theater Workshop or the Dramatists Guild Musical Theater Development Program.

Any individual who has previously won the Kleban award or any

individual whose work has been performed on the Broadway stage for a cumulative period of two years prior to the date of the application is ineligible.

Applicants may apply as a team, but each person must complete an application form.

Applicants may apply for each category, but must submit an application for each category.

Applicants may only win in one category.

Applicants may only send one submission per category.

APPLICATION MATERIALS:

LYRICIST CATEGORY:

(1) A minimum of five and a maximum of eight typewritten lyrics with a detailed description of their contexts. The lyrics may be from one or various shows. The pages should be stapled, paper clipped, or bound with brads. *No folders, please.*

2) A tape, if possible. The lyrics and tape should be numbered correspondingly.

(3) A completed application form.

LIBRETTIST CATEGORY:

(1) One or two acts of a musical book. They may be from one or two shows. the books should have a cover page and be bound with brads. *No permanent binding such as spiral binding and no folders, please.*

(2) A completed application form.

DO NOT SUBMIT ORIGINALS.

Please submit only copies as no materials will be returned. Submissions are coded and reviewed blind. **MANUSCRIPTS, LYRIC SHEETS AND TAPES SHOULD NOT CONTAIN THE NAME(S) OF THE WRITERS. THIS INCLUDES IN DOCUMENT HEADERS AND/OR FOOTERS.**

APPLICATIONS WILL NOT BE CONSIDERED UNTIL ALL OF THE ABOVE REQUIREMENTS HAVE BEEN MET.

SUBMISSION DEADLINE:

The completed application and supporting materials for this award must be postmarked by **September 15, 2001** in order to be eligible for consideration.

Applications are available from Jean Banks of the BMI Musical Theatre Department or from New Dramatists (424 West 44th Street, New York, NY 10036).

**BMI-Lehman Engel
Musical Theatre Workshop**

**320 West 57th Street
New York, NY 10019**

Jean Banks – Senior Director

Steering Committee

Patrick Cook
Richard Engquist
Frank Evans
Nancy Golladay
Annette Leisten
Alan Menken
Susan H. Schulman
Jane Smulyan
David Spencer
Maury Yeston



by Richard Engquist

What do you listen to?

I'm convinced that what you put into your brain in the way of musical nourishment has a lot to do with what comes out when you sit down to write a song or a score. And I'm convinced also that a rich and varied musical experience will greatly enhance your compositional palette.

David Yazbek, composer of "The Full Monty," is quoted in the current "The Dramatist": "...I have an allergy to conventional Broadway musical ideas. I'm very sensitive to the vocabulary of composers and lyricists who I think don't listen to other than theater music. The composers I like—Adam Guettel and Cy Coleman—clearly love all kinds of music and can talk about [Thelonious] Monk or the Beatles or Nirvana or world music, anything, including theater music."

That rings a bell with me, but I'd go much further. I grew up, fortunately, in the pre-TV era, and the range of music that surrounded me could probably not be duplicated today.

On the battery-powered radio (no static!): The Big Bands, Grand Old Op'ry, The Metropolitan Opera, the Hit Parade, The Longines Symphonette, Phil Spitalny and His All-Girl Orchestra, jazz, operetta, The New York Philharmonic, polka-time, you name it.

On the wind-up Victrola: a potpourri of 78's from the 20's through the 40's—an unimaginable variety. (My brother still has the collection and the machine still works.)

At home and at school: old standards around the piano, music lessons (the classics and semi-classics and salon music—anyone remember that?), band and choir and campfire singalongs—boy, am I dating myself!

At church: everything from Byrd to Buxtehude to Bach—on through the great 19th-century hymn-writers, not forgetting gospel (the real stuff *and* the sentimental, watered-down white imitation).

But that's ancient history. Let's talk about now. I don't know how much music you budding theatre-writers absorb, or what kind, but I suspect it's not enough. You may

have a passing knowledge of the work of the great living theatre composers—Sondheim, Bock, Kander, Strouse, Herman, Coleman—and of our colleagues Alan Menken, Maury Yeston, Nancy Ford et. al—but what about the departed titans: Kern, Porter, Loesser, Rodgers, Arlen, Bernstein—not to mention the nearly-forgotten Vincent Youmans and Harold Rome?

I believe you'd get more and better ideas from listening to ten minutes of Irving Berlin or Geroge Gershwin than from ten hours of the so-called New Age product or any amount of Euro-trash. And, if you're serious about theatre-writing, you owe it to yourself to do some catching up. When I ask a roomful of writers if they're familiar with "One Touch of Venus" and two hands go up, my heart sinks. Not know Kurt Weill? To someone of my generation, that's inconceivable.

But—you say—who has time for all that? My counter-question: how much time do you spend on the internet or watching sit-coms? What are your priorities?

All my life I've been lucky to have great teachers, including Lehman Engel, whose knowledge of music was encyclopedic and whose taste was impeccable but very broad. Skip Kennon tells me that in Lehman's last years he turned more and more to the glorious complexities of Richard Strauss and Richard Wagner—"Parsifal" in particular. I like to imagine that he was weaning himself from the banalities of terrestri-

al existence, since he was well aware of his impending death. At any rate, he gravitated toward the sublime!

The other day while visiting my year-old grandsons I was delighted to hear what my son was playing for them as they played on the rug: Mozart, Rachmaninoff, Schumann and Brahms. Since my son pretends to have no interest in serious music (or theatre music), I was gratified to know that he'd gotten my message nevertheless: It's never too early to start listening to good stuff.

But, hey! It's also never too late. A rich musical diet won't make you fat, so don't starve yourself. Dig in!

APOLOGIES TO CLAY ZAMBO

In the last edition of the Newsletter, due to a glitch in the layout process, the first two paragraphs of Clay Zambo's swell lead article ["Got Game? (or: Adventures in the Quiz Show Trade)"] were inadvertently dropped. Though it's too late for a hard copy restoration, the on-line archival facsimile version of the Newsletter *has* been corrected; and the full piece can be accessed, and downloaded, via BMI.com.