

## NOTES : ASCAP/ DISNEY MUSICAL WORKSHOP IN LA

**Held in March : In Four Parts By Genell Kelso**

**DIRECTOR / MODERATOR** – Stephen Schwartz - typically, asked a question; then each guest answered.

**PART ONE: LYRICS - Feb. 27 SPECIAL GUESTS / PANELISTS:** ALAN BERGMAN, MARILYN BERGMAN, STEPHEN BRAY, MARCY HEISLER, ANDREW LIPPA, PAUL LAZARUS

**Paul Lazarus**, director of a NYC radio show which interviewed many lyricists, played clips of these incl.

**Stephen Sondheim:** “Lyrics exist in time on the stage, with music and much else going on. Listeners may hear a lyric only once – must be simple enough that they can get it, even though it may look idiotically simple on paper, such as ‘Maria – I just met a girl named Maria...’ Lyric needs to be appropriate for the character: it still bothers me that I had uneducated Puerto Rican Maria say, ‘It’s alarming how charming I feel!’ Important words should go on the downbeats; but the rhyme words are most important.”

**Craig Carnelia:** “In a good lyric, something happens: the singer discovers something, or audience discovers something about the singer.”

**Stephen Schwartz:** How do you start writing lyrics?

**Alan Bergman:** Study the book; look for chunks I can steal!

**Andrew Lippa:** Get or make a beatsheet of the book – showing main plot points, and figure out which type of songs go where – what style, fast or slow, major or minor, etc.

**Marcy Heisler:** Songs go at points you / character(s) cannot do dialogue – must sing!

**Alan Bergman:** Yes, such as an inner dialogue.

**Marilyn Bergman:** The first song you write for a show sets the level for the rest, so you must select musical language as well as verbal language. For this, I want to know each character’s complete back story – even what’s in each one’s frig! Start with the most difficult song.

**Stephen Schwartz:** I always start with the easiest!

**Andrew Lippa:** I start with a song for the main character.

**Stephen Schwartz:** How do you make the songs seamless with the script? ... You must know the song’s goal and endpoint first – then lead into that goal/endpoint so it’ll look inevitable.

**Stephen Schwartz:** How do you combine lyrics with music, and/or collaborate with the composer?

**Marcy Heisler:** First draft of lyrics > first draft of music > revise lyrics > revise music, etc.

**Marilyn Bergman:** Keep all drafts and revisions – so you can go back and forth.

**Andrew Lippa:** Write for singer(s). e.g. avoid ee on high notes, or consecutive consonants (and day, get to). What’s “obligatory” for musical theater lyricists? Pure rhymes – not jarring false rhymes. “I want” song - previews point of story (usually third song – never later). Act I finale = big visceral declaration setting up cliffhanger > Act II’s conflict. Then big “11:00 number.”

**PART TWO: RELIGIOUS MUSICALS - Tues. Feb. 28 SPECIAL GUESTS / PANELISTS:**

PENNEY COX, STEVE HICKNER, MICHAEL McLEAN, SANDRA RABINS, STEVE SPIEGEL

“Political correctness” problems affect religious musicals – Cox-Hickner-Rabins work in PR at Disney, where Stephen Schwartz’ Prince of Egypt (about Moses) had huge problems with TV evangelists trying to dictate what the movie must or must not include. McLean’s The Ark had PC problems with theater critics in New York.

STEVE SPIEGEL, with Theater Rights Worldwide, licenses religious musicals to schools, churches, community organizations, etc., which often want big casts. e.g. Stephen Schwartz’ Children of Eden makes good \$\$ from frequent performances, but has never been produced or reviewed in NYCity.

**PART THREE: COMPOSING FOR MUSICALS - Wed. March 1 SPECIAL GUESTS / PANELISTS:**

JASON ROBERT BROWN, HENRY KRIEGER, CHRIS MONTAN, MATTHEW WILDER

**Stephen Schwartz:** How do you start composing a musical?

**Jason Robert Brown:** I need to understand its musical world, to be consistent with its time period – not jarring. And whether I need to write large vs. small music – how many / which instruments in orchestra. Must be sure the leading characters have the main songs.

**Matthew Wilder:** MUCH revision will be needed – changing any one thing has exponential domino effect!

**Henry Krieger:** Composing revision goes through 3 developmental “gears”: 1<sup>st</sup>, spoken dialogue. 2<sup>nd</sup>, recitative [lyric spoken rhythmically over its soft melody and music]. 3<sup>rd</sup>, full-out number.

**Jason Robert Brown:** I’m technically facile: I compose quickly, but it’s glib – must get deeper to succeed. It helps to try different keys, unexpected chords, sing different ways.

**Stephen Schwartz:** Some composers try out lyrics with a “dummy” or “temp” tune – probably revise it later.

**Matthew Wilder:** Use a musical motif, which recurs each time a certain theme appears – helps unify show.

Part Four continued on page 4.....

*Songwriter Notes*

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12. The decision of the judges is final!

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