

CAST OF MENTORS

**SHORT SAGE ADVICE FROM
50 BROADWAY SUPERPOWERS**

KEN DAVENPORT

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to the two hundred TheaterMakers who have appeared on my podcast over the past five years. You've taught me so much, and inspired me even more.

Thank you for your generosity in giving me and my listeners your wisdom and even more importantly, the most valuable resource of all . . . your time.

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Note from Author

About the timing of this book . . .

This book wasn't even my idea. It was one of the very first Mentors I interviewed back in 2015 who suggested it (I told you they gave great advice!). "You're going to turn this into a book of some kind someday," he said.

That someday turned out to be in 2019. It took us some time to edit the interviews, format the book, get permission of all those mentors, and so on.

It's ok, I thought. We'll publish by Q4 in 2020.

And then, you know that Covid thing happened.

I thought about pressing the pause button, like I did on all my shows that were about to open.

But then, one dark day in April, when NYC was approaching the apex of its curve, a week after my father passed, I found myself needing some advice.

And with my dad gone, I picked up the draft of this book. I opened it to a random page.

And, well . . . here we are, in Q4 of 2020, and you're reading the book.

The advice in this book is timeless. It will help TheaterMakers and Non TheaterMakers, during a pandemic and post pandemic.

Because it helps me everyday.

Enjoy.

Ken Davenport

11/19/20

Introduction

I didn't even listen to podcasts when I decided to start one.

But, like my blog that I had started ten years prior, I knew that the platform could assist me in my mission, to help TheaterMakers and future TheaterMakers all over the world, understand more of what it takes to make it on Broadway, so they'd have a better shot on their own. (For more about my specific mission, visit www.TheProducersPerspective.com/5000By2025)

So I started one.

And judging from the emails I got after my first podcast hit the e-waves, it worked. It gave people all over the globe an insight into the world that I'm lucky enough to work in every single day.

What I didn't expect was how much it helped me!

See, I had been working in the business for twenty-five years and thought I understood it. But shortly after I started talking to the Superpowers in this book, I realized that the only way to really understand *anything* is to shut up and listen to other people's perspective for a while. And doing that, has been one of the most profound experiences of my life, not to mention my career.

I never had a mentor while I was coming up. And now I had 50.

Over all these interviews, I've learned why choreographers should be brought into the writing of a musical before any writing is done! I've learned why costumes need to cost so damn much. I've learned that one of the most commonly used phrases from super successful people at the beginning of their career was "I didn't know what the @#\$ I was doing."

Because so many truth bombs have been dropped into my microphone, I've become obsessed with getting the wisdom of my guests to as many people as possible. Because I know the words of these Mentors will inspire others to create, fail, get back up, fail again, succeed, and frankly, just be effin' happy.

And since there are plenty of people who don't listen to podcasts and never will (my late Dad was one of them), I had to find another way.

Enter this book that you're reading.

Inspired by a similar work by Tim Ferris, I took the podcasts of 50 of my guests, and pulled out some key thoughts and takeaways, and aggregated them for you here. Each entry can be read in a few minutes. I'd call it bathroom reading, but I don't think some of my guests would appreciate that. I like to think of it as what-you-should-do-instead-of-scroll-through-social-media reading.

Read one at a time. Read it all in one sitting. Read a random entry when you need to be inspired to keep going. Read it however you'd like.

And I hope the words of these mentors help you.

Because now, YOU have 50.

Rick Miramontez

“ YOU SHOULD TAKE THE MOST NEGATIVE ASPECT OF WHAT YOUR PROJECT IS AND TURN THAT INTO YOUR SHINIEST OBJECT. ”

- RICK MIRAMONTEZ, PRESS REPRESENTATIVE

www.omdkc.com

 /  @OMDKC

RICK MIRAMONTEZ is more than just one of the snappiest dressers I've ever met in my life... He is also one of the best spin masters you'll ever meet, in our industry or any other. As the president of O&M, one of the elite theatrical publicity companies, Rick has represented some of the biggest names in modern Broadway history: *Kinky Boots*, *Beautiful*, *Dear Evan Hansen*, *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder*, and *Spider-Man*, just to name a few. In a notoriously high-pressure sector of the business, Rick deftly manages the needs of producers, talent, and management, all while stirring up the biggest buzz possible to generate audience interest in his projects.

On what makes a great producer:

There are two attributes that I look for. One – and this is a basic – is good taste. Somebody with good taste, by which I mean they are passionate about the theater, about making good shows happen, and about Broadway. They know how to deliver something with class and something that’s worth a \$150 ticket. Secondly, the really great producers are the ones who are the most collaborative, who you really have a relationship with. They listen to you and they take your opinion to heart.

On the impact of a Tony on ticket buyers:

Nowadays the imprimatur of a Tony for Best Musical or best play is truly, more than ever, the good housekeeping seal of approval. It’s a marketing shorthand. If somebody comes into town, they go to the theater in a more limited way than they used to (obviously that has to do with the cost of tickets) and they need to see *the* show, instead of a moment in time when they might have gone to four or five shows a year. It’s not as casual a decision. Nowadays the Tony Award, as I’m discovering with the winner of last year, means more than it ever has.

On not sweating it over the *New York Times* review:

There is this idea that it is make or break with a *New York Times* rave, but I don’t think the *Times* can make or break a show anymore. I think it can be helpful and for all kinds of reasons, but mostly opaque, not at the box office. I wouldn’t say it’s the most important ingredient in the selling of a show.

On spinning gold from straw:

One thing I learned from *Spider-Man* – which is a very practical and powerful PR lesson – is that you should take the most negative aspect of what your project is and turn that into your shiniest object.

On working on competing shows:

You know, it's funny, the adventure of last year (2014), where we were literally involved with all four best musical nominees. It was really interesting, because it taught me two things (not that I don't behave that way anyway, but there were two factors at play that were required because of the unique circumstances).

Number one, campaign on your positives. Do not try to tear down the competition. We've all been involved in campaigns where the converse was the case. It's a much better approach, a much more powerful approach.

Number two, what this is all about is a much bigger assignment than any one show. It's about making the Broadway experience more exciting. Not that I'm not fiercely competitive, just focusing single-mindedly on any one show, but the Broadway assignment is the idea that theater-going, seeing any one of these 50 shows that are on at given time, is the ultimate good that I can provide my industry with. That became very apparent then. It almost made the one show competing against the other puny. Then you're just dealing with personalities and managing personalities. It felt very high school in a way, which I love. I do tell nervous nominees, "Don't sweat it. This is like running for class president in high school."

Charlotte St. Martin

“ONCE YOU HAVE ONE
GREAT EXPERIENCE ON
BROADWAY, THEN YOU
WANT TO EXPLORE AND
GO A LITTLE BIT
DEEPER.”

- CHARLOTTE ST. MARTIN, PRESIDENT

The Broadway League, Broadway’s trade association, is comprised of a wide variety of industry leaders, including Producers, Theater Owners, General Managers and more. Before her tenure as the President of the League, Charlotte St. Martin was one of the highest ranking women in the hospitality industry and spent three decades as an Executive with Loews Hotels before making the transition to the Broadway League in 2006. With her unique perspective on customer service and unmistakable Southern diplomacy, Charlotte unites the multitude of agendas held by League Members to reach the common goal of enacting positive change across our theatres.

On the primary function of The Broadway League:

The League was formed to provide labor negotiations for multi-employers, but we've done a lot more than that since. We brand Broadway, we work on audience development, like Kids Night on Broadway or Broadway Week. But to me, probably one of the most important things we do is we create a place where a disparate group of people, à la the farmers and the cow hands, or the producers and the theater owners, can get together, discuss differing points of view, and then come to some kind of consensus about what needs to be done. They can walk out our door, shake hands, and move on.

On what she credits the “Broadway Boom” to:

We weathered the 2007, '08, '09 recessions better than almost any other industry because we continue to diversify our audience. If you look at what's showing on Broadway, there is something for virtually every age group and every interest level. When I came to Broadway, there were three kinds of shows, and then Disney. There was the serious play, the comedic play, and the big musical, and then you had Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Lion King*. Today, there's stuff for teens and tweens and 20-somethings and 30-somethings. Yes, there are going to be big, popular musicals where everybody knows the brand, and when somebody doesn't know what to see, they'll go to see that. But once you have one great experience on Broadway, then you want to explore and go a little bit deeper. I think that's what's happening.

On the characteristics of a great producer:

I heard a saying, many, many years ago, about sales people. It was, “Nothing happens until somebody sells something,” and I really have adapted that for producers. Nothing happens until somebody produces

something. And the producer is the jack of all trades. Some of them are more creative, some of them are more business-minded, but at the end of the day, the best producers are those who are actively involved in all of those things, whether they're personally making the decisions or finding the people who are good at making a decision in that given area. There are certainly some that are very wealthy who go and hire great executive producers, and we need those, but I know those that become successful over the long run have continued to develop that multi-talent and multi-interest component to their productions. Enthusiasm is one of the things that is very healthy for a producer. I have never met a producer who didn't believe that their show was going to be one of the five that recoups its investment.

On the theater industry's biggest challenge:

You get on an elevator; people don't even look at each other—they're so busy looking at their iPhones. One of the most important things the League can do is to continually work on audience development and audience engagement with our young people. We've got to get them interested before they think the only form of entertainment comes from something that you plug in and charge.

What she wishes she could do:

I'd wish to get all of the people that work on Broadway and for Broadway, and that would include our colleagues in the unions, into a room, and get them to understand what the obstacles are for helping Broadway do even better. If that happened, we would have different pricing on Broadway, we would have different union contracts, we would have more profit-sharing when something was a big hit, and we would have profit-taking at a lower level when it isn't a big hit. And I think everyone would do better if we could do that.

Nina Lannan

“ DON'T GIVE OTHER
PEOPLE A STICK TO
BEAT YOU WITH.
APOLOGIZE IF YOU MADE
A MISTAKE, BUT DON'T
OVER-APOLOGIZE. ”

- NINA LANNAN, GENERAL MANAGER

As comfortable backstage or in the prop department as she is at an advertising meeting, General Manager Nina Lannan has had a hand in some of Broadway's most iconic shows including *CATS*, *Mamma Mia!*, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, *Billy Elliot* and dozens more. She was the first woman to serve as Chair of the Broadway League, and in 2017, Lannan was honored with a Tony Award for Excellence in the Theater for her contributions to the business of Broadway.

On the changing nature of general management:

So much more is being done now with marketing and dynamic ticket-pricing. None of that occurred two or three decades ago. I find that a general manager's job is taken up more and more with different meetings on marketing, on dealing with social media, on how we're going to price a show, or reviewing what's actually happening with ticket sales. We have so much more data in these areas than we had previously, and it requires maintenance and review. It's no good to produce data and not look at it.

In the old days, let's say in the '80s and into the early '90s, the general manager was much more involved with designers and technical personnel in the development of a show. A lot of the design and technical processes are now being left to the production managers of a show. I even had Natasha Katz, the award-winning lighting designer, ask me last year, "Nina, why don't we see general managers in more of our production meetings?" My answer? Because we're busy in these other meetings.

On not being a victim:

There was a wonderful production supervisor, Peter Feller, who always said, "Don't be a victim." That's stuck with me in many ways. I tell that sometimes to young managers who are too ready to apologize for their actions when something goes wrong. Don't give other people a stick to beat you with. You can apologize if there was a mistake but don't over-apologize. Or, just acknowledge a mistake and say, "I'm going to make this right and I'm going to move forward." If you start going around beating yourself up, you encourage someone else to beat you up, so don't do that!

On making the right move entering the field:

I would say to anyone coming in: put yourself in the place with the most energy, the most excitement, the most activity. The only regret I have is perhaps, right out of college, I should have come to New York instead of working at ACT and San Francisco Opera, although I loved my experiences there. People coming out of school have an enormous amount of energy and that is seductive, interesting, and incredibly appealing to would-be employers. I tell people when they meet with me: try not to work in an office with just one person, unless you really like that person or you're looking at it as a short-term job. You don't want to be sitting in an office answering phones or handling correspondence for someone unless that person is really a genius or there's some extenuating circumstance. Get yourself in a position where you can bump into as many people as possible. It's a collaborative business and it's all about working with people. We work with people on one show and work with a different assortment of those same people on another show. It's about being in touch with all of the creative people we have in our business.

On the frustrating economy of Broadway:

What's frustrating is the production cost for getting a show up, particularly the cost of advertising a new show, which is so high that to do limited runs is really tricky. What if I had a really nice show with no star and I wanted to do a twelve-week run on Broadway? Assuming I could engage a theater—it would almost be impossible to make it financially viable. I wish there was a way we could have more turnover of shows on Broadway, with more limited runs, so it can't cost as much to launch a show. I would like to see more shows coming and going. We have a lot of long-running musicals that people say clog up some of our theaters,

but, with my other hat on, those investors have a right to make as much money as they can from their shows.

If we have to only rely on the 1% of people who have the money to come to the theatre, theatre will die.

Terrence McNally

“WHAT I'VE LEARNED IS NOT TO TURN ON THE COMPUTER UNTIL I'M READY TO BEGIN WRITING. I DON'T ENJOY STARING AT A BLANK SCREEN, I WAIT UNTIL IT'S REALLY TIME TO GO.”

- TERRENCE MCNALLY, PLAYWRIGHT

A master at his craft, Terrence McNally spent nearly six decades writing daring and insightful pieces of theater such as *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune*, *Love! Valour! Compassion!*, *Master Class*, *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, *The Full Monty*, *Ragtime*, *Anastasia* and more. His writing for theater, television, film, and even opera earned McNally an Emmy and five Tonys as well as the honors of being inducted into the Theater Hall of Fame and the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Tragically, the industry lost Terrence due to complications from COVID-19 in 2020, but his contributions to the arts have certainly solidified his legacy as one of the most important and celebrated voices of his time.

On the long road to turning failure into success:

The first play I ever wrote that was done on Broadway was a big flop. It took me maybe 20 years to get a sense of humor about that and write *It's Only a Play* and it's taken me another 20 years to get that play onto Broadway, where it probably always belonged. Happily, it's very successful now.

On taking advantage of opportunity:

There is talent, sure, and there is luck, but you've got to be prepared when the moment happens. If James Coco said, "Can you write a play for me overnight? I'll give it to Elaine [May] in the morning," I probably could not have written the play overnight. But I had one ready to go. That's the basic story of my career—suddenly I was earning a living writing plays and I loved it.

On turning ideas into words:

Very often it's a long way from getting an idea to actually sitting down at the keyboard and writing it. It's been a different experience with every single play that I've written. What I've learned is not to turn on the computer until I'm ready to begin writing. I don't enjoy staring at a blank screen, I wait until it's really time to go.

On getting discovered (and improving) as a writer:

The advice I would give people is what I did—hang out with really talented people. There are all these newer groups which are almost off-off-Broadway that are welcoming to new writers, directors, and actors. That's my advice: hang out with your peers. The odds of your first play going to Broadway in this day and age are pretty remote. Yes, anything can happen, but you should be with your peers anyway and learn from

one another. The other bit of advice is try to work with people who are smarter and more talented than you so that you learn something. If you're the smartest person in the room, you tend not to learn anything, so challenge yourself.

On being a control freak in the theater:

That's what's exciting about the theater: the unexpected thing happens. That's also the source of a lot of frustration about theater, because it's not a good industry or way of life for a control freak. Yes, there are a lot of control freaks who end up in the theater, but they're usually broken pretty thoroughly and quickly. You could say: "You're the biggest control freak of all, you're the playwright—you're dictating whether she lives, she dies, he gets married or falls down the stairs, he inherits \$1 million," but I've learned to let go. You acquire a certain wisdom about theater the older you get, but I love the impatience of young people and I still have my youthful impatience. I want it to happen now, I want it to be good. They did it right on Friday, why does the Saturday matinee suck? Why can't you bottle lightning?

On the rewards of a theatrical life:

I know we all have to eat and have a roof over our heads but, other than that, if you can do theater and not starve to death and not shiver in the cold night because you're sleeping in the park, you've got to consider yourself well paid because it's an amazing life.

On musical collaboration:

The musical should seem as if one person, one mind, one sensibility, wrote the book, the music and the lyrics. There shouldn't be a big disconnect from the dialogue to the music, where the lyrics don't sound remotely like the character who's been speaking. It's finding the right

collaborators and being willing to really see that your main job is in providing the structure for the show. If you want a really good scene and the actors, your composer, lyricist, and collaborators come up with a really good song that accomplishes exactly what that scene did, you have to be glad for them and let your scene go. *If you've got a big, needy ego, you're not going to be happy writing the book for a musical.*

On choosing your collaborators:

Your choice of collaborators on a musical is as important as choosing a life partner, a spouse. You're with these people a lot, you have to completely trust them. You have to really look out for one another, and it's a lot of tough love.

Jordan Roth

“A GREAT PRODUCER HOLDS IN THEIR HANDS THE IMPOSSIBLE TENSION OF BEING AT THE SAME TIME A PERSON OF TOTAL BLIND FAITH AND CLEAR-EYED REALISM.”

- JORDAN ROTH, PRESIDENT OF JUJAMCYN THEATERS

Jordan Roth has had a hand in some of the most innovative new works of the past two decades. Roth began his professional career in the theater as a producer for *The Donkey Show* in 1999, and later *Rocky Horror* at Circle in the Square. As the President of Jujamcyn Theaters and currently the youngest Broadway Theater Owner, Roth has continued pushing boundaries and subverting expectations in the shows he selects to fill his theaters (*Book of Mormon*, *Hadestown*, *Hair*, *Moulin Rouge*). With an emphasis on technology and the audience experience, Jordan Roth has helped bring Broadway into the modern era. Outside the realm of theatre, Roth's work in philanthropy impressively earned him the Human Rights Campaign Legacy Award in 2019.

On finding your theatrical role *off* the stage:

The way that I participated in the theater growing up was as a performer, which I think is true for most people, because there's not a third-grade theater owner. Had there been, I would have been it—but you're excited about the theater as a young person, and you go onstage. You either continue to do that, or you figure out that the theater is the space that you want to be in but performing is not the role you want. Or you figure out, "This is not where my life is and I will be a very happy audience member." For me, I was performing all throughout grade school to college, and in college, I figured out that I really didn't want to be an actor. For me, I connect that realization over time with coming out. I came out sophomore year of college. I don't connect this with anybody else's reason for performing, but for me, as I became more comfortable with my own voice, with my own body, and with my own self, I became less interested in being somebody else, in "taking on another role." Those were very hard-fought places of comfort. My fascination, my escape, and my exploration became more about my real, offstage physical, vocal, and mental well-being.

On falling into producing:

I didn't say, "I want to be a producer," and I didn't say, "I am a producer." I just was interested in a show and wanted to make it happen, so I did. I talk about that a lot when I talk to people who are either beginning their career in the theater or transitioning. What's wonderful about a life in the theater is that there are so many ways you can come at it, and they don't all have to be the same throughout your whole career. Or at the very least, that ability is something we should offer each other. What was significant for me, and what can be helpful for people as they think about it, is that calling your shot can be hard. This is a business of a lot

of pressure, and so much of the pressure is from ourselves. Think, “Are there any elements of that pressure that we can remove?” For me, saying “I’m a producer and now I’m going to go and find a show to produce,” was calling my shot in a way that I didn’t want to... I wasn’t saying, “I’m a producer.” I was saying, “I’m doing a show called *The Donkey Show*.” That was it. That was as far as I had gotten. I don’t think any of us expected it to run for as long as it did, so that part of my story is not prescriptive. Trying it, figuring out, “This is a show that I want to do and have a role in,” that’s as far as you need to get. Now, what do we learn from that experience? Do we want to do it again? If so, how should it be different? That was the beginning.

On the day-to-day of being a theater owner:

One of the things that I love about what I do is that I don’t have a “normal” day. They are all very different, all filled with really interesting, talented, and wonderful people. A large part of what I do is operational. We are very focused on delivering a unique experience and a unique feeling for both our theatergoers and our theatermakers. That feeling starts with the feeling we create for our team members, meaning everybody up here in the office and at each of our theaters. Creating that feeling is a combination of a million different little pieces, decisions, and priorities that all of us make and that requires a lot of deliberate focus every day. That’s a big part of what I do. Happily, a big part of what I do is also connected to each of our shows, whether it be a long-running show, a new show that’s coming in, or perhaps a future show that’s a year or two or three down the road. My relationship to each show is very different, depending on what the show is, where it is in its life cycle, and who’s involved but, for me, it’s a special relationship with each one of them.

On choosing what shows get Broadway theaters:

What goes into the decisions? When I'm thinking about a show, I think about three buckets, three areas of ideas. The first: is it uniquely theatrical? Does the fact that it's live make sense? Do we, the audience, have to be there to experience this? That, I think, is really about the project of theater. Does this show use what is unique and, therefore, valuable about the theatrical form? That's where we need to be. If everything about what you're putting on stage can be filmed, do it on film. That's cool, we love film; but if we're coming to one room at one time of day, which is a highly inefficient mode of storytelling distribution, there has to be a really great reason. We are there as a community. We are there as a group of strangers that, at some point, are transformed into a community called "the audience." The fact that you are up on that stage in the same breathing space that we are in, that is why this thing is special and you have to be there. I think there are lots of ways in which creative teams answer that question, but we need an answer and we hope it's compelling.

The second thing: Does it matter? Does this have to exist in the world? Do we need this? That is not to sound heavy. Joy has to exist in the world, laughter has to exist in the world, but if we're doing laughter I really hope we are doing gut-bustingly funny. For me that speaks to the responsibility and the understanding that our stages are scarce resources; if we are putting a show on the stage there are several other shows that we are not putting on that stage. So, the show that is getting put on that stage should matter in some way, at least, that is the goal.

The third is: Is it going to sell tickets? Is it commercial? We are a commercial theatre.

Those are the three buckets. Two out of three, we're doing great. Three out of three? Home run.

Tim Rice

“THE STORY IS THE KEY
TO ANY MUSICAL. I
BELIEVE THAT VERY
STRONGLY. IT'S EVEN
MORE IMPORTANT THAN
THE SCORE.”

- TIM RICE, LYRICIST

Guided by the credo “story comes before all else”, Sir Tim Rice has lent his lyrical genius to some of the most beloved titles in all of show business, including *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Evita*, *Chess*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aida*, *Aladdin*, *The Lion King*. His accomplishments span decades, genres, and mediums, earning awards and nominations, and honors from induction into the Songwriters’ Hall of Fame to the coveted EGOT.

On the paradox between freedom and fame:

One of the best ways to avoid interference is to be unsuccessful, or at least to be waiting for success. This is weird, it's a paradox that I'm often baffled by—but the longer I go on in my career, the more people tell me how to do my job. You've got to have a bit of confidence and occasionally fight changes, but sometimes people are right. You have to admit the ghastly possibility that you might not be the only person who's correct.

On the differences between Broadway and the West End:

I think a big difference, for me, is the audience. In England, we're much more laidback and we don't leap up and down and cheer as much as they do on Broadway. Sometimes I think Broadway audiences are almost too enthusiastic; even the program sellers get a standing ovation. In England though, we're often too quiet and audiences are a little wary of revealing what they think. Somewhere in the middle of the Atlantic, there's the ideal audience, who are neither too extravagant nor too quiet.

On the key to writing lyrics:

The first step is to get the story right. The story is the key to any musical. I believe that very strongly. It's even more important than the score. You've got to make sure that you know what the character has to say before you start writing a word and even before you start writing a note of the music. The *modus operandi* for most of the shows I've worked on has been get the story right, get the scene right, and know who's in the scene and what they have to say. *Always* the story has to be the key.

On writing hits:

I think you know when something works artistically, but whether or not it will work commercially is in the land of the gods. We never, for one

minute, thought that “Don’t Cry For Me, Argentina” would be a hit song outside the concept of the show. It was written as a scene in the show, not as a single. If we had tried to write a hit single for that scene it wouldn’t have been half as good.

On his start as a songwriter:

I never thought about writing songs as a career until I was doing it. It came about by accident. In a desperate attempt to become a pop singer in the swinging ’60s, I made a tape. In order to sell my perhaps less than memorable voice, I wrote one or two songs with a limited range that no-one had ever sung better than me. No-one went for my singing but to my amazement, one record company liked one of the songs and it got recorded with one of their beat groups. It wasn’t a hit but it made me think that I should stick to songwriting rather than continue trying to be a singer. Through writing pop songs, I met Andrew Lloyd Webber, but he was trying to write for the theater. He was 17 and I was 20. We were just two struggling songwriters, each needing the other half. I was better at the words and he was better at the music. I felt as a team we had more chances of making it in the theater than in the pop charts so I fell in with Andrew’s ambitions. In the end, we succeeded in both departments.

Ben Brantley

“PEOPLE SAY 'DO YOU
EVER THINK YOU WERE
WRONG?' AND THE
ARROGANT ANSWER IS
NO.”

- BEN BRANTLEY, THEATER CRITIC

www.nytimes.com/by/ben-brantley

 @DidHeLikelt

Ben has been the Chief Theater Critic of the New York Times since 1996- a title he has held for longer than anyone before him. During his tenure of over two decades, he has filed hundreds of reviews for Broadway and beyond, becoming the most influential voice in theatrical criticism (I even created a website in his honor called DidHeLikeIt.com). He began working as an editorial assistant for the Village Voice, then began moving up as a reporter and editor of fashion journalism working for Women's Wear Daily, before eventually moving to Paris and becoming the Bureau Chief and Publisher. Ben continued to add to his resume with work for Elle, Vanity Fair, and the New Yorker before landing at the Times in 1993.

On how critics watch shows:

You watch on two levels. As a critic, there's a part of you that's calculating. The cerebellum is processing it all and thinking, "Okay, do I have a lead here? Where is this play going?" But then you're watching with your gut, too, which I think is the most important part. What you want to do is translate what you're feeling into what you're thinking. What you've got to trust is the feeling much more. You can intellectualize it if you want to figure out why you responded in the way you did.

On the changing landscape of criticism:

I think it was beginning to change even under Frank Rich in that you couldn't take the public's interest in theater for granted anymore. It used to be such a central part of the New York conversation, but now it hasn't been for a long time. You have to raise your voice a little more. You have to be more emphatic. We're also in a culture now where people don't like nuanced opinions. Some people may respect it, I certainly do, but it confuses people. They want: did you like it or did you hate it? It's one extreme or the other.

On star casting:

I think it's nice when the theater has a slight coolness quotient when it's something that people actually want to do. You could say that it's also a place where dead stars go to have their careers reborn, but I don't really think that's true. When Julia Roberts made her Broadway debut, that wasn't the reason. It was just something she wanted to do. With Nicole Kidman, I think it actually really did help, professionally. The theater is a testing ground and it's good in that it challenges people who are already proven successes in other fields.

On being wrong:

People say, “Do you ever think you were wrong?” and the arrogant answer is no, because what you’re doing is writing about what you saw and how you saw it at that moment, and that changes. The glory of theater is that it changes from moment to moment. No performance will ever be the same and you will never be the same person who sees the next performance.

On crying at the theater:

I get moved pretty easily. It’s rare that I go to something by Shakespeare that I don’t have tears in my eyes at some point, really from the language as much as anything else. And musicals . . . I mean how can you not cry? Whether it’s good or bad, there’s just something about people being able to find a rhythm, a song, and a dance in life’s drudgery or agony or ecstasy that I find very moving.

On pull quotes:

I have learned that if I haven’t read reviews and I see pull quotes, not to trust the pull quotes. But years ago, long before I had this job, I remember I was doing a freelance piece for *Harper’s Bazaar*—an interview with Catherine Deneuve. I wrote the piece and it was fine. She was appearing in a movie that I hadn’t yet seen, but we talked about it. And the deck—that is the copy right below the headline—said, “In this movie, Deneuve goes beyond stardom to become a spellbinding actress.” Well, shortly after the magazine came out I saw an ad for the movie and it said, “Deneuve goes beyond stardom to become a spellbinding actress.” I had not seen the movie; I had not written those words. They were editorial window dressing that an editor had tacked onto it. So I’ve learned to never, ever trust what you see critics say in the ads.

On reviewing Off-Broadway:

I try to do as much Off-Broadway as I can because I think there's usually more of interest there. Obviously, the news is what's happening on Broadway and that's where the commercial interest is, but if you're looking for innovation, you don't look to Broadway. If it comes to Broadway and it's new, it's been new somewhere else before. I try to get to the periphery as much as I can.

On the best revivals:

There are perfectly pleasant revivals, passable revivals, but I think the best ones are the ones that do make you rethink and say, "But this is new." Or one response is, "This must have been what it was like to see it when it opened, even though it's been retranslated for our times. This is the kind of energy and newness it must have had, the freshness."

Michael Arden

“ ANY DECISION YOU HAVE
TO MAKE, IF IT DOESN'T
INVOLVE YOU BEING
SCARED SHITLESS, SAY
NO. ”

- MICHAEL ARDEN, DIRECTOR

 @michaelarden

With a passion for unique and innovative storytelling, Michael Arden has gone from Broadway to television- and back again—acting and directing, electrifying audiences and earning acclaim. Arden made his Broadway acting debut in *Big River*, and later went off-Broadway in *Bare: A Pop Opera*. After a brief but successful stint on TV in shows like “Anger Management” and “The Good Wife”, he returned to Broadway, this time as a director, helming the revivals of *Spring Awakening* and *Once on this Island*. His multiple Tony, Drama Desk, and Outer Critics’ Circle Award nominations have solidified his place in the industry as a one of the industry’s most visionary new Directors.

On making the shift to directing:

I've done a lot of plays, musicals, television, and film. I really started to become interested in it when I was working with Trevor Nunn, because I found myself obsessed with how he approaches a text. I remember spending time with him in London during *Aspects of Love*, watching him, and thinking that I wanted to be him. I wanted to help actors and artists achieve their best work. I find that to be much more rewarding than being onstage. I love assembling a team. I find directing to actually be much more difficult, because you have to do everything. As an actor, you're required to know nothing; when you set foot onstage, you have to be ignorant to everything. You have to enter knowing what the character knows, which is usually not very much. I have such great respect for actors, because I am one myself. As a director, it gives me a chance to ask out loud all the questions that I had been asking as an actor.

On labels:

It's hard to say that you are something unless you feel like you are *successfully* something, but I think that's damaging in a way. You have to step into a room and wear whatever hat you put on with pride, regardless of how shabby that hat may be. If I'm on an airplane and somebody asks me what I do, today I say I'm a director. A year and a half ago I said I was a writer because I had just sold a pilot. I answered that way because it was what I was doing at the time. Now, I've started walking into rooms declaring, "I'm an artist. What can I do to help create something?"

On education, opportunities, and taking risks:

You're not supposed to audition while you're at Juilliard, but I did. Actually, it was going to work out really nicely because *Big River* was a show at Roundabout, which are limited runs. It was set to open and

close, all within my summer break. I was just going to do a Broadway show on my summer vacation. Then, the show was a big success and was extended. The moment they announced the extension, I got a call from Juilliard asking if I was quitting the show to come back to school. I was faced with a dilemma. Jeff Calhoun actually gave me some really great advice at that time. I was really afraid that if I didn't go back to school, I wouldn't learn all I needed to know to work in the business (even though I was working in the business). Jeff said, "Any decision you make, if it doesn't involve you being scared shitless, say no."

On the intersection of sign language and theater:

In Deaf West's production of *Pippin*, I was a voicing actor (I didn't sign), which is when I realized that I'd love to work with the company. I wanted, possibly for the first time, to highlight how everyone was different rather than the same by having characters who are deaf. Not just in a musical or living in a world where everyone knows sign language, because everyone doesn't know sign language. What it highlights is that language is a dividing thing: not only for sign language, but when we visit China or with tourists on the street with whom you don't share a language. We have differences and they bring us closer together. It's been on my mind ever since—how we interpret for each other and why we need to communicate across a language divide. When people choose not to communicate, what does that mean? In theater you can't only show the good, you have to show the bad too. You have to be honest. By creating theater that's simultaneously done in two languages, Deaf West elevates the material in a way that, even if you're a hearing person that doesn't know any sign language, you're able to somehow understand the text more by seeing it come to life. Even if it's not a language you understand, just like going to an Italian opera, you're able to understand

some of Puccini's romance more than if you'd heard it in English, just by osmosis.

On not sweating other people's success:

If I could wish one thing away about the industry, it would be the idea that one person's success is another's shortcoming. We should all be looking forward in a common direction and thinking about how we can all take a step forward and create the absolute best work. There are a lot of people trying to do this. No one is trying to make work that is less than spectacular, because we're all fighting. We're all marching in that *Les Mis* triangle forward. It's really exciting that we all get to tell different stories. We should celebrate each other a little bit more.

Casey Nicholaw

“ JUST MAKE IT
HAPPEN. FIGURE OUT
A WAY TO DO IT AND
WORK REALLY
HARD. ”

- CASEY NICHOLAW, DIRECTOR/ CHOREOGRAPHER

Casey Nicholaw’s track record speaks for itself; of the seven Broadway shows which he has directed or choreographed, five have recouped their investments. This uncanny ability to recognize and manufacture hits has made Casey one of the most highly sought-after creatives of the contemporary musical theatre scene. Commercial success aside, his involvement with shows like *The Prom*, *Mean Girls*, *Elf*, *Spamalot*, *Something Rotten!*, *Aladdin*, and *The Drowsy Chaperone* have earned him eleven Tony nominations, and one win for Best Direction of a Musical with *The Book of Mormon*.

On why choreographers make good directors:

It ends up being one vision, which is a great thing because with two people there's a higher chance of them not getting along or having different visions. A musical has to move with pacing, and choreographers know pace well. Since the shows I've been doing are comedies, it just has to *go*. There's a natural build that has to happen in a musical. A choreographer is also very helpful with the transitions: Someone who is directing and choreographing can literally move things more quickly.

On constructing a musical:

Writers say, "It's an energetic scene, so it sort of acts like a song." No, it really doesn't. It *really* doesn't. If there's not a song in it, it doesn't act like a song. An audience can sense it. It's like the rule I learned at Encores!: Three pages, song, three pages, song, three pages, song. It's a pretty good rule to follow anyway because then, if you've got 13 pages between two songs, the show is going to lag. You have to figure it out, you have to restructure it somehow. There's always a moment in a show, like in *Aladdin*, we suddenly realized we didn't have a production number in the middle of Act One, and we needed one. We completely changed "Babkak, Omar, Aladdin, Kassim," which was just a small, cute number with the four guys. It didn't go anywhere and it was song number three in the show, so we pulled it out and made it a giant production number in the middle so that we had major ensemble buoyancy in-between "Arabian Nights" and "Friend Like Me."

On making it as a director or choreographer:

Honestly, everyone takes a different path, but if you're passionate about doing it, just make it happen. Figure out a way to do it and work really hard. I know that's easy said than done, it was a different thing for me

because I didn't start by being an associate or anything first. I think my work ethic as a performer and my experience being a performer on Broadway showed people that I was reliable, had a sense of humor, that kind of thing, before I started doing this.

On what he looks for in shows:

Something that I'm going to want to see. I look at a show and I go, "I would love to see something like this." It's that, but it's also a combination with the storytelling of it. If it feels like it's a good story or script, it's something that interests me. All of those three shows [*Book of Mormon*, *Aladdin*, and *Something Rotten!*] have that in common—the writing and storytelling are fantastic in those shows.

On coming to New York and losing his hair:

I got to the city and I waited tables for a really long time. I came as a performer, had \$50, nowhere to live, slept on people's couches, which you could have done then, waited tables absolutely everywhere, watched all of my friends get their Equity cards, and I lost my hair. Once I lost my hair, I started working. I sort of developed my sense of humor when I lost my hair. It was a very self-deprecating sort of sense of humor, but I wanted to be the first to talk about my hair loss before people started commenting on it. Everyone was looking at my forehead when they were talking to me, like, "Hey, I haven't seen you in a long time, great! How are you?" And their eyes were just focused on the top of my head. Then I started getting into the ensemble of all of these shows and I was always the waiter or the gangster or the stagehand, but I loved it.

On how he knew *Book of Mormon* was a hit:

[After the lab], we knew we had something special, absolutely. I didn't know it when I started for sure, and I was also petrified. I was really

nervous about it all, but then I just got this feeling. And it was that feeling that when I had friends come to the workshop, they said after it, “Oh my God, that was amazing. I loved it.” Then they texted me later that night, “I can’t stop thinking about that.” And then two days later calling me and saying, “I just have to say, I have not stopped. I still have that song stuck in my head,” or, “I still am thinking about this moment.” That’s three times, as opposed to someone just saying, “That was cute,” or, “That was sweet,” or, “Fun.”

On how he knows when changes need to happen:

Usually, it’s my own gut response. And audience response, of course. I watch half the show looking up and down the rows. But mostly it’s my gut. Like I said earlier, it has to be a show I want to see. When we were out of town in Toronto with Aladdin I wasn’t really enjoying myself when I was watching it, so we made big changes before Broadway. I thought, “Well something’s wrong. If I’m not looking forward to the next number, it’s not right.”

David Henry Hwang

“ I FEEL LIKE THE
AUDIENCE
IS NEVER WRONG. ”

- DAVID HENRY HWANG, PLAYWRIGHT

 /  @DavidHenryHwang

David Henry Hwang has carved out a unique space for himself in the contemporary arts industry as one of the world’s most-produced living opera librettists. The LA native attended Stanford and Yale, but cut his studies short when the opportunity presented itself to have one of his shows produced in New York City. David’s early work focused heavily on the Chinese-American experience, forming his unofficial “Trilogy of Chinese America”, and is best known for his 1988 Tony Award winner, *M. Butterfly*. Since then, his work has graced Broadway numerous times (with *Chinglish*, *Golden Child*, *Aida*, and his masterful reworking of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Flower Drum Song*), and he has written dozens of works with his unique literary and cultural lens for stage, film, television including the Pulitzer Prize finalist, *Soft Power*.

On the differences between writing plays and musicals:

Writing a book for a musical is actually quite humbling. When you write a play, you build a scaffolding, dramatically. You're building to the big monologue or you're building to the big conflict and then you get to write that. When you're writing a musical, you build a scaffolding, but then you don't get to have the orgasm. You hand the orgasm over to the lyricist and the composer. It's much more structural and much more about craft. It's tricky. Now that I've worked in a number of different forms, in every form there's somebody who's the primary creative artist and other people support that. If it's a play, it's the playwright. If it's a movie, it's usually the director. In an opera, it's the composer. In a musical, you need to do a mind meld between the book writer, the lyricist, the composer, the producer, and the director.

On the development process:

We overdevelop shows. Every show is its own kind of beast, and different shows need different things. When we get into a one-size-fits-all development model, that's a problem, because some shows are ready when they come out. Others do need as much development as we have now. There are probably examples in the old days where shows didn't get enough development. The point is to try to be very sensitive to what each particular project needs

On audience feedback:

I'm certainly listening to the audience as an organic entity. I feel like the audience is never wrong, in the sense that, if you think something is funny and they're not laughing, it's not the audience's fault. It could be the actors, it could be the production. I learn a lot from the audience. One of the most harrowing part of the process, and also one of the most

important and revelatory, is that first preview. You learn so much by listening to the audience. Usually it's about stuff that isn't working and you have to fix, and that's why it's scary.

On starting off as a writer:

I've come to feel that you never know what is going to be commercial. Maybe producers do, but I don't and I don't think artists necessarily have to know or really *should* know. In a way, it's a good thing because it forces writers of all ages to fall back on writing what you really believe. That is just as likely to be successful as something that you calculate for commercial gain. If you write something that explores the questions that you need to ask yourself as an artist, and you make the discoveries that you need to make as an artist, then you've already won. No matter what happens to the play. Success is the icing on the cake. Success shouldn't be the cake, it has to be the icing.

On bringing diversity to Broadway:

I don't feel that we've quite figured out how to do it yet. *Hamilton* is a step: it's certainly a great direction and I love that show. But, in general, I don't know that we've figured out how to make diverse audiences feel welcome in the theater. People talk about the ticket price, and it's certainly a huge issue in the theater, but it's not the same as the diversity issue. Our tickets are no more expensive than tickets to see Beyoncé and Jay Z, but their audiences look much more like America than ours. I believe that when audiences feel welcome, they will buy tickets. As an Asian-American, Asians generally have a fair amount of purchasing power and yet are not particularly well-represented in Broadway audiences. We still have a lot of work to do, and to me, it relates to diversifying content and who we cast. Everybody wants to see themselves onstage.

Ted Chapin

“ ANY YOUNG WRITER MUST UNDERSTAND THAT EVERY RODGERS AND HAMMERSTEIN SHOW WAS AS MUCH REWRITTEN AS IT WAS WRITTEN. ”

- TED CHAPIN, THEATER EXECUTIVE

Ted Chapin began his theater career as a Production Assistant for, among others, the original Broadway company of *Follies*, an experience which he chronicles in his book, *Everything Was Possible: The Birth of the Musical "Follies"*. As President of the Rodgers & Hammerstein (R&H) Organization, Chapin is now responsible for some of the most valuable musical theater titles in the world, from *Oklahoma!* to *The Sound of Music*, and was directly involved with the historic revivals of *South Pacific* and *The King and I*. He previously served as Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the American Theatre Wing, and has lectured at prestigious universities all over the world.

On what makes a great musical (and why R&H were the masters):

They're just very well-written. What a lot of the younger generations have discovered is how hard musical theater is. The alchemy of speaking, singing, movement, dancing... "In a musical, when you can no longer speak, you sing. When you can no longer sing, you dance." Easy to say, but hard to construct a story in which you can validate all of those things while making it interesting and enlightening to an audience. In the old days, there was a kind of process in the Broadway world by which people would learn as they went along. That kind of built-in training grounds is very different today. As people are learning how shows should be constructed, there's always a Rodgers and Hammerstein show that you can go back to and realize, "Oh my God, that first scene in *The King and I* (on the ship) gives you so much information without anybody telling us anything explicitly."

On emotional connections, business connections and protecting a legacy:

First of all, I'm a hired hand. There are a lot of estates that have people with enormous emotional connections to what their relatives wrote, and it's more complicated when you have an emotional connection. My emotional connection is to the theater. A lot of people who do estate management, as I said before, are either members of the family or they're lawyers. They have a very different mandate because they're always terrified they're going to do the wrong thing. My feeling was that I was sure I was going to do the wrong thing. Anytime you have everything lined up and think you will work perfectly, a curveball will get thrown in. It's always something that would never have occurred to you.

On the future of Rodgers and Hammerstein:

Show Boat is the first one that's going into the public domain. Then, 15 years later, it will really get going with *Oklahoma!* Nobody knows what's going to happen. I put before you what happened with Gilbert and Sullivan. They were rigidly controlled when they had copyright protection. When they fell out of copyright, they fell out of fashion. Perhaps if Gilbert and Sullivan had allowed other people to do them in different ways, they wouldn't have fallen off the cliff.

On routine and modern disruptions of the creative flow:

There are a lot of distractions in this day and age. When Rodgers and Hammerstein, Cole Porter, and Lerner and Loewe were working, there were fewer distractions. The idea of focusing on work was probably easier. There was a kind of discipline they had that is still possible today, but is very hard. Hammerstein wrote *Allegro* about how when you become successful, there are all of these things that grab at you (committees, boards, etc.) and actually take you away from the thing that got you there to begin with. There's a consistency to Rodgers and Hammerstein shows, even though they take place in vastly different locales, with different people who have different personalities. There are some basic, theatrical storytelling tenets that both of them understood instinctively. With *The Sound of Music*, they knew that there needed to be the older, wiser person at the point in the story where the lead needs to get a little push, so they gave the moment to Mother Abbess. She followed a long line of similar characters in their shows: Aunt Eller, Nettie Fowler, Lady Thiang, etc.

On how writing = rewriting:

Any young writer must understand that every Rodgers and Hammerstein show was as much rewritten as it was written. In Hammerstein's original song titles, the essence of what the song needs to be is there, but he was not afraid of writing something down that wasn't good enough. Originally the idea for "Climb Ev'ry Mountain" was personal: "I will ford every stream, I will climb every hill..." Then it evolved into a song in which the Mother Abbess addresses Maria directly, following the notion of her saying: "You have to face the life you were born to live." You can see, through all Hammerstein's drafts, how it evolved into the song we know today. Then, he had to go back and think, "Okay, how does the Mother Abbess say to Maria: 'You have to face your life. You have to face the life that you were born to live?'" From there, we get "Climb Every Mountain." You can see, through his drafts, how it went and got turned around to Mother Abbess saying, "You will do this."

Susan Stroman

“DON'T BE AFRAID
TO ASK
THE QUESTION.”

- SUSAN STROMAN, DIRECTOR/ CHOREOGRAPHER

Director and Choreographer Susan Stroman is one of the most celebrated individuals in the industry, and one of the most successful women in her field with five Tonys and a myriad of other awards and nominations to her name. Stroman started as a dancer, but as her career evolved, found her way to choreography, starting with a revival of Kander & Ebb's *Flora The Red Menace*. She would go on to lend her creative vision to productions of *Crazy for You*, *Showboat*, *Big*, *Contact*, *The Producers*, *Young Frankenstein*, *The Scottsboro Boys*, *Bullets Over Broadway*, and many more, in theaters on Broadway, in the West End and all over the world.

On how music can drive storytelling:

At a very young age, I was inspired by watching Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers' movies. It was a big deal when they came on television. I could see how, when Fred Astaire would dance, the orchestra completely supported his movement. I understood that at an early age, if Fred Astaire jumped in the air, so did the orchestra. Arranging the music for the dance is also a big part of what I do when I create a new piece. As I work with the composer and the dance arranger, the staging, choreography, and the music become one. Even the musical time signature tells a story. For example, in *Crazy for You*, during the number "Shall We Dance", if I want Bobby and Polly to be coy and shy with each other, we play the music in a soft-shoe rhythm. If I want them to fall in love, we play it in 3/4 time. If I want them to chase each other, we do it in a fast two. The manipulation of the time signature in a melody can help you tell the story and elicit emotion from the audience.

On knowing your collaborators' business:

The more you know about the other designer's job and their art, the better off your own work is going to be. I can make the most fantastic dance step, but if the costume is not right, it won't matter. I can do the *most* fantastic dance step, but if it's not lit right, it won't matter. You all have to come together and collaborate to make everyone's work better.

On the changing landscape of Broadway:

On Broadway, the audiences have changed. There are many more tourists, and I think producers are gearing towards more tourist shows, which is why you see so many revivals now. Financially, it's so costly to mount a show; producers would like to have a sure thing. Anyone would like

to have a sure thing, but it's a little different now. People won't take chances like they used to. There are not enough chances taken on artists.

On taking notes:

If you do get notes from producers, even if something is off-base or you don't totally agree with it, it certainly highlights that area to perhaps make you analyze your decision and possibly think of something else. If there's a moment that bothers somebody, even if you don't quite agree with them, it puts a little star around the area and that makes you ponder, "Oh, maybe I could try this instead." I don't mind at all hearing from people, but there is a way to do it—a diplomatic way and a respectful way. In the end, you just want the room to feel safe for the actors and the creators.

On learning from your flops:

It's very sad when a show doesn't work. A show can be a financial flop, but that doesn't mean it wasn't an artistic success for you—that's how you have to think about these things. Each show I do is a stepping stone to the next show. When people refer to something as a flop, it doesn't really register with me. I do feel bad about flops financially, but artistically, there's always good work. There are always great images to be seen and always great performances to be witnessed. As Mel Brooks says, "You hope for the best and expect the worst." You have to hope that people love what you love. I haven't done anything that I feel that I didn't put my whole heart or soul into. Whether it takes to an audience is a different story. If we all knew what that formula was, we'd all be doing it. In the end, you just never know what's going to sell tickets.

On getting yourself out there:

The best advice I can give you is: don't be afraid to ask the question. The worst thing that can happen is somebody could say no, and then you go on. If you believe in your work and believe in your talent, get up there and ask some questions. Also, you have to start it up yourself. You can't wait for somebody to call you. You can't wait for the phone to ring. You have to go out and create it. If you really believe in your art, you have to go out and create it yourself.

Daryl Roth

“
YOU HAVE TO
BE WILLING
TO DO IT ALL.”

- DARYL ROTH, PRODUCER

www.darylrothproductions.com

 /  @Daryl_Roth

Daryl Roth is the producer of over 120 musicals and plays both on and off-Broadway, including the global sensation *Kinky Boots*, as well as *Indecent*, *How I Learned to Drive*, *Three Tall Women*, *Proof*, *Anna in the Tropics*, *Wit*, and *The Normal Heart*. Her ability to detect shows that will resonate with audiences is reflected in her accomplishments and accolades, including twelve Tony Awards, an Off-Broadway theater complex with her name on it, and involvement with the production of seven Pulitzer Prize-winning shows (more than anyone else in history).

On choosing projects that matter:

I remember feeling like a bit of an outsider in high school, which gave me more empathy when reading plays that concern others who feel that way. I decided that it would be my mission to produce plays that would open people's eyes and get people to start thinking about things from a new perspective. In the beginning of my career, that was a good guiding principle, because some of the plays that I chose had extremely challenging subjects. Truth be told, most other producers didn't want to touch them, but I thought they were meaningful and powerful and had to be heard.

On what it takes to be a producer:

I'm a tenacious person by nature, which is really one of the tent poles needed *to be* a producer. If you get behind a project that you really love, you can't give up on it. A producer needs to be dedicated and loyal to the people they are working with. A lot of it has to do with the feeling of responsibility, which I have always felt very keenly. Part of being a producer is making the commitment and then doing your best to see it through. Not only willing, you need to be excited to do it all; even if that means selling the merchandise at intermission or handing out the Playbills. Off-Broadway, where I started and still love producing, is very scrappy, but what you do for yourself, you reap the benefits of for the production.

On the value of Off-Broadway as its own entity:

There are a number of stories that need to be told in more intimate settings. Off-Broadway is not, for me, a stepping stone to Broadway; Off-Broadway is its own world. I think the most important thing is choosing the right venue for the piece that you want to produce. Oftentimes, the

experience that audiences have is so determined by the space in which they experience it. For example, I could fall in love with a very beautiful piece. If it doesn't have a major star in it and it doesn't have any bells and whistles, it would be foolhardy to think that (just because I love it) it would thrive on Broadway. Chances are it won't. Doing it Off-Broadway is an opportunity to bring new voices forward, to have these wonderful actors and writers have a place to develop their craft. It just feels comfortable to me.

On responsibility in criticism:

Critics should encourage people to make up their own minds about any given piece of theater; they should of course, give their opinion, but they should also tell them honestly what the show's about, what is important about the show, and what is entertaining about the show. It troubles me when critics come in with the sword of the pen and destroy someone's life, career, hopes, and dreams, without sometimes understanding what the show is actually trying to say. To me, that's the biggest problem right now. Mind you, I am certainly happy to be on the side of a great review, but I speak for other people, too. I'm not just talking about my own shows. I'm talking about the industry and how so quickly someone can destroy something valuable by not being fair-minded, open minded, or understand it within a larger context.

On what drew her to producing:

I have always loved theatre, and I thought about what I felt I was capable of doing, what I enjoyed doing, and what I felt I could offer. I was always pretty good at putting things together, starting with raising my family which, to me, is a big production. I felt that producing would be my natural place. I'm not talented enough to be an actress, writer, director, or designer, but what I felt I could do, what I felt in my heart I really had,

was the ability to facilitate other people's talent. That's what I feel being a producer is.

On failure:

It's really the hardest part of the job for me because I feel very personally responsible when a show closes and that I let everybody down. Not only the company of marvelous people that created the work, but the people that believed in it and invested in it. It is truly the most difficult, depressing, and hardest part of this business. For me, particularly, I can't just go merrily along after something doesn't work. I think there must be another word for it, but it's like postpartum depression when you have to close a show that you believed so thoroughly in. It's difficult and I don't think I'll ever feel differently about it. It doesn't get easier.

On female producers:

There are a lot of women who are joining the ranks of producers now and they're feeling more welcome than certainly years ago. There are more opportunities for women, and hopefully those same women are the ones reaching back to produce women playwrights and hire women directors, designers, and staff. When starting new projects, I think we should all think about parity and who we're "inviting into the room." If producers "don't know" women who can fill those roles, they should take those meetings and get to know them.

Joe Mantello

“

THERE ARE GOING TO BE
THOSE MOMENTS WHERE,
FOR WHATEVER REASON,
SMART PEOPLE COME
TOGETHER IN A ROOM AND
IT JUST DOESN'T WORK.

- JOE MANTELLO, DIRECTOR/ACTOR

”

Whether acting on stage or film or sitting in the director's chair, Joe Mantello has been involved with several groundbreaking theatrical works throughout his career. Most notably, Joe has taken on roles in *The Baltimore Waltz*, *Angels in America*, *The Normal Heart*, and directed *The Boys in the Band*, *Three Tall Women*, *Assassins*, and *Wicked*. He has been nominated for a Tony eight times (twice for acting and the other six for directing), and won twice (both for directing).

On picking the perfect project:

It's a slightly mysterious process, similar to meeting someone at a party and slowly falling in love with them. There's something that sparks your curiosity, there's a response to a kind of intelligence and honesty that makes you want to see them again and turn the page. It really is that, it's the material. I described it at one point as being like a little bell that goes off in my head, where something about it instinctually feels right. I would say that in recent years, it's important to me that there's someone in the room that I'm going to learn from and/or be challenged by. I don't have it in me as much anymore to do a project just for the sake of doing a project. I want to do something that's going to make me better.

On being on the director's side of the audition table:

I loathe auditions. I think that's left over from the days where I was on the other side of the door. I have a great sensitivity to the bravery, courage, and fearlessness it takes to walk through that threshold and face a table full of people. In fact, I don't sit at a table. I'm usually to be found standing wedged in the corner, writhing with sympathetic nausea for people who have to do it. I never sit at the table. I tend to greet actors at the door so I can just have a moment where I check in with them. Then, if I have an adjustment or want to continue the work somehow, I will pull them way to the other end of the room and we'll just have this private little conversation. It's really my time and their time to see whether we're a match. Do we speak the same language? It's so brief, the time together where you have to make that really crucial decision, and I want to see if we're communicating. Am I saying something that's going to make sense to you? It's your chance to check me out as well.

On being on the actor's side of the audition table:

Come in, do your best, share your take on it, walk out with your head held high, go have a hamburger, and know that there's nothing else you can do. Quite often you know that a really brilliant person will come in, give a fantastic audition and not get the part. I wasn't aware of that when I was acting.

On the essential rehearsal questions:

You ask the same series of questions. Does it make sense? Are you staying on track? Why does it need to sing here? Is this the right song? It's just a series of questions that you keep asking yourself. What I try to do when I come to rehearsal is literally let go of the day before, sit down in my seat, and approach the material from a fresh point of view—watch it as if I'm seeing it for the first time. Does it make sense? Are we tracking it? I ask the same questions if it's a musical or a play.

On failure:

What I've been able to learn over the years is that I cannot let the critical or commercial outcome be the defining moment of the experience. If you're in theater long enough, you know that there are going to be those moments where, for whatever reason, smart people come together in a room and it just doesn't work. If we knew why, someone would have done something about it. I try to have my own definition of what makes something a success. You have to have those moments where you fall on your face. That's inevitable. It's how you deal with it.

Stephen Schwartz

“ WE SPENT A YEAR
OUTLINING THE SHOW
[WICKED] BEFORE WE
WROTE ANYTHING. ”

- STEPHEN SCHWARTZ, LYRICIST/COMPOSER

A born-and-bred New Yorker, Stephen Schwartz has earned renown for scoring beloved works for Broadway and film. He honed his talents at Juilliard and Carnegie Mellon and burst onto the New York scene with one of the most often produced musicals in the world, *Godspell*, followed by *Pippin*. In addition to shows like *The Baker's Wife*, *Children of Eden*, *Rags* and *Working*, Stephen has contributed songs to many musical film scores including *Prince of Egypt*, *Pocahontas*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *Enchanted*. He is the composer and lyricist for one of the biggest hits Broadway has ever seen, *Wicked*.

On how being oblivious may lead to better test scores:

Some people are good test-takers and some people are not. I think it has to do with your attitude. If you really think about how the outcome of this test is actually going to affect you, then probably you don't do so well. But if you think of it as a mind game, a puzzle that you're just doing for fun, then you may do quite well at it.

On choosing the right project:

It's an instinct. It's coming across an idea, being excited by it, and thinking both, "This is something I would like to see" and "This is something that feels right for me." It's also a world that I am willing to be in for five years because it usually takes at least five years from the time you get an idea to actually getting the show on.

On structuring the creative process:

What appeals to me about musical theater is the combination of music and a compelling story. I ask myself, "What is the essence of the story and how can it be structured for maximum impact?" Of course, that is something I collaborate on with the book writer because I usually don't write the book myself. For *Wicked*, Winnie Holzman and I spent a year outlining the show before we wrote anything. Meanwhile, I fooled around with tunes and themes: "This music sounds like it could be for Elphaba, this sounds like something the citizens of Oz would sing" and so on. But we waited to start the actual writing until we had worked out the story. I once read an interview with J.K. Rowling, in which she talked about her process for writing the *Harry Potter* series. She spent an entire year working out the world and the rules of that world before she wrote anything. I was inspired by reading about her process.

On writing for film:

When you write for movies, you have to be aware that the camera has to be in motion. You can't have a character who's going to stand in the middle of the stage and sing for three and a half minutes, which can be very exciting in the theater but not so much on film. There's only so many times the camera can go in a circle around somebody. You really have to think about how what you're working on can be a *motion* picture.

On giving notes to family members:

My director son Scott and I have become truly collegial in terms of how we relate to one another. I have always asked him to come see shows I'm working on. I asked him to come and see *Wicked* and he had very helpful suggestions. One of his notes led to the creation of the song, "The Wizard and I." And I just went to the first preview of a new show that he's directing, and I called him today and said, "Here are the notes that I have for you, for whatever they're worth." It's like working with a colleague you like and respect, but also one whom you know shares your basic aesthetic. Scott has no hesitation about saying what he thinks doesn't work about something of mine, and, frankly, neither do I about his work. It's really no different in that regard than working with Joe Mantello or Diane Paulus.

On breaking into the industry:

My advice would be to write something that you can show people. That's what happened for me. I came to New York with an embryonic version of the show that would become *Pippin*. By the time it opened in New York, not one single word, note, or lyric of the show was the same as the show that came out of Carnegie Mellon. Nevertheless, I had written something people could listen to and say, "Oh, I think this guy could

maybe do something.” That was how I came to be asked to write the score for *Godspell*.

On the inception of *Wicked*:

I was out in Hollywood and working very happily in animation. Then I went on an unexpected vacation with some friends for a couple of days in Hawaii. We went snorkeling one day and one of my friends [Holly Near, the folksinger] happened to say, “I’m reading this really interesting book. It’s called *Wicked*. It’s the Oz story from the Wicked Witch’s point of view.” I thought, “Well that’s just the best idea I’ve ever heard. It’s so *me* in so many ways.” It had the kind of thematic content I like, a colorful (pun intended) leading character and it was set in a magical and musical world. It was obvious to me that it had to be a stage show, and it was obvious that it was such a big idea, it was going to have to be a *Broadway* show. I thought, “I really want to do this, so it’s worth it to suffer through doing it on Broadway.”

Lynn Ahrens

“MAKE
OPPORTUNITIES
FOR YOURSELF.”

- LYNN AHRENS, LYRICIST

www.ahrensandflaherty.com

 @ahrenslynn

Before Tony Award-winner Lynn Ahrens started writing musicals, she was using her talents to shape the next generation with regular contributions to *Schoolhouse Rock!* and *Captain Kangaroo*. In 1982, she enrolled in the BMI workshop, where she met Stephen Flaherty, thus beginning a 35+ year collaboration which produced such works as *Once on This Island*, *My Favorite Year*, *Ragtime*, *Seussical*, and *Anastasia*. The film version of *Anastasia* earned Lynn two Academy Award nominations. And Lynn is a member of the Theater Hall of Fame.

On finding your groove as collaborators:

When you begin, everybody walks on eggshells. If your collaborator writes something that you don't like or that strikes you as not right, you have to find very delicate ways to express that—as opposed to 'that really stinks.' As you go on in a relationship, you can be more direct. You always have to be kind and explain why you think that something might not be right, but you can just cut to the chase and not dance around something that you're unhappy with. And it's always wise to have an alternative suggestion—"Maybe not this but that"—to keep the creative conversation going.

On starting the songwriting process:

Usually, Stephen and I talk a lot about what the character is feeling, what they're thinking, what we're seeing on stage. Is she lonely and all by herself, or is she surrounded by people who don't hear what she's thinking? Is she upset, is she exuberant, is she frustrated? Sometimes a song is inspired by an actor, as in the case of "Your Daddy's Son" from *Ragtime*, when we were working with the great Audra McDonald. It's usually a matter of trying to "become" the character in a strange way, to try and think like them. What are they feeling? How would they express themselves? What kind of language do they use? That's where it begins for me.

On getting more women in the field:

Hire women. Read their plays, produce their plays. Keep it in mind as something that is a goal. Obviously producers and artistic directors go for the best work. But as a male producer you may not be as interested in subjects that women writers are interested in, and you may have a certain propensity not to choose those projects because they don't speak to you

even though they speak to women. I think you have to be hyperaware of that when choosing projects.

On what makes great source material:

I think it's great characters. Great, juicy, emotional characters and a wonderful story, something where all of the blanks aren't filled in. Like with *Ragtime*, for instance. It's a dense novel. It's a big, fat, full meal of a novel, but it's very emotionally cool and there's no apparent passion—it's all in between the lines. We thought to ourselves, "Songs could go flesh this out. Songs could fill in the emotions that the author left unspoken." Doctorow [the author] agreed with that, eventually. He understood and loved the way the songs fit.

On adapting material:

The source material can be very inspiring for words or for characterizations. It can also be harmful if you try to recreate anything too slavishly for the stage. You have to free your mind a bit—to try and make something fresh and original, while honoring the source material in the right ways.

On building your story:

I'm a beginning, middle, and end person. I try to start by finding the key structural points and I tend to rely on a three-act structure. How is Act One going to open? How is Act One going to end? In a three-act structure, how does the technical Act Two begin and end? What is the big crisis in Act Two that propels us toward the climax? And then in technical Act Three, how do all the ends tie up? If you have those moments, you can plot out a story pretty easily.

On first career steps as a writer:

Try to meet as many people who share your interests as you possibly can. Join workshops and find actor friends who can help you present your work. See as much theater as you can, even if it means standing room. Listen to show albums, join the Dramatists Guild. That would almost be my number one: join the Dramatists Guild, because there's so much information to be had from their magazines and on their website. They have seminars, the DGF Fellows' Program, and they have all sorts of resources for beginning writers. It's a wonderful place to start and to become part of a community of writers. It gives you a sense that you belong somewhere and that you have places to turn. That would be my number one. Get out there, meet people, tell them you want to write, try to do presentations of your work, and make opportunities for yourself.

Diane Paulus

“ ANY BIG SUCCESSFUL
INNOVATION OR INVENTION
IN BIG BUSINESS, AND TRUE,
BIG BUCK SUCCESS IS BORN
FROM MANY FAILURES. ”

- DIANE PAULUS, DIRECTOR

www.americanrepertorytheater.org

 @americanrep

If there were a patient zero for the immersive movement, it would be Diane Paulus. Paulus injected fresh blood and immediacy into her Broadway “revival trilogy” of *Hair*, *The Gershwins’ Porgy and Bess*, and *Pippin* bringing audiences closer to the action and actors closer to the audience. Each of these shows received the Tony for Best Musical Revival, and *Pippin* won Paulus a Tony Award for Best Director. Speaking of revivals, Paulus also rejuvenated the American Repertory Theater (A.R.T.), launching world-premiere productions including *Finding Neverland*, *Waitress*, and *Jagged Little Pill* at the theater. She remains the Terrie and Bradley Bloom Artistic Director at the A.R.T. and is the Professor of the Practice of Theater in the English Department and in the Theater, Dance and Media Concentration at Harvard University. In 2014, TIME magazine named Paulus one of the 100 most influential people in the world.

On transitioning from downtown to uptown:

Hair was a big and symbolic musical for me because it's all about breaking rules. I had grown up on the music. I always felt I missed my decade. I had a whole romantic notion of what it would have been like to be part of the youth culture in the 60s. The Public Theater called me and asked if I was interested in staging a concert version of the show. They gave me nine days to do it, so it was already non-traditional! That kind of gauntlet or challenge was critical to the inception of the production. I said to Oskar Eustis, "You can't do a concert for *Hair* and not have the right hair or the hippie clothes. It wouldn't make sense." I also expressed how important it was to get the casting right, so we did a gigantic search and found an extraordinary cast who accompanied the production to Broadway. It was also just the right moment for that show—you could feel young people engaging in politics again with the promise of Obama becoming President.

On knowing when and how to engage your audience:

I'd followed the whole history of *Hair*, including how they got the audience to dance on the stage. I insisted that we get the audience to dance on the stage, as it was part of the lore of the show. I'll never forget the first night when the show ended. I was standing in the back of the Delacorte wondering what was going to happen. The show ended and we did a reprise of "Let the Sunshine In." We were all thinking, "no one's going to go onstage. People will probably be too embarrassed." Then one person got up, then two, then fifty, then hundreds. I remember our production manager ran into the bowels of the Delacorte because, all of a sudden, there was a panic that the stage might not be able to hold the weight of three hundred people jumping and dancing.

That was a real rulebreaker. Then, when we went to Broadway, I knew that the audience had to be allowed to dance on the stage. The powers that be (Jordan Roth and Paul Libin) understood that. Paul actually said (when we were moving to the Hirschfeld), “Tear this theater up, that’s my one request.”

On developing new musicals:

New musicals are exceptionally challenging. As hard as a revival is, you are primarily focused on execution, even if you’ve been asked to create a “revival production” script; you’re not questioning the actual architecture of the piece. With a new musical, you have to work just as hard on the execution, and then stand back and say, “Do we even have the book right? Do we even have the right song here?” You have to let go, back up, be willing to drop a song, and rewrite. The work involved is like doing a revival on steroids—it’s incredibly hard. But, when you get it right, there’s nothing like it. There’s something undeniably special when an audience comes to see something new—when a story is being unveiled for the first time.

On supporting art, and especially experimentation:

When I heard A.R.T. wasn’t doing well (subscriptions were down and they were playing to 50% capacity), I remember thinking, “What is wrong? If the A.R.T. isn’t flourishing, this critically renowned cutting-edge theater at Harvard University, located in Boston which is filled with thousands of young college students, then this would be a case study for the state of American theater. If I can figure out how to reignite the A.R.T., then maybe it’s a worthy undertaking for the field.”

I was also feeling like I wanted to have an official voice at the table as a producer because when you’re a freelance director you’re not

always invited to make decisions regarding the finances of a production. There is an idea that the director might only be concerned about the art, and therefore would be irresponsible about the budget, and that makes me crazy. My whole experience as a young director making theater was inextricably linked with the business side; as an artist, you had to think about how to get audiences to come and see your show. The not-for-profit movement was born out of the notion that audiences might not always want to buy tickets for “art”—it had to be subsidized. I am interested in making theater that audiences want to buy tickets for. I feel that when audiences want to buy tickets for a show, that is like your public subsidy. God knows philanthropy for the arts is necessary. It’s still necessary at the A.R.T., no matter how many tickets we sell. We absolutely rely on philanthropy, but the philanthropy that we need is to support the research and development (R&D) for our productions. You have to fund the experimentation, trial, and error. I have a lot of entrepreneurs on my board. Any big successful innovation or invention in big business, and true, big buck success is born from many failures. You’ve got to do R&D. If you don’t, you don’t have a chance at innovation.

Jeanine Tesori

“ DON'T WAIT.
THAT'S THE KEY –
DO NOT WAIT. ”

- JEANINE TESORI, COMPOSER

A champion of the underdog and unexpected, Jeanine Tesori is one of the theater's most honored female composers. She burst onto the scene with the haunting *Violet*, and since then her portfolio has grown as eclectic as it is prolific. She wrote the Tony Award-winning *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, collaborated with Tony Kushner on *Caroline or Change*, adapted the animated film *Shrek* into a Broadway musical, and then composed the acclaimed *Fun Home* based on Alison Bechdel's graphic memoir of the same name. All this has earned her 5 Tony nominations, one win, and the distinction of being a two time Pulitzer Prize finalist, as well as a reputation that precedes itself amongst theater fans and theatermakers alike.

On choosing projects:

Either something sings to me or it doesn't. It's really evident right away. It's like looking at a meal and thinking, "That's appetizing." If a story is porous, almost like pumice stone, and you see that it can absorb another layer, that music can serve it in some way, it's not complete. If something is already complete, then I'm not sure what my purpose would be. I also have to find myself in it in some way.

On learning and adapting:

I like learning, especially from playwrights. I like being in the room with people who are smarter than me, where I can learn something. I don't want to keep making the same thing. I really enjoy the newness of that relationship and not knowing where the other person is going to go. I'm writing another piece with all the playwrights I work with, but I really enjoy their strengths. Their strengths bring out a different strength in me. You watch Serena Williams play with all of these players and it brings out a certain thing in her game. She's got short staccato when she plays the Italian player who was long and very legato. It brought out something different in her game and she had to respond to it. I thought, "That's exactly what it's like to work with someone different. Why would a tennis player always play with the same player?"

On being creative during crunch-time:

I think that for a career in theatre you have to be not just good, you have to be good and fast when it matters. I used to do a lot of recordings in Nashville, it's what they call the 'red light syndrome.' They say a lot of people can play really well, but when the red light goes on and you're recording, then you really have to play. It's hard because there's an awareness, a third eye. You're looking at that light and it's the mind

game of, “I have to write well right now.” For some reason, it doesn’t get to me that much. I don’t know if it’s being a parent and I think, “Okay, I have two hours to write. I’m going to write for two hours and come out with something. It might be terrible, but there will be something at the end of two hours, that’s non-negotiable.” I think that’s the same thing in previews.

On unexpected sources of feedback:

I always ask the dressers and stagehands, because they really know. The dressers are, in my experience, the smartest, greatest people. They hear the rhythm of the show; they don’t always watch it. There’s an understanding. I remember asking someone, one of the technical directors, about a show and he said, “It’s not going to work, there’s too much scenery.” He could tell by the load-in that it was not going to work.

On the important distinction between plot and story:

It was Mike Nichols who had the greatest definition of plot and story. The plot is “the king dies, the queen dies,” but the story is “the king dies, the queen dies of a broken heart.” It’s such a great and quick definition of the difference. The story is the one that sings. I’m not going to sing about the tragedy of it; people are going to get that. What I’m going to sing about are the consequences, the stakes of loving someone, the need to be recognized as a daughter or a father in society and what happens when it doesn’t happen. That’s why we tried to work with the party/pain ratio really carefully [in *Fun Home*] so that it wasn’t constant heartbreak. You get some relief from it.

On getting more women into the room where it happens:

At the end of the day, I’ve really found that there are certain things that, if you’re in the room when it happens, it’s gender-fluid. The idea matters,

the presentation of the idea matters, the life force behind it matters, the way that you take a stand for someone else matters. But being allowed in the room is so key. It's one of the reasons that I'm just trying to do everything I can to usher in young women and to learn the science—what I understand the science of writing is, the science of collaboration. You have to be in the room and you have to be invited in. Lisa Kron made an observation once that she felt men were rewarded for promise and women were rewarded for the product. I thought that was really true. You see these men advancing—they've made one indie and then suddenly they're directing a \$100 million movie. You just don't see that with women. It means that people need to look at their decision-making process and say, "Well, it's a risk either way, but I've seen women lead a crew when there was no money."

On the one thing to do as a new writer:

Don't wait. That's the key—do not wait. Don't wait for the phone call or for the right singer or for the room to be open or to get the right studio. Make the work, study other people's work, and be kind. Time is the only thing we run out of. I think because we all lost so many friends in the late '80s and '90s, so many men were not allowed to have the careers that they deserved and should have had. We all learned, painfully so, that you run out of time, so you have to use it. Not in a crazy way, but in a way that's filled with intention.

Benj Pasek & Justin Paul

“ WE NOW LIVE IN A TIME WHEN THERE ARE FEWER GATEKEEPERS THAN EVER BEFORE WHO CAN DETERMINE IF WORK WILL BE HEARD. ARTISTS ARE ABLE TO CONNECT MUCH MORE DIRECTLY WITH AN AUDIENCE AND THAT DIRECT CONNECTION AND EXCITEMENT THAT IT GENERATES CAN PROPEL A MUSICAL TO A BROADWAY STAGE. ”

- BENJ PASEK & JUSTIN PAUL,
WRITING/COMPOSING TEAM

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Pasek & Paul first appeared on everyone's radar (and computer screen) when the revue they wrote in college, *Edges*, began racking up views on the newly born video-sharing platform, YouTube. Their collaboration continued after college with the musical adaptations of *James and The Giant Peach*, *A Christmas Story* and *Dogfight*. But it was their entirely original idea about a teenager struggling to belong that would become the musical *Dear Evan Hansen*, which has become one of the megahits of the modern theater. In addition to their Tony Award for *Dear Evan Hansen*, the pair won an Academy Award for their work on the film *La La Land*, and were again nominated for *The Greatest Showman*.

On the songwriting process:

Pasek: Writing songs feels similar to crafting the five-paragraph essay that you had to write in high school. What is your thesis statement? Your “thesis statement” in songwriting is usually in your chorus and it’s sometimes even the title of the song. It’s the central idea you need to consistently support throughout the lyrics. We like to find a phrase or thesis statement that has a unique enough angle that we can keep coming back to it again and again while approaching it from different perspectives, making sure that as the song moves and grows, we are still examining the same central question.

Paul: From there, I’ll start working on a way to musicalize that thesis statement. Sometimes we’ll just start with a chorus idea and then work backwards. Sometimes the only way in is to go through the song chronologically, by starting where it wants to start, and continuing it as we go from there.

On being creative entrepreneurs:

Pasek: The world has changed a great deal since the advent of the internet. We now live in a time when there are fewer gatekeepers than ever before who can determine if work will be heard. Artists are able to connect much more directly with an audience and that direct connection and the excitement that it generates can propel a musical to a Broadway stage. Writers have the opportunity to act more like entrepreneurs, and generate their own opportunities to get their work out there.

On exorcising personal demons with *Dear Evan Hansen*:

Pasek: I’ve been thinking about why we wrote the story. For me, at least, so much of *Dogfight*, but particularly *Dear Evan Hansen*, is about asking a question and trying to get to the answer through the creation of

something artistic. I don't really know if I have the answer myself, but I see a lot of myself in these characters and in much of the plot. The songs wrestle with identity and try to investigate who we are as humans. They are meant to shine a light on the dark, weird, and scary parts of ourselves that are sometimes terrifying to examine. Getting to explore that in a theatrical way is exciting.

On when they feel like they “made it” (this was pre-*Evan Hansen*...):

Pasek: I don't know that you ever really feel like you've “made it” but I definitely feel like we're on the right path when we write stories that feel true to our lived experiences. We're trying to create work that has a sense of authenticity—sometimes hopeful and often messy—and hope that by sharing something honest about ourselves in our writing, we can create something to which others might relate.

Paul: I would agree with that. I would also say that it takes so much work—not just for the writers, for everyone—and a confluence of events, people, and artists to create a show that plays on Broadway and runs on Broadway. It's like magic in a way. It's lightning in a bottle. It so rarely happens: a show that works in all those ways. A show where all 120 people or 270 people or however many, in the orchestra, on stage, in the crew, all of the designers, etc. are all speaking the same language at the same time throughout the two and a half hours the show plays. The audience comes and sees it, sees it again, and tells their friends to come and see it.

Robert Lopez

“ I DON'T WANT TO
WRITE STUFF THAT'S
ETHEREAL AND ADMIRABLE,
I LIKE TO CONNECT WITH
AN AUDIENCE. ”

- ROBERT LOPEZ, COMPOSER

Bobby Lopez is the youngest artist to accomplish the coveted EGOT, and in the shortest amount of time too—only ten years. This feat was only made more impressive as he continued on his award-winning streak, for a total of 2 Emmys, 3 Grammys, 2 Oscars, and 3 Tonys to date, reaching double EGOT status and getting halfway to triple. His work on both "Frozen" movies proved that he could do family-friendly just as well as irreverent having previously co-created *Avenue Q* and *Book of Mormon*. He met his wife and now collaborator Kristen Anderson-Lopez at the 1999 BMI workshop.

On working with producers:

My favorite dynamic is that they're there when you need them, in the development. That if you need a workshop or a reading, they're able to make it happen. That they're able to challenge you to go beyond what you think is possible. They're able to give notes but not force you to follow them to the letter. That they'll understand if you try to hear the problem behind the note and address that they're not prescriptive of how the plot will go. And that they'll be brave . . . that they'll be risk takers. I think a lot of writers are risk takers. I know I'm a risk taker, but I'm also profoundly conservative with my money—I could never write a check the way producers do. It's the risk-taking, gambling, high-risk, high-reward attitude for which they provide the bravery.

On when your romantic and creative partners are the same person:

What we share together as a result of both being writers and writing together . . . There's just so much where we communicate so intimately about so many things during the day. We have the opposite problem of most married couples, who are like ships passing in the night. They don't see each other because one takes over when the other one gets a rest. We're full on partners. When we're both up, it's great. When one of us is up and one of us is down, that's fine because we'll bring each other up. But when we're both down, it can be challenging because then who's going to bring us up? It feels like everything has collapsed.

On adapting a movie like *Frozen* for the stage:

I always thought, "It's like fifteen songs on Broadway." It's really more like 20, (or 20-22, counting the little ones, the big ones, the reprises, and all of that). It's a far more musical medium (the stage) than cartoon,

musical-fantasy adventure because you don't have the benefit of close-ups or action. On stage you're really talking about emotion. The stories have to be told through song and emotion. While the plot is happening, information and events are not as important—they jump over a big ravine and something important falls into the ravine, that's not really something that registers on stage. So much of what we're doing is communicating cinematic moments (the same story) and turning them into songs.

On hopes for the future of Broadway:

I'm part Filipino. I was not raised as ethnically different. I was assimilated, basically. To me, in "normal" America, a story would be about a white person. I would change that. Having daughters and having written *Frozen*, I learned just from the response to that, how much my experience as a man has been affected by the white male privilege of our society and how insidious it is on a very basic level. It's the lens we see the world through. Men run it, that's just the way it is. But I would change that. I would want the stories that we see to reflect all the stories that are out there.

On blurring the lines of collaboration:

The less definition between the roles, the better. I started as a lyricist and a composer mixed together, and I always feel stifled if I can't write lyrics. I've never worked as purely a composer with anyone. I like an open atmosphere; I like not feeling too precious about things. I like when my collaborators are allowed to say, "I don't like that melody, what if it went like this? Can you change the bass line there?" I like that dynamic. It takes it away from preciousness and ego and brings it into the realm of, "What's going to connect with people? What is going to speak to people?" Because, in the end, that's what I want to do. I don't want to write stuff that's ethereal and admired, I like to connect with an audience.

Leigh Silverman

“ OFF-BROADWAY, OFF-OFF-BROADWAY, AND REGIONALLY THERE’S MORE GENDER PARITY FOR PLAYS AND MUSICALS DIRECTED BY WOMEN. THE CLOSER YOU GET TO THE MONEY, THE FEWER WOMEN THERE ARE.”

- LEIGH SILVERMAN, DIRECTOR

When Leigh Silverman was attending a summer theater program at Cambridge University at the age of 15, a teacher told her, “Leigh...you are a terrible actress, but you’re really smart, and you should think about directing.” This one-two punch of discouragement and encouragement set Silverman on a new path, which led her to a degree in playwriting and directing from Carnegie Mellon (one of the few colleges to offer an undergraduate degree in directing). After an internship with the New York Theater Workshop, she directed *Well Off-Broadway* and the subsequent Broadway transfer, as well as *Chinglish*, *Lifespan of a Fact*, *Grand Horizons* and the revival of *Violet*, which earned her a Tony nomination.

On defining a director's role:

Directing can be a mystery to people, hard to define because the job is different every single time. I believe the director is the captain, conductor and manager of all personalities and creativity. It is the director's job to unify all members of the creative team, articulate the vision, shape all aspects and deliver a show to an audience in a way they can see, appreciate, and understand. It requires a huge amount of vision, tenacity, and flexibility. You have to know what to say, when, and to who. Directing, ultimately, can be the most collaborative role, but also much of what a director does can be invisible, misunderstood and attributed to other people. Frequently a director will get blamed for the exact element they had been rallying against in a performance or text. It's the hardest to define and yet the most central role on a production. My dream is to collaborate with a writer whose vision is both challenging and in concert with mine, an inspiring, rigorous relationship filled with shared aspiration and creative tension, but overflowing with respect and trust in our process.

On not reading reviews:

I'm one of those people that must work very hard to tune out the noise. I'm not on Facebook, Twitter and barely on social media. It's not out of honorable intentions—it's just self-protection. I read a review once that was so mean and it's burned in my brain. I could easily dissolve into a daily panic of scanning the internet trying to see what others think of me, but it's better for me to disengage with that part of the business. It's a survival tactic. Total protection is not realistic, but I still endeavor to insulate myself for my own sanity and ability to work bravely.

On the state of the American play:

The new American play is thriving, because most playwrights are also now writing for television. It is relatively new phenomena that playwrights can find a sustainable way to have a playwriting career and the boom in television/cable/streaming has done a great service to the whole field. Although it also drains our talent, it gives back in undeniable ways.

On the rising prominence of female directors:

When I directed Lisa Kron's play *Well* in 2006, I was only the seventh woman to ever direct a straight play on Broadway. That's appalling. Thankfully that number has started increasing although it must be said that there has been **some** movement towards gender equality on Broadway when you factor in race the same despicable statistics hold fast. Off-Broadway, off-off-Broadway, and regionally (in places where there's not a huge amount of money involved), there's a much more concentrated effort towards gender and racial parity. Sadly, the closer you get to the money, the fewer women there are and anyone non-white hired for any part of the process. There are women who are thriving in the Off-Broadway community, who are not, and probably never will be given the opportunity to direct a Broadway show. I will also say that for younger women it's hard to get hired to direct anything, however young white men are frequently exempt from this rule . Jill Solloway has this incredible quote about how men are hired for their potential and women are hired for their experience.

On advice for early-career directors:

People ask me how to get a job and if you're asking that question, you're already in trouble. So much about directing is about creating worlds and convincing people to trust you and willingly, freely embark on the

journey with passion and dedication you're your vision. Your number one job as a director is to figure out how to be proactive and create the environments and stories that you believe in. Practice with your trusted friends and colleagues. Learn how to advocate for yourself and to talk about your work clearly, effectively and in a way that will get people excited. Make yourself undeniable. Essential. This is harder for women and exponentially harder for non-white women, who are taught many damaging fallacies including to be accommodating and hide their ambition.

Stephen C. Byrd

“PEOPLE, WHEN THEY CAN TOUCH, SEE, AND FEEL AN ACTOR, THEY NATURALLY FEEL CLOSER TO THEM. YOU’VE REACHED TO THEM. IT’S NOT JUST BUILD AND THEY WILL COME.”

- STEPHEN C. BYRD, PRODUCER

Stephen Byrd is one of the individuals leading the charge to make Broadway the diverse beacon of the arts it aspires to be. From producing all-black revivals of Tennessee Williams’ *Cat On a Hot Tin Roof* and *Streetcar Named Desire* (shows which he secured the rights to without ever having produced on Broadway before) to the historic, *Eclipsed* (the first Broadway show written, directed, and performed entirely by women, in which each cast member was from a different African country), he has proudly provided a mainstream platform for many up-and-coming artists of color. Byrd’s productions also include *The Trip to Bountiful*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Iceman Cometh*, *American Son*, *Ain’t Too Proud*.

On being the first African-American producer on Broadway:

It doesn't bother me, or it doesn't affect me one way or another. I know it's a rough business and that every time we do a new production, it's like starting a brand-new business. You're starting everything from scratch. You're raising money, getting a theater, and a million other things, so everyone is welcome to do it, if they want the challenge. It doesn't have to be just the people currently doing it. It is a pretty rough business if you don't have a demonstrated track record. I was fortunate enough to have some of my ex-guys from Wall Street come on board initially. They struck gold, so they thought I was a genius. It's a wide-open field for anyone who can raise the money, get a theater, put together the talent, and get a great story that they're passionate about.

On what Wall Street can teach Broadway:

Give headaches and not get them. There are basic business practices in the theater world that have been done that way over the years, and it tends to perpetuate itself. We try to come in with new ideas and look at new analytics with a new approach to the market. We go after the traditional theater goer first and then we're fortunate because we also go after the African-American market. We get two bites at the apple, because if I did an all-white production and we got a bad review, I'd be done. Here, I get a second bite at the apple because they want to see the Lapita play or they want to see Terrence Howard. They don't care what the critics write, and they know what they want to see. It's a huge market that's been neglected.

On the necessities for bringing in diverse audiences:

Outreach. I think that you have to do outreach in the community, beyond the typical musicals. For example, I took the cast of *Eclipsed* over to a

church in Brooklyn which has a 45,000-member congregation. You get 10% of those people to come to the theater, you're doing pretty well, and we've sold several tickets to many groups just from that particular church. People, when they can touch, see, and feel an actor, they naturally feel closer to them. You've reached out to them. It's not just build and they will come. It's a broad outreach, but you have to do those little things for that particular audience to bring it in, as well as advertising and bringing in non-traditional media.

On what Hollywood actors need to learn for Broadway:

Discipline. When you're shooting a movie, you can do one to ten takes and go back to your Winnebago. Here, the discipline comes when the reality sets in that they have to do the same role eight times a week before a live audience. A lot of them don't have that discipline, so I surround them, to the best of my ability, with people who are theater veterans and have a lot of experience that can give them that guidance and mentor them.

Bartlett Sher

“ I HAVE THINGS IN MIND THAT I WANT TO EXPLORE, AND I LOOK AT DIRECTING AS AN ACTIVITY. IT’S LIKE I TAKE THE TEXT AND I TAKE THE THING AND I BEGIN TO PUSH IT TOGETHER AND SHAPE IT AND PAINT. ”

- BARTLETT SHER, DIRECTOR

 @bartlett.sher

 @bartlett_sher

Shortly after his work on the *The Light in the Piazza* at Lincoln Center Theater, Bartlett Sher was made the organization’s Resident Director. Under his guidance, LCT produced some of the most significant Broadway revivals of the modern age, including *The King and I* and *South Pacific*; both won the Tony Award for Best Revival and garnered him two of his nine Tony nominations, winning for *South Pacific*. Other Broadway productions of his include the revivals of *My Fair Lady* and *Fiddler on the Roof*, as well as *Bridges of Madison County*, and *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* and the Clifford Odets plays, *Awake and Sing* and *Golden Boy*.

On the important parts of a director's job:

Intellectually, it's really important to separate the interpretative from the creative impulse. Directing is an interpretive art, like conducting. There is a pre-existing reality. You take this pre-existing reality and you make something of it. It's different than if I sit down as a composer or a writer to write a piece and shape it myself. Now, directors help in the development of scripts, but essentially, we're interpreters. We're also unifiers; we unify all of the arts around us and in order to do that, we have to be immersed in everything. We have to be able to build a concept about the piece. That can be really special and there are a lot of approaches to what makes an interpretation interesting. We're enormously skilled at convincing everybody else to be good and holding together everybody else's talent. It's different than the actual talent of an actor or a singer—we draw all of those parts together, reveal them, and pull together the rhythm, the storytelling, and the action; all of those things get integrated through the ways in which a director decides where the whole piece is going.

On what has changed over two decades of directing:

Fundamentally, it hasn't changed. The influences have changed—who influenced me, through the middle part of the twentieth century, from Peter Brook to Strehler, is different to who is influencing people now, both experimentally and classically. The place that theater has in the world is changing wildly. In a traditional sense, theater was seen as a place to “hold a mirror up to nature.” I think now social activism has taken a strong lead in the work of theater artists as we steer through incredibly uncertain times. And rightly so.

The basic function of what you do with a text on a stage has not changed. The technology has changed; the way people listen has

changed; what they're capable of handling in terms of absorbing the amount of information or how it's delivered has changed; their capacity to hear has changed. Audiences don't share the same history of the work, which is more difficult in this sense. They're not all in the same place when they get in the room, which can be quite wildly fascinating and hard. Directing essentially hasn't changed, but who we are, how we perceive, and what influences us has changed radically.

On expectations for actors in the audition room:

I don't expect them to come in and deliver the role for me to use. I'm really searching for talent and whether you're good for the role. Then, whether you have the collaborative skills to build the thing quickly with me because, as you know, I'm going to be chaotic and we're going to make it together as we go along. I want people who are versatile and have a certain kind of collaborative skill. I may find that they're really good for the part, but I may smell that they're difficult or they don't quite have a good vibe with me. So, I still won't hire them, even if they're perfect. I would rather build a team of people who are going to be enjoying the adventure with me and have the intellectual, physical, and actual talent for acting that I need. If you have a great actor, you are going to have a great show, but you also need a collaborator.

On advice for producers:

First of all, there are some really good Broadway producers. And it's the most difficult job to be good at in the theater. What the producer has to do is balance everything, between capitalism and the commercial nature of the work, to finding a way to allow the director/artist to be rich and complete in their artistic enterprises. They have to steer everyone towards accomplishment, especially if it's solely in the commercial vein. That's incredibly difficult to do because the concerns and the costs are so

high. I wouldn't know exactly what to tell them, except perhaps to trust as much as possible that the best level of art may make them the most money. Look at *The Lion King*, *Hamilton*, or *Wicked*. It's never been true that a purely commercial piece, which will make your money back, is necessarily worth it without the art. It's that balancing act, which is going to be different each time.

Sue Frost & Randy Adams

“DON'T SPEND
MORE MONEY THAN
YOU NEED TO.”

- SUE FROST & RANDY ADAMS, PRODUCERS

www.jydprod.com

From Goodspeed Opera House and TheatreWorks Silicon Valley respectively, Sue Frost and Randy Adams teamed up to form Junkyard Dog Productions in 2006 with the goal of developing new musical theatre works, and bridging regional and national stages. They made their way to Broadway with *Memphis* in 2010, enjoying a three-year run which won them a Tony Award for Best Musical, spawned a national tour, a West End production, as well as productions around the world. Additional productions include *First Date* and the Off Broadway production of *Make Me a Song: the Music of William Finn*, and the unexpected hit *Come From Away*, which recouped in an astounding eight months.

On finding your people and taking the big leaps:

Sue: We were both on the board of the National Alliance for Musical Theater. We met there in the early days of NAMT and it was as much about revivals as it was new work. New work was kind of like...

Randy: The bastard child...

Sue: Randy and I were, of course, were really passionate about new works and that drew us together. We realized that we were developing a lot of the same writers and that we had very similar tastes. It was a huge, crazy leap. We looked at our collective knowledge from over those many years, and we realized that until you play in the big pond, nobody's ever going to take you seriously. We had to find a way to make our mark here in this town. Even though I knew a lot of people from my company management days, it's a different beast when you're a producer. That's how we ended up with *Memphis*. We knew we had to start with Broadway. Broadway is the center of the universe when it comes to musical theatre, so you have to be able to negotiate there to make anything else happen.

On what they've learned from nonprofits that has helped them in the commercial world:

Sue: Don't spend money if you don't have to. Our experience in nonprofit means we understand that world. As commercial producers, it's been very helpful for us to build on partnerships that we've developed over the years, as well as having a real understanding of what those theatres need. Going into our relationships, we developed *Memphis* [and *First Date* and *Come From Away*] through partnerships with regional theatres. It's an acknowledgement of what we all bring to the table when it comes to developing a new work, which is risky, expensive, and challenging.

Randy: We also spoke that language. One of our funniest stories is when we had our general manager of *Memphis*, Carl Pasbjerg, and Debby Buchholz from La Jolla Playhouse on the phone. They were talking about something that was in the contract and they were both saying the same thing, but using different language. We said, “This is what you’re saying, right?” They said, “Yeah! Okay, let’s move on!” It was fascinating. We know how that system works and we know the players, but we also know how it felt when people would come into our house and work with us. So we’re really good people to go into other people’s houses and work within their system. Your job is to bring the very best of what you’re doing, yet not try and screw with their system because that’s what they do and they do it really well.

Sue: Also, don’t spend more money than you need to.

On communication and being present as a producer:

Randy: You have to work with so many different people. You really have to make sure they’re all communicating with each other as well. If the process isn’t working, it doesn’t really matter what’s going on, you’ve got a whole different issue at hand.

Sue: You’ve got to communicate first and foremost with your creative team. Then, you’ve got to communicate with your financial partners, communicate with your sales team, your general management team. If we have a show in the rehearsal studio, we make sure we’re there every day for at least the beginning of the day, the lunch break, or the end of the day to check in and see what’s going on and ensure we are a comfortable presence. We love that part of it.

Randy: Otherwise, how else do you get to know what’s going on? How do you know what’s going on in rehearsal? How do you know what’s happening and the temperature in the room? How does everybody feel

about the way it's going? You can't just drop in for five seconds and get that. You have to be around in order for people to be comfortable enough to talk to you.

On saying 'no' and letting go:

Sue: I don't think saying 'no' is hard if you've done your work and everybody understands that you all want the same thing. Then it's a conversation, and everybody understands where the 'no' is coming from. We've been really blessed to work with creative teams who understand the business as well as the art, who really genuinely listen when you say, "That's a bad idea." Some of that has to do with the fact that they've had other experiences where it didn't work out so well. Sometimes it's a compromise. Sometimes I think it's probably one of the hardest things a producer has to do, but maybe the hardest is to know when to let go. That's very painful.

Randy: I think part of it is just that conversation we have with the creators. They know we're all going after the same thing. It's not like we're just trying to penny-pinch. On *Memphis*, there were conversations like, "Well, it'd be really nice if we had this and this." We'd say, "Well, here's what that would mean and..." They got that and they'd go back and figure out another creative way. It's really just about everybody working together to try and make it the best it can be.

Tara Rubin

“ I MISS HAVING MORE TIME. EVERYTHING NEEDS TO BE DONE IN AN INSTANT. IT’S POSSIBLE TO DO BECAUSE THE INTERNET ALLOWS US TO MAKE INFORMATION FLY OUT IN A SECOND. . . ”

- TARA RUBIN, CASTING DIRECTOR

www.tararubincasting.com

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Tara Rubin started her career working for Broadway producer and theater owner Lester Osterman before landing at Johnson-Liff, Broadway’s premiere casting agency throughout the 80’s and 90’s, an opportunity which turned into a fifteen-year-long tenure. Then, in 2001 she formed the Tara Rubin Casting Agency, becoming one of the biggest names in casting herself. She has helped assemble countless Broadway companies and is responsible for launching the careers of many up-and-coming stars, with shows like *Aladdin*, *Cats*, *Miss Saigon*, *Dear Evan Hansen*, *School of Rock*, *The Band’s Visit*, as well as numerous National Tours and regional productions for The O’Neill, Paper Mill Playhouse, Asolo, La Jolla and more.

On casting in the age of instant information:

I miss having more time. Everything needs to be done in an instant—“Get me a list. Get me five people. Set up an audition for tomorrow.” It’s possible because the internet allows information to fly out in a second but I miss the time when someone would send us a script, we’d all read it, and then Vinnie [Liff], Geoff [Johnson], and I would sit in the conference room to discuss it. The director and producer would come by and we’d talk about the play, what the plans were, and get to know the director a little bit. And then, a week later, you would probably meet again because we’d all been thinking about it, we’d all made lists, and we would put the lists together. There was time for reflection and consideration that I miss sometimes.

On what to look for in the audition process:

The most important thing you need to get started, is: who are the right people to tell this story and what are those people like? Are they bright, are they people made of primary colors, are they people made of pastels? The actors who have that gift of being able to share who they are easily, you get to figure out where they fit, either the world of the play or just the world of my office and projects that I’m working on. Being able to show me who you are, I love that. I look for that.

On the dos and don’ts of getting a casting director’s attention:

I always say hard work is the best thing that an actor can do because gimmicky things—like mailing campaign, I remember a woman who sent a letter in a lavender envelope every Tuesday because she wanted to be in *Les Mis*—those kinds of things make us think that you’re not taking this work very seriously. When an actor comes in and she’s prepared and it’s

clear that she has brought her full self to the audition, that's the best way to get my attention.

On when casting isn't going "your way":

I remember a teacher who said, "When a director gives you a note, always say thank you and take that note and do it to your best ability. Don't resist it, don't criticize it or analyze it, because it will be clear if the note works if you do it properly." I think I've always applied that to my work in casting. I take a lot of notes from directors and writers, I try to follow their concept – I always say we are in the business of serving their imaginations. Most directors have enormous bandwidth in their imaginations and can accommodate the ideas that come from the casting process—so I will add people into the sessions that might not exactly fit the initial brief to see if we can expand or enhance the original concept. I don't think I have ever said to a director, "I don't think that's right. I don't think we need that person." The casting process will usually make it all very clear.

On the biggest (and most overlooked) mistake made in the audition room:

The biggest thing to do is be prepared and bring your whole self to the audition. Also, try to read the social signals . . . whether the room is warm and open—a handshaking group—or a more reserved team at the table. It helps the process if the actor can key into the tone of the room. Casting directors try to make the actors feel comfortable and welcome; we are all together for the same purpose: to shine a light on the actor's talent and explore his or her appropriateness for the story we are telling.

On a producer's role in supporting diversity:

Producers taking a strong position that there must be diversity in the cast is critical. That support takes casting with a diverse imagination beyond an initiative and makes it a practice.

Rick Elice

“ THINKING ‘MAYBE THIS IS THE SORT OF THING THAT COULD BE SUCCESSFUL,’ IS NOT A GOOD REASON TO WRITE SOMETHING. ”

- RICK ELICE, PLAYWRIGHT & LIBRETTIST

For 17 years, Rick Elice worked at Serino Coyne, one of the “Big Three” advertising agencies of the theater, helping craft the marketing campaigns for some of the biggest hits on Broadway. After writing his first play over the course of just a weekend only years earlier, Elice began writing his very first musical by a chance encounter with an advertising client. The musical, *Jersey Boys*, went on to run for almost twelve years on Broadway, tour internationally, spawned a hit film, and then returned to Off-Broadway. Rick has also written *Turn of the Century*, *The Addams Family*, *Peter and the Starcatcher*, *Superfly*, *Dog and Pony*, *My Very Own British Invasion*, and *The Cher Show*.

On self-doubt:

When I was 40, Roger [Rees, Rick's husband] and I went to see Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia*, and afterward, Tom, Rog, and I went across the street for a meal. Tom said to me, "You seem awfully glum, Rick. Didn't you like the play?" I said, "Like it? I think it's proof that there's God. You're like Mozart or Michelangelo or something. I think I have to kill myself." "But why?" Tom asked. And I said, "I'll never be that good. What's the point of going on?"

I remembered in that moment how, years before, I'd given up acting. I was 25, I'd finally seen *The Deer Hunter*, and I thought, "Look at De Niro. Look at Meryl Streep. I'll never be that good. What's the point of going on? Who needs one more decent actor?" Nobody tried to talk me out of it, so I stopped. Now here I was, across the table from Tom Stoppard, the De Niro of writers, asking (I thought rhetorically), "Who needs one more decent copywriter; one more average playwright, when there's you?" Only, Tom answered. "Rick, don't you think that there are writers about whom I feel just the same way?" I said, "Who? Tolstoy?" And he said, "Well, yes, for one. Why don't you just write? Stop worrying about whether it's good or great or shit or anything. Just write. If it gives you pleasure, then do it."

The difference between stopping acting and keeping writing was the difference between my being 25 and 40, which was the difference between sulking and understanding Tom's point. Thanks to Tom, I kept writing. And a few years later, Tom's advice gave me the moxie to ask Marshall [Brickman] to write a musical about Frankie Valli and The Four Seasons. All I said was, "Hey, if we screw it up, we'll just have wasted our own time, but we'll have fun."

On finding passion for your work:

I think it's a little bit like anything else in life—you don't have to love everything about a project; if you can find something to love, you can write it. There's only one rule, it seems to me: If I drop a hammer, I don't need to look to see if it's hit the ground, the law of gravity takes care of that. In the same way, if there's a good story to tell and compelling characters to tell it, people will enjoy it. Call it the Law of Theatrical Gravity. When a good story smiles at you from across the room, passion follows. Finding that passion is the most rewarding measure of success. Thinking, "Maybe this is the sort of thing that could be successful," is not a good reason to write something. But if you burn to tell a particular story, if you have a real passion for it, then you'll never be wasting your time.

On dreaming of more real estate:

If I were asked for one Big Idea for Broadway, I would say, "It's the 21st century. Let's build a second and third tier of theatres over the Booth Theatre, over the Schoenfeld and the Jacobs and the Golden and the Shubert and the Broadhurst and the Majestic. Three tiers of new theatres—new spaces of several sizes that are up-to-date and technically fitted out, so that more work can be produced and more people can see it." Tony Kushner, Jeremy Harris, Lynn Nottage and Lin Miranda can write fifty more plays, but if there's not a theatre for them to appear in, we can't see them. Plays don't exist on the page; they live on stage, in front of an audience. The industry is bursting at the seams with new voices and visions, but we are starved for actual theaters to put them in. My wish would be for more theaters here in New York so that more voices could be heard, more actors and dancers and singers could be

seen, more ushers could usher, and more magic could be made. That's my fantasy about realty.

Lynne Meadow

**“DON'T LET ANYBODY TELL
YOU THAT YOU CAN'T DO IT.
YOU REALLY HAVE TO IGNORE
ALL THE REASONS NOT TO DO
IT AND FOLLOW YOUR HEART.”**

- LYNNE MEADOW, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Lynne Meadow has been challenging the status quo since she was the only female director admitted at Yale School of Drama to Yale's male-dominated directing department in the 1970s. Now a member of the Theater Hall of Fame, Lynne Meadow has been the Artistic Director of Manhattan Theatre Club, one of the city's most influential non-profit arts organizations, for over 40 years. In this time, she has produced or directed- and sometimes done both—for over 600 premieres in NYC and worldwide. Under her leadership, MTC has won every single theatrical award in the industry including 27 Tony Awards, 7 Pulitzers, 49 Obies, 40 Drama Desks, and the list goes on.

On women in the arts:

I didn't have a role model. An important part of my career, and one of the things about which I feel very proud, is that I helped to create a path as a role model for so many talented women who chose to direct and produce, and chose an area of the theatre which was very sparse when I started out in 1971. I had to start my own theatre because no one would hire a woman director at that time. There simply weren't any. When I was at the Yale School of Drama in 1970—in a three-year program—there was no other woman in their directing division in the school. There is extraordinary work being created by directors who are women now and I am thrilled that women are present in positions of power. It was not my intention to be a role model, but by exemplary action, by the very fact that I chose to be a director and to helm a theatre validates the idea that doors can open where they seemed shut tight for years and that artistic change can influence other areas of society as well. It makes me very proud to see, finally, the breadth and scope and excitement of the plays and musicals that are directed by women now. I once taught at Yale University and told my students, “Just because you're a woman doesn't mean you can't direct, and just because you're a man doesn't mean you should want to direct. It's a characterological issue, not a gender issue.”

On what's important in the (non-profit) business of show:

I'm wary of trends emerging where boards of directors feel that non-profit institutions or artistic institutions should be run by business people and not by artistic people. I think the heart of an artistic institution is the art. Any non-profit needs leadership that is practical and business savvy, but that position must not create the agenda and the priorities of an artistic institution. They must work with the artistic leader to find balance and financial practicality. But the budget is a statement of the mission

and if that is created by a purely practical sensibility, you will feel it in the work that is created. Every non-profit theatre needs a central artistic vision.

On the differences between commercial and non-profit theatre:

Our mission and our goal is not to make our shows financially successful. Our mission is to create new work for the theatre. At the end of the day, if you're producing in the commercial theatre your obligation is to create a financial success—that doesn't mean there isn't incredible success in our wonderful Broadway theatre, but their success is measured by, "Did the show recoup? Did the show make money?" Our measure of success in a not-for-profit setting uses a different metric system. A show at the Manhattan Theatre Club can have not generated the ticket sales we had hoped for but it can be considered successful in many other ways. A playwright is discovered who, two plays from now, is going to write a really successful play. Actors are discovered who are going to have major careers and we are going to be instrumental in helping those careers. There are a lot of other measurements of what constitutes success in a not-for-profit theatre and we have to make sure that the art stays at the center, not just the idea of business and survival.

On priorities in season selection:

One of them is to create a diverse season. The first thing on my mind is always quality and excellence. I'm looking for artists who have great talent. I'm looking for a variety of voices and subjects. I'm looking for writers who have a voice. I'm looking for work that, in some way, is going to speak to us now, something that I respond to and that hopefully other people will respond to. It takes a long time to do that. Sometimes I wish it were like an assembly line, where you could say, "I'll take that one, that one and that one," the way we look at cupcake at Magnolia

Bakery. But the process of producing involves identifying and determining the quality of the material, then assembling the best talents to bring that material to life and guiding the rehearsal and preview process to make the best show possible. We are there to serve artists and to introduce audiences to something new.

On starting your own company:

Get a lot of sleep before your first day because you won't sleep again. Don't let anybody tell you that you can't do it, that it's too hard, that you shouldn't, that it has been done, or that it isn't a prudent thing to do. You really have to ignore all the reasons not to do it and follow your heart. If you want to do it, you must go ahead. Every day you face the challenges, you try to look ahead and plan. Make a five-year plan of where you think you'd like to be, then throw that out because it probably won't turn out to be what you thought. I think you have to have the kind of determination, will, and unwillingness to fold in the face of a bad notice or financial challenges. I can't think of a day in over 40 years of being the Artistic Director of this theatre when there wasn't some problem to solve. And many days when there were many. The I Ching advises that "perseverance furthers."

David Stone

“ TRY TO FIND YOUR OWN PROJECT AND FIND A WAY TO GET IT ON. IT MAY NOT MAKE AS MUCH ECONOMIC SENSE AS BEING A SMALL PART OF A LARGE PRODUCING TEAM - AND YOU MAY NOT MAKE A LIVING DOING IT - BUT IT IS THE ONLY WAY YOU ARE GOING TO LEARN. YOU HAVE TO LEARN BY DOING. ”

- DAVID STONE, PRODUCER

David Stone knew early on that the theater was where he belonged. Right out of college, he took an apprenticeship with powerhouse producers, Barry and Fran Weissler. He began producing on his own with *Family Secrets* Off-Broadway and eventually *The Vagina Monologues* and *Fully Committed*, setting the stage for him to produce the global phenomenon *Wicked*, and other beloved musicals like Pulitzer Prize-winning *Next to Normal*, *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, *If/Then* and *War Paint*.

On what to do after a flop:

My first Broadway show got terrible reviews. The next morning, I got calls from a lot of friends in the industry. They all said, “Now you are a producer.” Jimmy Nederlander Sr. said, “It’s easy to have a hit. It’s easy to have a flop. The hardest thing to do is to have a hit after a flop. You have to get back up on your feet and do that.” Somehow knowing that producing a flop was the thing that made me “part of the club” was tremendously reassuring. I don’t love the word “failure,” because things can flop financially and still succeed in other ways. But, in a business where seven out of ten shows do not return their investment, it quickly becomes clear that everyone experiences this sort of thing and a flop doesn’t feel so lonely.

On running, not just opening, the show:

I have always been confused by how many people, even those within the industry, still ask me what I am working on. There are multiple productions of *Wicked* all around the world, and yet people wonder what I am doing with my days. *Wicked* still takes up an enormous part of every day. However, when I produce new shows (which I have to do, since only working on *Wicked* would quickly put me into a rut), I get to use parts of my brain that subsequently help the *Wicked* part of my brain. Left vs. Right. Operating vs. Production. It all interacts. There simply isn’t enough respect given to operating the show, but that is really the name of the game: running the show. For the investors, it is where the profit is. For the cast and crew and creatives, it is where the employment is. I feel an incredible amount of responsibility for all the people who work on *Wicked* week after week after week around the country and around the world. It is more glamorous to open shows, but you’ve got to pay just as much attention (if not more) to running them.

On marketing a long-running show:

It sounds vaguely Stalin-esque, but *Wicked* does have five-year plans, like they had in the Soviet Union in the 1930's. At all marketing meetings, we discuss the messages for this year versus the big idea for next year. We don't have a ten-year plan, as that might be getting ahead of ourselves. The world changes too quickly. But we have general ideas of the kinds of campaigns that we are going to implement for the next few years. I have had that strategy since about two or three years in, when I understood that we needed to think about more than just what was right in front of us.

On the state of the road:

The road is wildly successful right now. *The Lion King*, *Wicked* and now *Hamilton* are the cornerstones. They are consistent blockbusters on tour. The problem the road has is the "middle" shows. The very big shows put up numbers that were not even imaginable when *Wicked* started touring. The smaller shows also tour very well: *Next to Normal*, *Spelling Bee*, *Avenue Q*, *Fun Home*, *Dear Evan Hansen*, etc. The problem comes with the shows that are not the biggest brands, the ones in the middle. They do not sell like blockbusters and yet they cost much more than the small shows. The current economic structure of the touring business is not really built for those shows that straddle the middle. .

On why producing solo may be the best for young producers:

A lot of people think that the best way to start to produce is to be on a producing team of 60, 70, 80 people. The benefit there is that you can develop investors and get them into successful shows. Then, they will be loyal to you when you have your own show. The problem is that it only delays the point at which you produce your own show. When you are in

a room with that many people, you cannot learn anything substantial. Being billed with that many people does not put your name or reputation out there in any meaningful way. My advice is, as controversial as it may sound, try to find your own project and find a way to get it on. It may not make as much economic sense as being a small part of a large producing team—and you may not make a living doing it—but it is the only way you are going to learn. You have to learn by doing. You just cannot learn by going to one meeting every two months with dozens of people in a room where things are being presented that have already been decided.

On a concern regarding contemporary creative teams:

An older generation of writers/composers/lyricists would traditionally focus on one show at a time. In our current environment, that may not be practical, because you can work on a show and it might not get on and that does not make economic sense for the creators. I understand that. However, the scale has tipped too far in the other direction. There are people writing many, many shows concurrently. It is not good for the collaborative process. It is distracting to the work itself (and could be blamed for disappointing the creator's talent in general or diminishing the passion for a project in particular). And, it makes too much of our time about scheduling work rather than actually having the time to do the work.

Kenny Leon

“ I LIKE THE IDEA THAT THE AUDIENCE SEES THIS ONE-TIME EVENT AND THINKS, “WOW!” THEY WANT TO GO SEE A PLAY IN THEIR COMMUNITY, NOT JUST BROADWAY, AND THEY WANT TO TUNE-IN FOR THE NEXT ONE. ”

- KENNY LEON, DIRECTOR

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 /  @IAmKennyLeon

Kenny Leon was named Artistic Director of Atlanta’s Alliance Theater in 1988, and became one of the first African Americans to lead a regional theater in the world. After his tenure at The Alliance, he went on to co-found and serve as the Artistic Director of True Colors Theatre Company, promoting diversity and preservation of African American theatrical works. Leon has since directed dozens of projects for the stage and screen including: *A Raisin in the Sun* with Denzel Washington (twice on Broadway, once winning a Tony), *The Mountaintop*, *Radio Golf*, *Stick Fly*, NBC’s *The Wiz Live!*, and *Hairspray Live!*, as well as the Tupac musical, *Holler if Ya Hear Me*. His production of *American Son* on Broadway in 2018 was released as a film for streaming on Netflix, which he also directed.

On moving from regional theater to Broadway:

Being in a regional theater and serving as an artistic director trains you for Broadway because you see the entire picture. You understand the mind of producers. You understand where the money goes. You understand how to balance the budget. You understand how important the art itself is. You get to see everything. You know you're responsible for the costume department, the production department, and the technical director. You work with the development director, and you work with a board of directors. Running a regional theater is like running a small Broadway show. I simply understand Broadway better because of my time running a fifteen million dollar a year regional theater.

On what makes televised musicals unique and awesome:

You have Ariana Grande working with Kristin Chenoweth, which is beautiful. The audience sees that Ariana Grande is more than just a pop culture singing icon. I love all of these artists coming together and having the opportunity to grow their talent. I like the idea that the audience sees a one-time event and thinks, "Wow!" They want to go see a play in their community, not just Broadway, and they want to tune in for the next one. I like the fact that it's cross-generational, in terms of audience and also casting. We have a ten-year-old actor, a thirty-year-old, and a fifty or sixty or seventy-year-old. They all have followers on social media and they're all talented. All of them get the chance to merge their audiences and to broaden the minds of their audiences.

What the average person can do to promote diversity in the theater:

People could write to their local papers. Write to the *New York Times* or anywhere you can in order to say what you want to see on the stage.

Also, go support things that are on Broadway that you think are interesting and exciting, not just because it's a fun musical or because that story might be interesting. It's also good to take someone to a Broadway show who normally wouldn't see the show that you would go see.

On choosing projects:

I'm looking for the potential to change lives and to inspire people, which ultimately comes to the timeliness of it. Even when I look at a revival, I ask myself, "What does that say to an audience today?" When I did *A Raisin in the Sun* for the second time on Broadway, it was nothing at all like the first time. I never thought about the first time when I was working on it the second time. But I felt like the country needed that particular play and I wanted a big play to feel intimate. So I moved it closer to the audience, to make them feel included in it. I wanted to put black and white together, in subtle ways, so I did that. I'm *always* thinking about not only if I feel like I have to do a piece, but do I feel urgently possessed to present it?

Stacey Mindich

“ IT DIDN'T MATTER THAT IT
VENTURED INTO NEW AND BOLD
TERRITORY FOR A MUSICAL. IT DIDN'T
MATTER THAT THEY WERE 24, AND IT
DIDN'T MATTER THAT I DIDN'T KNOW
EXACTLY HOW IT WAS ALL GOING TO
HAPPEN. I KNEW THAT I WAS JUST
GOING TO DEDICATE MYSELF TO IT. ”

- STACEY MINDICH, PRODUCER

As lead producer of *Dear Evan Hansen*, Stacey Mindich helped nurture the show from a germ of an idea into the sensation it has become. As a result, she received the 2016 Robert Whitehead Award for Excellence in Commercial Producing, in addition to two Tony Awards and a Grammy. Born out of a desire to help develop both emerging artists and new works, Stacey pairs young artists with established directors whenever possible, which was the formula she used for *Dear Evan Hansen*. Stacey also produced *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, *The Bridges of Madison County*, *13* and *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, to name a few. Previously, she was a reporter for the *New York Times* and *Town & Country*.

On a love for musicals:

I love the way that somebody will break out into a song. Today, with the more realistic, authentic musicals, it's almost as if it gives voice to your deepest feelings. On *Dear Evan Hansen*, we get so many emails and tweets. One of the ones that I repeat constantly was a teenager who tweeted, "*Dear Evan Hansen* is the soundtrack to my life. It's a blanket on my heart." The music brings emotion to the script like nothing else.

On the similarities between Broadway producing and publishing:

I cannot believe how similar being a commercial producer is to being part of a magazine editorial staff. My job as the senior editor at *Town & Country*, which was the last job I had in journalism, was very much about being the leader of the team. It's about finding an idea. You need many, many ideas to make the magazine flourish. We're all interested in storytelling and what makes a good story. It's about taking one idea and finding the writer who has the chemistry with it to write it. Then, you need to pair that writer with an illustrator or a photographer to make that story come alive on the pages, going so far as to have the graphic designer create that look on the pages of the magazine. In the general sense, the editor of the magazine has to keep that magazine alive. It's exactly like what we talk about when we're developing audiences. It took me a while to get the lay of the land on Broadway, and certainly there are many, many differences, but I find that I got home more quickly here when I realized that my skillset was actually the same.

On being a woman in the industry:

I always want to have the sort of salty answer that people are craving, but I feel very fortunate in that I have not felt at a disadvantage for being a

woman. I felt welcomed by both male producers and female producers. I feel I have had some wonderful mentors, both female and male and young and old. I do see it in other parts of the industry—I'm very proud to have been one of the first board members of the Lilly awards, which recognizes female achievement in this industry and comes up with very innovative programs for women artists.

On mentoring:

We have a duty to teach the people coming into this industry how to do it. When I came in, it was my second career. I was 40 years old when I started producing, and I was looking for people to show me how it really works and that was actually quite hard to find. I have interns in this office who are young and they're not ready to produce, but they're ready to learn the ropes. Because of the people who did take the time to show me the ropes, and I have to mention my dear friend Margo Lion who just passed away, I feel committed to the idea of mentoring others as a way to give back. I like to surround myself with young people in the office and to include them in meetings and hear their thoughts and ideas – and I hope to do more of that at the theater when we open again.

On *Dear Evan Hansen*:

I asked Benj Pasek and Justin Paul what they really wanted to write, because at that moment they were doing shows that weren't who they were. They told me a story that is not what *Dear Evan Hansen* is now, but there was a germ of it in that story. It was a real-life experience that Benj had in high school. Beyond the experience, it was the feeling he was left with about his generation. They said that's what they wanted to be their next musical or that it would be a musical that they would absolutely love to write. Benj and Justin relaying that it was what they wanted to do made me want to do it. It didn't matter that it ventured into

new and bold territory for a musical, that the writers were 24, or that I didn't know exactly how it was all going to happen. I knew that I was going to dedicate myself to it. Strangely enough, over the years it has unbelievably begun to speak to me and my life, even though I never thought that it would.

Kathleen Marshall

“ NO MATTER ALL THE BELLS
AND WHISTLES YOU HAVE OR THE
FABULOUS MUSIC AND
CHOREOGRAPHY OR A FLAT OUT
SPECTACULAR PRODUCTION, PEOPLE
RESPOND MORE TO STORIES
AND TO HUMAN CONNECTION. ”

- KATHLEEN MARSHALL,
DIRECTOR/CHOREOGRAPHER

At the start of her career, Kathleen Marshall was working with her brother, choreographer Rob Marshall, on shows like *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, *Damn Yankees*, *Victor/Victoria*, and others. But the true extent of her abilities became apparent as she served as artistic director of Encores! at City Center from 1996 to 2000, and with Broadway productions of *The Pajama Game*, *Grease*, *Anything Goes*, *Nice Work If You Can Get It*, and more. Kathleen is a nine-time Tony Award nominee, and three-time winner.

On the director's role:

As a director, your job is to get the most creative people you can in a room, from the writing team to the design team to the musical team to the cast. You try to get them all on the same page and telling the same story. You can't assume anything and your job is to state the obvious. Does everyone know that we're doing a comedy? What is the style of this piece? What is the story we're telling? How are we going to tell this story? We lead, inspire, and shepherd. We also receive and filter all ideas so that we're all telling the same story in the same style.

On grounding dance in story:

For me, it's always about going into the story of the characters. Who are they, why would they dance, and how would they dance? I love research, so if it's a period show like *Nice Work If You Can Get It*, I research all kinds of dance from that time. I found some old footage of Josephine Baker that inspired me. My process is about doing research, but also figuring out the characters. I find that if I'm having trouble finding the steps and the actual vocabulary, it's because I don't know why they're dancing.

On the universals of story:

I mentor with a group called the Wendy Wasserstein Project, which, through TDF, brings high school students to see Broadway musicals and plays. They're all sixteen and seventeen-year-old kids from Queens, Brooklyn, and other areas. Some of them have never seen a show before, and you know what they all respond to? Sure, they all love the spectacle, and they love great music, but they also love plot, story, and characters. No matter all the bells and whistles you have or the fabulous music and

choreography or a flat-out spectacular production, people respond more to stories and to human connection.

On learning by watching:

To quote a show that everybody knows a bit about, you want “to be in the room where it happens.” Choreography is an apprenticeship art. You want to get in the room and watch other people do it. Do your own work and your own shows as much as you can, but watch other people. I was very lucky being the assistant choreographer to my brother [Rob Marshall] and being a choreographer before I became a director. I got to watch people like Hal Prince, Jack O’Brien, Jerry Zaks, and Susan Schulman at work. I got to see how they run auditions, how they talk to writers, how they talk to designers, how they run a tech, how they run a production meeting, and how they give notes. It’s informative to the ways that you want to work and the ways that you don’t want to work.

Eva Price

“ YOU CAN'T MAKE A
LIVING, BUT YOU CAN MAKE
A KILLING, AND THAT'S
ALL YOU GOTTA WORRY
ABOUT. ”

- EVA PRICE, PRODUCER



@evarprice



@evaprice

Before her success as one of the youngest lead producers on Broadway, Eva Price helped a myriad of works on their way to success as she produced, managed and booked Off-Broadway shows in theaters around the country. In 2019, Eva Price produced the Broadway revival of *Oklahoma!*, earning a Drama Desk nomination, a Drama League nomination, an Outer Critics Circle Award, and the Tony Award for Best Revival of a Musical. She is one of the Lead Producers on the Alanis Morissette musical, *Jagged Little Pill* and has a host of co-producer credits on her resume including *Dear Evan Hansen*, *Tina*, *Angels in America*, *On Your Feet* and many more.

On failure:

My first show, *Joy*, went terribly. It did, at least, last six weeks and not the four that I think it probably should have lasted. However, it was all okay because if I had succeeded my first time out, I don't think I would have learned nearly enough. The best thing about starting a career or something new that's challenging is failing first and picking yourself up. Keep going and learn from those mistakes.

On learning from those mistakes:

I instinctively felt that I was good at producing, even though, practically, I was not because I wasn't succeeding. The things that I thought, the decisions I made, and the impulses that I had, I thought, were good at the time. I remember so clearly: there was free Wi-Fi at the Cosi up on 49th. I would put my laptop in my backpack every day, go up to that Cosi, and I'd send emails, and do extensive research. I even started meeting people for coffee dates, and eventually, I figured out that you need to raise money for projects, you need to option shows, and you need to create a revenue stream for your producing office that was more than just waiting for royalties to come in. By choice or by mistake, whatever we want to call it, I taught myself how to be a producer while also building my general management business.

On believing in and pitching your show:

I was truly passionate, as well as emotionally and authentically true in my pitch. I believe this every time I put on a show. Maybe things change six months later, but I truly believe at that moment that a show deserves a life. I believe that the economic strategy of the show makes sense for investor return. I believe that the artists involved in the show have something important to say and deserve the platform of Broadway or

off-Broadway or a tour. I think that, ultimately, my authenticity is what pulled me along the way.

On the producer's role:

The producer's responsibility is to do everything he or she can do to create the best outcome for that show, and for that show's investors. That would include everything relating to its artistic success, its business success, and the legacy that the show needs to leave for itself. No stone unturned, no email unreturned, no phone calls ignored. It's beginning your day and ending your day knowing you did everything you can to make that show successful.

On being a producer *today*:

I think the most important skill a producer has to have is in understanding the world we are in. If you're producing a show or you're behaving in a way that is not cognizant of the world around you, then you're failing. You're failing your show, you're failing the audience, you're failing your artists, and you're failing your investors. That means the topic has to resonate and be relevant to the world we're in right now. There has to be a reason for it. You also have to exist *in light* of the times, and that means you must be smart about how you market the show. Be smart about the message you use to talk about it and the mechanisms in which you sell your show: from how you price it, to what sort of platforms your ticketing is on, to how you utilize social media in the digital sphere to be relevant. I think people who ignore the time and place that they're living in while producing is so foolish. We're so connected. It's an entertainment option in the list of 3,064 entertainment options that Americans have each day, from Netflix to Quibbi to YouTube to the Apple Watch; there's just so much to consume. If you're not going to be cognizant

about the world you're in, in both the art itself and the narrative you're creating to sell your art, go home.

On making a living, not a killing:

When I left the news business, I told my parents on Thanksgiving that I was going to go and become a Broadway producer. My mother said, "I don't understand. How will you make money?" I said, "You can't make a living, but you can make a killing, and that's all you gotta worry about." Ten years later, I have not figured out how to make a killing, but I have figured out how to make a living, which is actually fun. Apparently, you can live in New York by just being normal, and I'm fine with that and grateful for that. I looked at Broadway as a place I would always work—a community that I would be a part of and find ways to produce for. I also knew that there was a "beyond Broadway" that was fruitful and creating great work, which was a home for me also.

On the struggles of off-Broadway:

My opinion of off-Broadway is that it has become the most exciting breeding ground for new artists. I'm not going to forget that, and I'm not going to turn my back on the off-Broadway space just because it's hard to recoup. I want to be doing exciting work. I want to be supporting new artists and telling new, different stories. I can't keep an arm's length approach to it; I have to be there. I don't have to be there *every* season, and I don't have to be there all the time, but I have to be there. I have to support it, and I have to like it. Off-Broadway is how every producer learns how to be a producer, unless they get lucky, right? If you're going to start off being a producer and you're likely going to fail anyway, I say fail where the stakes are lower.

Kwame Kwei-Armah

“ INVARIABLY, THE POLITICAL
POINT THAT I WISH TO MAKE WILL
PROBABLY BE NEGATED
THROUGHOUT THE PLAY, BECAUSE
IT'S NOT ABOUT HAVING A
SOAPBOX. ”

- KWAME KWEI-ARMAH, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR/
PLAYWRIGHT/ ACTOR/ DIRECTOR

 @k_kweiarimah

 @kwamekweiarimah

Despite pleas from his mother to become a lawyer, Kwame Kwei-Armah began his acting career in London theatres. With a lack of steady work in the types of stories he wanted to tell, Kwei-Armah was prompted to write *The Bitter Herb* in 1998, winning him instant acclaim, a Peggy Ramsay Award, and a reputation for infusing character-driven stories with pointed political commentary. He'd go on to write *Blues Brother*, *Soul Sister*, and *Elmina's Kitchen*, which was on the shortlist for the 2004 Laurence Olivier Awards for Best New Play. His televised version of *Elmina's Kitchen* was nominated for a BAFTA in 2005; he also wrote and directed *One Love: The Bob Marley Musical* and directed Kemp Powers' *One Night in Miami*. He was artistic director of Baltimore Centre Stage Theatre from 2011 through 2018, before he became the Artistic Director at the Young Vic in London.

On transitioning from acting to writing:

There was a summer where many of my friends were all unemployed. It was a summer where the BBC were only doing Jane Austens and period dramas. At that time, they didn't integrate them, which meant that none of us could work in TV or theatre. So, we would meet every week complaining—but I hate complaining. I decided at that point that I would start to write. I would write to tell the stories that we were saying were not being included in theatre and TV. I would write for the actors that I enjoyed looking at, some of which were actors of color. Then, I didn't *start* writing a play until 1998, two years later. A director that I worked with, Andy Haigh, asked me what I was doing, and I told him that I wanted to start writing. Andy told me that if I wrote a play for the theatre, he would commission it. I wrote my first play, *A Bitter Herb*, which got produced at the Bristol Old Vic and went on to win a couple of awards. One of those was the Peggy Ramsay Award, which included compensation of about \$50,000. I thought, "I must be a writer if I'm winning 50K!" That was the beginning of my transition from acting to writing.

On seeing potential in writing:

What Andy Haigh saw was that I had something to say and potentially had a voice. I remember Andy saying at the time that he would much rather get a very badly structured play that has voice and energy than a well-structured play that said nothing. The structure you can work, the voice you cannot create. As I developed into an artistic director, I kept that with me. I would rather read a script with a voice.

On art as service:

I'm the eldest son of economic migrants. What that means is that I was born into a Britain that was much colder—racially, socially, and in-class

terms—than it is now. Life was relatively hard. It was less hard for me than it was for my parents. I hope that for my children it is less hard. There were many issues that we had to deal with and so, in an odd way, I discovered at quite a young age that art was my weapon. My mother wanted me to be a lawyer that could serve our community. Once I discovered art was my way of doing that, I could look my mother in the eye and say, “Look, I know I’m acting, but I’m also serving.” Serving through art has been right at my core from a very young age.

On process and a delicate political hand:

My process has always been the same. An idea lands either through dreamscape or through media-scape. I read something, I hear something, and I stop to think, “What does it mean? Why am I fascinated by that story, and how might I encapsulate it within four or five characters? What’s the theme? What’s the political point I wish to make with this?” I’m a political playwright, so invariably that’s what happens. I think, “Is there something politically I want to say, and how can I humanize that political theory?” If I don’t wish to humanize it, I’ll write an article for the Guardian. If I want to make it into something that people sit and muse with for two hours and see it manifest into human flesh, then I need to find the human story. I go about finding the character that might best inhabit this theme or this political point that I wish to make. That’s my process. I attempt to bury my political point as deeply as I can in the story. Invariably, the political point that I wish to make will probably be negated throughout the play, because it’s not about having a soapbox. Invariably it will be negated and be deeply buried, much like theme. However, if I get it right, the audience will use their intelligence to hook and find that theme. Then the applause at the end should simply be the beginning of the debate about the theme that I wish to talk about.

On being an artistic director:

One of the big things I've learnt is that it looks easy on the outside, but is bloody hard on the inside. Don't do this job because you want someone to say, "Well done." There will always be someone saying, "You messed up," and you just have to know that that is part of the gig.

On ways to bring equality to theatre:

I think we still need to look at the structural inequalities that allow boards to think there isn't a qualified person of color out there to lead their theatres. Theatre knows we need to address this. We want to live in a more equitable environment than the numbers currently show. Further, let's look at the structural inequality of the gender imbalance. Roughly 70% of tickets to plays are bought by women, and less than 30% of plays on our stages are directed by women. As an artistic director or anyone in the theatre, we know that it's wrong and that we need to do something about it. If you're an artistic director, seek gender balance in your season. If we acknowledge that something is wrong and then figure out how we're able to influence our sphere, it becomes easier to say, "I can do that." In terms of people of color, we look at the structural inequality and say, "How many directors of color get to direct plays that are not linked to their cultural background?" Then when we're looking at the next big classic that's happening at my theatre, I think, "Maybe I need to help the infrastructure by making sure that there's a director of color." Maybe that director of color says, "Actually, my sound person that I've been working with for years is someone of color," and they bring them in. There were ways in which we can look at our immediate environment and think, "How do I diversify it? How do I look at the structural inequalities? How do I identify those?" Then, we know what to do. I arrived at Baltimore Centre Stage and there wasn't much diversity, but I left Baltimore with 40% of the senior managers being people of color. I'm proud we just did it.

Pam MacKinnon

“ IT ALL EVENTUALLY WINDS UP
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WHEN A SHOW COMPLETES ITS
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- PAM MACKINNON, DIRECTOR

 @pammac900

 @pammackinnon

As a twenty-three-year-old Ph.D candidate studying political science at UC-San Diego, Pam MacKinnon realized her true passion lay in theatre. She began directing in parking lots and assisted Anne Bogart and Des McAnuff in rapid succession. Moving to NYC after putting up *The Who's Tommy* in Germany, she worked downtown on new plays with the company Clubbed Thumb and regionally, before directing off-Broadway and eventually on Broadway. She won the Tony and Drama Desk Awards for Best Direction for Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, a season after being nominated for her direction of Bruce Norris' *Clybourne Park*. Other Broadway credits include *A Delicate Balance*, *The Heidi Chronicles*, *Amélie- A New Musical*, *China Doll*, and *The Parisian Woman*. She recently served a three-year term as SDC Board President and is now the Artistic Director of the American Conservatory Theater (A.C.T.) in San Francisco. She prefers play that ask big questions to ones that answer them.

On reading the audience during previews:

You can feel whether that collective group is going on a ride. Are the heads facing forward? This is a pressure cooker moment, and if people are getting distracted, heads are moving, programs are getting dropped, or it's "rustle, rustle" and people are digging into their purses, there's a problem. They're not paying attention. Certainly, it's not about "Do they leap to their feet?" Still, you can feel whether they're engaged, whether they're excited. Obviously, not all plays are "leap to your feet" kind of plays, as they're not constructed that way. It's a big public moment, early previews. They make you nervous; you're sharing something that still needs work and you *are* working on it, but you have to try to be relaxed enough to take in the collective feeling, and not so much of the individual whispering.

On Broadway's biggest (and cruelest) surprise:

It is cutthroat that stuff can close. Stuff that is fantastic doesn't necessarily find its audience. I've had some very bittersweet moments. *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* closed early. We did not find her audience. It was beautiful, and then a couple of years later, I did a wonderful revival of *The Heidi Chronicles*. People didn't come. The company was *so* amazing and Lizzie [Elizabeth] Moss as Heidi was so relevant. Vulnerable and strong. So that's the shocker...

I'm also very fortunate that my career calendar is kind of booked, so people expect me in a couple months, or sometimes the next day. We closed *A Delicate Balance* on my first day of tech of *The Heidi Chronicles* across the street. I have a great support system, but then another room expects me. Other producers and another group of actors expect me a day or a month later. That's also an incredibly rarefied, fortunate position to be in. Even if it does work out, it eventually closes too. It all

eventually winds up in the dumpster. It's great when a show completes its run and it's great when it exceeds expectations, but it's eventually going to disappear.

On the state of female directors on Broadway:

There are so many great women directors out there right now. There are not that many working consistently on Broadway. I have to think there will be, but it is a crazy statistic. There are certainly more celebrated women working on Broadway (meaning getting awards), but the percentage actually hasn't shifted at all since they've been keeping records. About 17% of the plays directed on Broadway are directed by women. That has been true since the early eighties. There is no change to it. It's 17%, it's not even, "Oh, now it's 22." It's shocking.

On the importance of relationships in show business:

It's a business like any other business. You make relationships, and certainly my relationship with Edward Albee, for instance, opened a lot of doors for me. I did a production of a play of his for a small theater in Philadelphia, which we rehearsed in New York. He came in my rehearsal hall. He liked what he saw. We got to know each other a little bit. Eventually, he gave me a new play at a regional theatre, and it was a 17-year relationship before he died last year. I had someone like that. I had someone who was both in his third chapter or third act of his career and being produced widely. It was very fortunate, unusually fortunate for a young director (man or woman) to have someone. The first time I worked in Chicago was on an Albee play because David Petrarca got a movie, and an Albee play that he was going to direct needed a director all of a sudden. So those kinds of writer-director relationships are hugely important. It's not about "This writer will take me to Broadway," but it's "This writer, we clicked for whatever reason. Let's continue what this

relationship is and let's see where we go." You have your people and sometimes those people wind up taking you to interesting places, and you take them to interesting places.

Sergio Trujillo

“ I MAY FALL IN LOVE WITH
DIFFERENT SECTIONS OF A NUMBER,
BUT IF THEY'RE NOT WORKING OR
THEY AREN'T TELLING THE STORY
OR MOVING THE PLOT ALONG, I'M
THE FIRST ONE TO CUT IT. ”

- SERGIO TRUJILLO,
DIRECTOR/ CHOREOGRAPHER

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Sergio Trujillo has made a huge impact on Broadway, setting a new standard for excellence with each new project he takes on. A true natural talent, Trujillo auditioned for, and booked, his first dance show without ever having taken a dance class in his life. From *Jerome Robbins' Broadway* and *Guys and Dolls*, to *Victor/Victoria*, and *Fosse*, his career as a dancer gave him the opportunity to learn from some of the best choreographers in the business. Sergio made his choreographic debut with *All Shook Up*, quickly parlaying that success to the hit *Jersey Boys*. He lent his explosive and intricate style of choreography to *On Your Feet!*, *The Addams Family*, *Memphis*, *Summer*, *Hands on a Hardbody*, and *Ain't Too Proud*, which won him a Tony Award.

On changing paths and knowing when to be a big fish in a small pond:

You have to have a really clear vision and path, so I knew that when I did *Fosse*, that was going to be my last show. I had made a decision that I wanted to choreograph. I knew that being a choreographer in New York City was extremely competitive. Having seen that Jerry Mitchell, Rob Marshall, Rob Ashford, and Katherine Marshall were all competing, I thought to myself, “Oh my God, I can’t compete with you; I just got here!” I realized that I was going to either stay in New York and try to compete with people that had been going at it for fifteen years, or I was going to figure out how to be a big fish in a small pond.” I decided to choreograph in Toronto, Canada.

On choreographing:

For me, it’s not about imposing how I dance, how Sergio moves, but rather figuring out what is the language of *Hands on a Hardbody*? What is the language of that show? What is the language of *Memphis*? What is the language of *Jersey Boys*? That’s the first thing. No matter how many shows I have done, I’m always a nervous wreck until I get into the rehearsal room to begin preproduction and start to dance. The minute I walk into that room and begin, even if I spend two hours just sitting there moving a little bit with a couple of the dancers, that’s where the process begins to germinate for me. It’s not always me dancing around. I have the script, and I figure out what section I’m choreographing. I have a blueprint for each of the numbers, and I’m very pragmatic and organized about it. I generally block the numbers out so that when I walk into the room, I have a blueprint and then I can play.

On self-diagnosing choreography:

I may fall in love with different sections of a number, but if they're not working or they aren't telling the story or moving the plot along, I'm the first one to cut it. So, again, if I'm looking at a piece of dance and we haven't learned anything or elevated the storytelling, then I have to look at it again. The audience will inform you of that. It isn't about how they applaud; it's how does it help the narrative? Does it help carry the plot along? Do we learn anything as well as letting the audience have joy? Do we liberate? Do we transport them to a different place? I have to look at the whole piece, not at just each number, but the piece as a whole and where we are losing the audience.

On finding your niche as a director/choreographer:

Fosse, Bennett and some of the contemporary ones right now like Casey Nicholaw and Jerry Mitchell have gotten something special, which is that they understand what kind of material they are good at. They've honed in on the tone of the shows and the kinds of stories that they know they can tell. Fosse knew that if he could take stories like *Pippin*, dark stories, but figure out a concept and add his trademark, they would all be "Fosse." Tonally, they're all the same. Susan Stroman knows how to do that as well. She knows the kind of stories that she can tell. It's understanding that, for me, I want to take stories where dance is a big character and a big driving force.

Lisa Kron

“ THERE CAN BE RIGOR IN
COLLABORATION. YOU CAN BE KIND AND
BE IN A HUMANE RELATIONSHIP WITH
SOMEONE ELSE, AND ALSO BE RIGOROUS.
I THINK YOU LEARN TO SIT WITH
DISAGREEMENT AND NOT JUST HOW TO
GET PAST IT, BUT TO PUSH
THROUGH IT. ”

- LISA KRON , PLAYWRIGHT/ACTRESS

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With a spirit that can't be crushed and fearless honesty apparent in her work, Lisa Kron is truly a force to be reckoned with. After facing rejection and critics early in her career, Lisa found her strengths in writing with two remarkable pieces of autobiography (*2.5 Minute Ride* and *Well*). Her adaptation of Alison Bechdel's graphic memoir, *Fun Home*, won her two Tony awards, for book and lyrics. Lisa is also an accomplished actress (she was performing at the Public while *Fun Home* was having its premiere... at the Public), as well as a founding member of the wonderfully satirical collaborative theater company, "The Five Lesbian Brothers". Lisa is also a Kleban Prize winner and has taught at both Yale and NYU.

On taking risks:

In high school, I started to get the feeling that I could get to the end of my life and realize that I didn't live my life because I was afraid, and I would be horrified. So I made a rule for myself that if a door opened, I needed to step through it, even if I was scared, which ended up taking me to a lot of different places.

On the most important relationship in the theater:

I often ask my students what their primary relationship within the theater is or will be. They often talk about artistic directors, as that's who they're trying to forge a relationship with. My response is that their primary relationship should be with an audience. The artistic director is only the guy you've gotta get through, sometimes the woman you've gotta get through, to get to that audience.

On rigorous collaboration:

All great collaborations are rigorous. The very best are also humane and kind. The best collaborators know how to keep pushing for their vision while staying open to the idea that their collaborators may have a better idea—or maybe, nobody has the right idea yet and it's something you'll figure out together. The best collaborators try things out, even things they don't understand. To do this work you have to learn to tolerate discomfort. You have to learn to sit in disagreement and be able to handle not knowing the answer—to not just get past it, but to work through it.

On how white male playwrights are valued against others:

Every time somebody chooses a play, they're making a leap of faith. Every single time. The unconscious assumptions underlying their decision making have led artistic directors to look at white male playwrights,

and think, “This might be interesting, I’m going to give that guy a chance,” but with women and people of color they think, “I don’t know... We should probably wait and see on this one.” Thus, white male playwrights are lifted based on their potential, while women and people of color are allowed in based on their accomplishments.

Rebecca Taichman

“ DOES THIS
MOVE ME
DEEPLY? ”

- REBECCA TAICHMAN, DIRECTOR

www.rebeccataichman.com

Rebecca Taichman's passion for her craft brought her from the Yale School of Drama to rave reviews at The Shakespeare Theatre in D.C., where she directed *Taming of the Shrew*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *Cymbeline*, among others. Taichman earned the distinction of being the first person to direct a Paula Vogel play on Broadway when *Indecent* made the leap from Off-Broadway to the Cort Theatre, and won her the 2017 Tony Award for Best Direction of a Play in the process. Other credits include *Time and the Conways*, *School Girls or The Mean African Girls Play*, and works at every major regional theater in the country.

On breaking into the business:

It's a tough industry. When I started out, there were few women directors getting jobs. I knew it would be a struggle, and that I would need to be strategic ...and relentless. I remember feeling that there was a locked gate, and I couldn't seem to find the key. For a long time, I walked around with a giant portfolio and would introduce myself to artistic directors through those photos. Finally, finally, finally - someone took a leap of faith on me, then another, then another...

A lot of young directors now ask me how to break in. If you can't imagine yourself doing anything else – just do it, don't give up. Temp if you have to (*I did a lot of that*), waitress if you have to (*that too*), live on friends' couches (*yep*), make your own opportunities (*hell yes*), dream big beautiful dreams (*oh yes*), believe in yourself (*the most important, and often hardest, part*).

On what makes a show worth directing:

I ask myself: does this story or language or idea move me? What makes a piece of theater great or full of potential is hard to define and varies from person to person. I don't think there is any one single right way to tell a story. I trust my instinct. If I'm moved, I believe I will be able to release the story such that it moves an audience. Ultimately that's the goal: to invite empathy, open hearts, inspire, make people laugh, cry, lose themselves, remember themselves... Hopefully the experience leaves behind a meaningful imprint.

On what she looks for in the audition room:

Same thing really: I want to be moved. If an actor's read of a script moves me, I get super charged and often work with that person in the audition. I want to know that we can communicate well, that they feel

safe with me, that we can create together. Usually it helps to see someone twice. When it clicks, ideas start flooding in and I can start to really see or feel the piece. It's a slow process, and a meticulous one.

I think auditions can be tiny acts of violence if we're not very careful. I do my best to make the experience safe and the atmosphere generous.

On gender parity in the theatre:

You can't deny numbers. The facts tell a clear story. There's inequity and it's extreme. The theater industry is far too homogenous, and it's way past time for change. There's extreme gender, and racial inequality. We have to shift the balance. When I walked off the stage at the Tony Awards and realized I was the sixth woman ever to win, I was of course personally gratified but also rocked by the paucity of women directors getting those large Broadway shows. A woman of color has never won that award. That's just plain WRONG.

On advice for the next generation of writers:

I would say: write, write, write! I find often the greatest art is the most honest and vulnerable, or real. I don't mean that a writer should write only about themselves. I'm suggesting that trying to be "cool" or "clever" usually yields less interesting or exciting work than striving to ask the big questions or tell the deepest truths.

John Weidman

“DON'T FEEL CONSTRAINED BY
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BASES YOU HAVE TO TOUCH OR
BEATS YOU HAVE TO HIT AT
CERTAIN MOMENTS IN ORDER TO
DELIVER WHAT PEOPLE WILL
RECOGNIZE AND EXPERIENCE AS
SATISFYING.”

- JOHN WEIDMAN , LIBRETTIST

John Weidman was beginning his career writing books for musicals while simultaneously pursuing a law degree (!) at Yale (!!). In 1976, rather than take a job as a corporate lawyer, John collaborated with Stephen Sondheim on the book for Hal Prince's *Pacific Overtures*. In the years that followed, he joined forces with Sondheim for two more musicals, including the controversial *Assassins*. He wrote the book for *Big, Contact* and is a three-time Tony nominee. In addition to his work in the theater, he has won more than a dozen Daytime Emmy Awards for Outstanding Writing for his work on Sesame Street. From 1999 to 2009, he served as President of the Dramatists Guild of America.

On being the rookie in the room with legends:

I mostly stood up for myself by *not* standing up for myself. I don't mean that I backed off things that I felt were right that were going wrong, but I had enormous confidence in Hal and Steve's experience and their sense of stagecraft. *Pacific Overtures* started with Hal—as producer and director—at the center of the collaboration. When Steve and I wrote *Assassins* later on, the two of us went into a room and didn't talk to anybody until we had a finished piece of work. But *Pacific Overtures* was created differently. I did occasionally feel like we were playing a little fast and loose with history. That we were allowing ourselves to be inaccurate when it was convenient with the facts of what actually happened. I would raise that from time to time, but I remember Hal saying, "We're not writing a history book, we're doing a musical." Because I'd studied Japanese history in college, I came to the show with a kind of baggage none of the other guys did. Still, there was never a moment where I thought: "I know what's right, they're wrong. How do I stand up to these two giants?" I was a kid. They were the kings of Broadway. But I can't imagine two better collaborators.

On whether every idea can be made into a musical:

Having written *Assassins*, my first answer would be yes. Although if you pick an idea that's outside the box, you should be prepared for the consequences. When *Assassins* opened at Playwrights Horizons, most people hated it. Now the reviews all tend to be positive, but the first time around a lot of critics and a large segment of the audience rejected the piece because they felt there was something inherently frivolous about treating material that serious in musical theater, as if the fact that *Assassins* was a musical meant that we weren't taking the subject matter seriously. To me, what musical theater provides is a larger bag of tools for the work that any playwright does. So, no, I don't think there's anything that's

off-limits. That said, people do have a certain set of expectations of what a musical is going to deliver and you should be conscious of that when you decide that you're going to devote the next five years of your life to a show.

On form, function, and not always following the rules:

I don't recommend that people go to Yale Law School as a first step in creating a career in musical theater. That said, law school was helpful for me because it gave me a particular way of thinking about things. A way of seeing things from different points of view, different perspectives. Whatever I had absorbed from seeing dozens of musicals was churning around someplace in my head and that definitely had an impact on the way in which I put things down on paper. Still, I didn't approach *Pacific Overtures*, either the straight play or the musical, with any kind of BMI workshop rules about where the "I want" song goes and what the opening number is supposed to accomplish. It was just: Let's see what feels like the most effective way to get from A to B to C to D. To tell people what they need to know when they need to know it, to try to hang on to them as the story progresses. I don't mean that conventional rules aren't valuable, but *Assassins* is an interesting case in point because it's a show where form really does follow content. The structure of the show is what it is, a structure which doesn't feel like the structure of any other musical, because the shape of the piece was driven entirely by what we were writing about.

On the writing process:

Anxiety tends to inform almost all aspects of my life, so I try and control it as much as possible when I'm writing. That requires that I know where I'm going to end up when I start. Since I'm a librettist, not a playwright, I work collaboratively as opposed to sitting down in a room by myself.

And I believe collaborators—book writers, composers, and lyricists—should get together and talk until they’ve basically exhausted each other, until they really feel like they’re all on the same page and they all understand that they’re going to write the same show. Then there’s a point where it’s embarrassing that you’re still talking about writing instead of writing and everybody has to go off and do their part. I find that soothing, because now I know we’re in the same world doing the same thing. It will evolve, it will change—it’s not paint by numbers. Things can change dramatically as you work on them, but I like to have that sense of shared shape and purpose at the beginning.

On dealing with failure:

Visiting my therapist is definitely part of the process. It’s difficult. If you’ve written something that you’re really invested in and you’re really satisfied with where you’ve come out, then a negative reception can be bruising, but you’ve still got the satisfaction of the thing you created. If you’ve written something you weren’t that invested in (you were doing it for reasons other than a pure authorial reason), then you’re not left with much except unhappiness. The night *Assassins* opened at Playwrights Horizons, a bunch of us went out to have drinks afterwards. At a certain point, somebody wanted to go get a copy of *The Times* and—this is probably the healthiest thing I’ve ever said—I said “Let’s let tonight be a satisfying celebration of what we all just created, and we’ll look at *The Times* in the morning.” Then I went home, got a good night’s sleep, and woke up.

So much time and so much effort goes into creating these things, and you’re so exposed. Maybe novelists feel the same way, but we have audiences of 1,400 people come in. If they don’t laugh at a joke, if they’re shuffling their playbills, or if a bunch of people don’t come back after intermission, that’s hard. Rejection is hard.

Joe Iconis

“THE WORLD IS CHANGING,
AND THERE'S NEW WAYS OF
DOING THINGS. THERE WILL
ONLY EVER BE NEW WAYS OF
DOING THINGS.”

- JOE ICONIS, COMPOSER/ WRITER

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Joe Iconis is one of the most stylistically distinct writers of the contemporary musical theatre world and one of the first writers to harness the power of social media to fuel his success. His offbeat works have enjoyed unprecedented viral buzz and commercial success, with a growing, dedicated base of fans the world over. After his musical *Be More Chill* premiered at Two River Theatre in New Jersey, the music and specifically the song entitled “Michael in the Bathroom” went viral and has now been streamed over 500 million times. The social media hunger for the musical led to a sold out Off-Broadway production which led to a subsequent Broadway production only a few months later. His unique style can be seen in his other work including *The Black Suits*, *Love In Hate Nation*, *Bloodsong of Love: The Rock N’ Roll Spaghetti* and *Broadway Bounty Hunter*.

On making your own opportunities:

I did not fully grasp how long it takes for musicals to get on a stage, even musicals that everyone was excited about. My first year out of school, I was in development with *Black Suits* when I realized that the timeline was going to be more protracted than I initially anticipated. I immediately felt like I wanted to do live concerts because, in addition to the material I wrote for *Black Suits*, I was writing standalone songs that were theatre songs, but I knew they were contained. I had so many of those songs and I wanted to do them. I wanted to be in musical theatre because I wanted to *do* musicals. So, we did the show and very soon out of school I started doing these concerts, which then became the things that introduced my work to a much larger number of people. That was the thing that allowed me to continue on. It wasn't like I had one musical, it fizzled out, and that was that. I had a whole other body of work, which then led to everything else that I've done since.

On concerts as their own medium:

When I first started doing concerts, there wasn't a huge musical theatre concert scene. Certainly, writers had done a night of their work, but the ones that I had seen always felt more like a recital. I always wanted to do something different, something that could be a live experience that isn't just a song resume or an audition. I wanted someone to be able to go there and have an actual experience. I want to put on a good show, I want it to feel like itself, and I want it to be specific. The whole "Iconis family" thing is sort of born out of that, about it being an event and performance that is, in and of itself, a fully satisfying evening. It's not a taste of something else or teaser or something—it's its own thing.

On process:

My process for writing standalone songs is different than when I'm writing a book for a musical or even a song in a musical. I tend to think a lot before I ever put pen to paper; I obsess over things. On any musical that I've done, even if it's something that's adapted from source material, it usually intersects with ideas that I've been fixating on for a really long time. With something like *Be More Chill*, that was a book that my agent at the time gave me to read, but I had already been excited about doing something that was more of a naturalistic story. I took a huge tonal shift at a certain point, with a sci-fi/horror thing. I had been wanting to explore some heavy issues in a light way. I had been wanting to write a proper musical comedy. I'd been very obsessed with '70s and '80s horror film scores. All of these ideas had been floating around and then they congealed. I'm also a big outliner; when I start a project, I outline fairly explicitly. It's a lot of thinking and brainstorming, with other people and with myself. There's so much that goes into it before I ever actually start to write anything, that by the time I really get in there to write, I tend to write pretty quickly or it'll come in bursts because I feel like I've been writing this thing in my head for a month or a year or six years. When it's a fine time to finally write it, I have all of the grunt work done already. My actual writing process is pretty messy; I'm not someone who has a specific time of day that I write. I write whenever inspiration strikes, which usually means when there's a deadline.

On the pressures of revising a show with a fanatic fan base:

There's a lot of pressure, and it was something that I never experienced as a writer when revisiting something. We did quite a bit of rewriting on *Be More Chill* for the Signature production. Anything that I did, I had a voice in my head saying, "Millions of kids are going to be so pissed off

that you just changed that word... There are fans who know every single syllable of that cast album.” I was very aware that anytime I changed something, it was going to be notable. I also believed that the people who responded to *Be More Chill* in the first place responded to my voice and Joe Tracz’s voice. Those voices are the same as they were in 2015, but I’d like to think that we’re better writers than we were in 2015. I believed that they would go with us no matter what we did, but it was still scary.

There’s one song that I never thought that we got right, and it always made me cringe. I always felt that if I was given the opportunity to do something else with *Be More Chill*, then I’d do some work on a song that clearly needs work (“The Pitiful Children”). Then, we had this box office opening event for *Be More Chill* before we went into rehearsals. A lot of fans came and I got to interact with people; a woman came up to me. She was so excited about the show, so passionate, and was telling me how much the show means to her. She took me by the shoulders, looked into my eyes, and said, “Just promise me one thing: promise me you’re not going to touch ‘The Pitiful Children.’” I gave some politician type answer, but it was so heart-stopping. I’ve literally thought about her so many times, and I am so terrified for her to see the show.

On advice for future writers:

All of my advice has become very cheesy. Believe that you can do it. I am someone who would not have thought that what happened to my show was possible. I just tried to make the best show I possibly could. Just try to make good work. Don’t try to think about how you can make something go viral or whatever. Just focus on the good work. If it connects with people, it’s going to connect with people, but it has nothing to do with the making of it. All you can do is try to be honest and truthful,

to believe and keep going. All I know is my own experience, but where I am right now is not where I thought I would be even a year ago. It's amazing. The world is changing, and there's new ways of doing things. There will only ever be new ways of doing things.

Michael Greif

“ WHAT I’M LOOKING FOR IN THE TRENCHES IS SOMEONE WHO’S GOING TO BELIEVE IN ME, TRUST ME, AND CERTAINLY QUESTION AND CHALLENGE ME. BUT ALSO SOMEONE WHO’S GOING TO RECOGNIZE THAT I’M DOING SOMETHING THAT’S UNIQUE. ”

- MICHAEL GREIF, DIRECTOR

Michael Greif is one of the most commercially successful directors on Broadway, with productions that have won two Pulitzer Prizes and two Tony Awards for Best Musical, not to mention, his four Tony nominations. Despite having helmed some of the riskiest musicals of the modern Broadway catalogue (*RENT*, *Next to Normal*, *Dear Evan Hansen*), Greif’s shows have a recoupment rate of almost fifty percent. He’s also lent his talents to Off-Broadway productions at the Williamstown Theater Festival, the New York Shakespeare Festival, and La Jolla Playhouse, where he served as artistic director for five years!

On bucking the “spectacle” trend on Broadway:

I’ve been fortunate enough to be connected to great stories with really accessible and flawed, but identifiable characters. Theater is about seeing yourself up there, and people want to identify with those characters or identify with a former part of their history when they were that character. I also feel very fortunate that I’ve gotten to work with extraordinary, extraordinary composers.

On being okay with knowing you need more education:

It’s just about how much can you put yourself out there. I just wasn’t ready and knew I couldn’t put myself out there. I certainly have a lot of regard for some people who come right out of undergrad and make it. That’s fantastic, but I knew it wasn’t for me. I always tell people who ask about that, that people have different paths. I certainly needed more lab incubation and support to try and sell my wares. That’s important too: On some level you really, *really*, at some point, need to sell your wares.

On reading reviews:

I feel like I’m the one who needs to be the link. I’m the one who needs to be responsible for how my work with the actors and creative team is ultimately received, so I feel like it’s an important part of my responsibility. Sometimes it’ll take me a day or two, or I’ll ask someone to let me know about the good ones first, but ultimately, I do read them all, and I take them very seriously.

On the ideal producer relationship:

I look for a collaborator. I feel like the best projects begin with a producer putting a team together. I’ve been fortunate for when David Stone or Stacey Mindich have put a team together, and I recognize the incredible

wisdom of how we all got there. A lot of it starts with that. In the case of David, some of the things we've done have also been his idea. He looks for a group of people who can execute an idea and inspire me and, by extension, others. What I'm looking for in the trenches is someone to believe in me, trust me, and certainly question and challenge me. But also someone who's going to recognize that I'm doing something unique. All that we directors have is a real, unique thing to bring to the process.

On the importance of actors:

I have a lot of respect for what they do. Maybe because I was a rotten actor myself, or because I also was partnered with an actor, but I understand what their life is like. We also go to the theater to see the actors interpret the material. Of course, it's all about the material, ultimately, but the first line of communication is through the actors. They carry that responsibility. From that, we have a tremendous responsibility to them to give them every possible tool to do their absolute best.

On the dangers of making everything “accessible”:

I feel like there's some mistaken notion that Broadway needs to be as accessible as the biggest studio movie. I don't think it has to appeal to everyone. It has to be about something and be somewhat challenging in order to become well-loved. Sometimes I believe that people are just trying to make the material much more accessible and likable than they need to. I don't feel like that makes for the best work in the end.

Kirsten Childs

“ I THOUGHT, I'M GOING TO
WRITE A SHOW, AND I DON'T CARE
IF IT'S REALLY BAD, IT WILL BE MY
FIRST ATTEMPT TO TRY AND
WRITE SOMETHING THAT SPEAKS
TO MY EXPERIENCE. ”

- KIRSTEN CHILDS, ACTOR/ WRITER

Though dramatist Kirsten Childs started on stage performing in some of the most notable productions of the 1970's, her career shifted towards writing as she began using theater as a form of activism. Spurred by the effects of the AIDS epidemic in the Broadway community, she wrote *The Bubbly Black Girl Sheds Her Chameleon Skin*, which was produced off-Broadway in 2000 and won an Obie Award. She went on to write *Miracle Brothers*, *Funked Up Fairy Tales*, and *Bella: An American Tale*, which won the Weston Playhouse New Musical Award in 2016 – where she was heralded as “an under-appreciated gem of the American musical theater.” Childs continues to educate and inspire, serving as an adjunct professor at NYU's Graduate Musical Theater Writing Program.

On working with Bob Fosse:

It was actually really wonderful. What I really admire about him and everybody that works for him is the level of work ethic. We're not even talking about the talent; we're not talking about all of these other things. It's just the commitment to work. He was kind of a workaholic, and all the people that were around him were workaholics. If you were not one, woe to you, but the beauty in the situation was that you didn't have to be the best dancer, you just had to try. You just had to try your best to do the work. He admired and respected that. He respected people for their various levels of ability. If they were trying to give 110%, that was what was important.

On becoming a writer:

A big part of my career as a performer was the era of the AIDS epidemic. I lost a lot of friends and it became very difficult for me to perform. Still, I loved the business very much and wanted to find another way into it. Also, I performed in an all-black version of *The Boys from Syracuse*, which was the first time I had been in a show where pretty much everyone was a person of color. What struck me was the level of talent in acting that I had never gotten the chance to witness before. This was because black performers, basically, were either doing the all-black version of a show that was formerly created for white people, or they were doing a musical revue, or it was just one black person in a show of all-white people. And here I was, watching all these people doing this incredible work. I thought that there should be shows that were about *my* people's experience. I realized that I was going to write the show and that I wouldn't care if it was bad, I was going to attempt to write something that spoke to my experience. The theater is full of very competitive folks, so I knew that pretty soon afterwards somebody was going to push

back on my work. They were going to say: “That’s not how you do it. Let me show you how to write a show for black people.” . . . Then, there would be two shows, a bad one written by me and a really good one by somebody else. More theater jobs for folks like me! That was my secret plan.

On faking it until you make it:

I was always hiding. I never told anybody I was a dancer or performer, even when I was trying to be. When I was a writer, I never told anybody I was an actor. I was always hiding who I was, which is really stupid, but there you have it. In a way though, it was also smart, because there were certain people who have bad attitudes towards people who are not in their particular part of the business. As you get older, you just don’t care as much. I’ll tell you all: I was a dancer. I was a musical theater performer. I was an actor.

On collaboration:

There are some things about collaboration that are gold to me. It’s a way of trying to communicate with somebody who is not you, but you’re both working on the same project. How can you find the way to spark each other’s imagination, yet merge *both your visions* into a piece of theater and a piece of art? How can you make it so it isn’t one person’s way or the other person’s way, but both of your ways? How do you communicate that but still maintain your strong convictions about what the piece should be? At NYU they teach you, if not that, find a way to try to do that more effectively, which is incredibly valuable.

On diverse representation:

There needs to be more producers of color, although there are all sorts of areas in the entertainment business where we could more heavily

embrace diversity. We have to take whatever steps we can. As long as we keep pushing, realizing that there's work to be done, and we aren't resting on our laurels, we have a good thing going, although we can always do more. We can do more, not just in terms of diversity of ethnicity, but also in terms of gender and disability. There are all sorts of ways in which people are actually opening their eyes and their hearts. It's an ongoing process and it always will be. The human race is an ongoing process.

Dominique Morisseau

“ BROADWAY IS NOT
CHANGING WHO I AM,
WHAT I DO, OR
WHY I DO WHAT I DO ”

- DOMINIQUE MORISSEAU, WRITER/ ACTOR

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 /  @domorisseau

In the 2015-16 and 2017-18 theatrical seasons, Dominique Morisseau was one of the Top 20 Most Produced Playwrights in America, with ten of her productions in development nationwide. She first began writing plays in college, deciding to take matters into her own hands when she found that there were not enough roles for her to perform. After graduating from the University of Michigan, she received a Playwrights of New York fellowship at the Lark Play Development Center, earned a MacArthur “Genius” Grant in 2018 and, in 2019, was the first African-American woman in two decades to be nominated for the Tony for Best Book of a Musical with *Ain’t Too Proud—The Life and Times of the Temptations*. Her career has also contributed to television, where she finished three seasons as a co-producer for the Showtime series, *Shameless*. The centerpiece of her writing career remains *The Detroit Project*, a three-play cycle about three moments in the history of Morisseau’s hometown.

On serving yourself and your community with art:

I was an actor, but I've always been a very problem-solving, solution-oriented person. I came to school to act and to do the kind of work that I was interested in doing, but that work wasn't being produced at my school. It was a no-brainer to me then—I needed to write! When I discovered that we had a student-run theater that we could submit work to, it was clear that I was going to contribute. I was going to do my own thing. I don't think I was conscious of filling any larger gap than the gap I was personally feeling. That revelation didn't come to me until after the work was up on its feet. Then I saw what it meant to everyone else, and I said, "This is bigger than me."

On not letting the fear of “no” limit you:

I'm a poet. I've always been good at writing, since my youth. Since I was in second grade, my writing has always been applauded by my teachers. I've always gotten encouragement as a writer from my mother and from my family members, and also encouragement as a performer, frankly. I have some sort of special connection to the written word. I don't think I cared who thought I was good. There was a point in my life where the idea that my writing wasn't good just never even crossed my mind. Caring about that didn't come until much later in life, when I got older. Sometimes I have to go back to the girl that didn't care. You can forget her really easily in an industry that is so focused on opinion.

On adjusting to Broadway:

With Broadway, there's always the constant reminder that it is a commercial production and a commercial industry. It does not have the same principles as Off-Broadway. It just doesn't. Decisions are not made strictly for artistic purposes; they're also made for the potential

of consumerism. I think when you know that, it allows you to weather information and scrutiny differently, yet still hold fast to a mission. I am an Off-Broadway, underground artist on Broadway. Broadway is not changing who I am, what I do, or why I do what I do. For me, when you see my work on Broadway, you're gonna see me on that stage. That is the thing I don't compromise. I cannot always dictate the curation of that work, but when it comes to the content of the work; I am an Off-Broadway, underground artist on Broadway.

On the writing process:

Sometimes I do nothing. I think about it. If I think I have an idea for a play, I don't go write it down necessarily. Some people do and sometimes I might. Some days I might come up with a list of all of my ideas that I've had in my head, but I don't really go back to them. If it comes to me twice, or it starts to come to me three or four times, then that's when I know that's something I need to move towards. Another week or month goes by and that's still on my mind, or maybe I start to think about it even more. It starts to take up space in my brain. Then I know that I'm ready to move to the conceiving of it, and that means a lot of different things. What was interesting about *The Detroit Project* is that it came to me as a project, as a three-play, connected project. Three is one of my favorite numbers, and I knew that's what I wanted to do. There were three eras in Detroit history; that really excited me. The way that they came to me, I knew how I wanted to write about it.

On the current state of representation on stage:

What I'm learning to say, to effectively convey my feelings, is that I'm cautiously optimistic. There's a lot of great work happening right now. This past season in New York City I saw a lot of plays by people of color and by young African American playwrights, which was exciting

to see. That was not happening when I first got produced. Something's changed, and I'm excited about that. I'm also cautious about it, because it's also a very trendy thing. I hope we're not a trend. When you just haven't been doing something and then do it really aggressively, it feels like overcompensation and I wonder if it's sustainable. And not just for African American playwrights, but Latinx playwrights, Asian American playwrights, Native American playwrights? Are we making space for everybody? Or are we picking hot topics? That's what concerns me. I don't want to be somebody's pick for the week. I want to be fully indoctrinated into the industry.

On what she'd change about Broadway's audiences:

There's still this idea of elitism with Broadway. There's a limited idea about the people we think actually have the money to come, so we cater to only one specific age group, racial group, and economic demographic. That's what we pour all our energy and resources into, as if no one else matters but them. That makes me sad, because I wish we would take more time to study the buying patterns of communities of color and to study the trending buying patterns of young people. My God, young people matter. We really don't pay attention to them because we think that they have no money. I say, whoever the young people are always turn the tide for what will be and how commerce will go in the future. They become ambassadors for the industry that we're trying to keep alive. I would change the way that we engage those communities in a commercial space so that they are thought of and are not afterthoughts. That we actually aggressively seek them with the same fervor that we are seeking what I feel like is predominantly the older, over 60, white, affluent audience.

Ali Stroker

“ IT'S NOT ABOUT OVERCOMING,
IT'S ABOUT EMBRACING THE WAY
YOU DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY. I
THINK A PART OF WHY I WAS
ACKNOWLEDGED AT THE 2019
TONYS IS BECAUSE NO ONE ELSE
IS DOING THINGS THE WAY I AM!”

- ALI STROKER, ACTOR

 /  @alistroker

Challenging expectations and breaking boundaries across the entertainment industry, Ali Stroker has lent her talents to the stage and screen since graduating from the NYU Tisch School of the Arts. She made her Broadway debut in the Deaf West revival of *Spring Awakening* in 2015, and made history in 2019 for her portrayal of Ado Annie in the revival of the Rodgers and Hammerstein classic *Oklahoma!*, when she became the first performer in a wheelchair to be nominated and win a Tony Award.. Stroker's television appearances include *Glee*, *Ten Days in the Valley*, and *Lethal Weapon*. Outside of her career as a performer, Stroker is a motivational speaker and philanthropist, speaking and teaching all over the world. Her dedication to improving lives through the arts, disabled or not, is captured in her motto: "Making Your Limitations Your Opportunities."

On the importance of representation:

I perform, but I'm always looking for ways to give back to people; it's something really beautiful that happened when I became an actor and began to get some publicity. I realized that there are so many people with disabilities who were needing, wanting, and ready to see themselves represented. I was one of those kids. When I was young, I came into the city from Jersey, and saw tons of shows, but never saw anyone like me onstage. So, in many ways, this dream of being on Broadway was something I always wanted but I didn't know quite how it would happen. I had never seen it done before. I believe that representation does that for young people; it allows them to see that something is possible. I was so fortunate to have parents that said, "Even if it hasn't been done, it is possible, you are a superstar, you can do anything." And then, I happened to meet the right people along the way, like Ken Davenport and Michael Arden, who were like, "Yeah, this has never been done, but we're doing this, no matter what it takes." It's changed my entire life.

On the power of singing:

My love for singing and being on stage was so strong—to this day, when I don't feel well, I will sing: it's similar to someone going for a run, it kicks my endorphins. When I'm singing, I feel this sense of freedom that I don't feel anywhere else in my life. I think it's because, having a physical disability, you feel your limitations all the time. I feel what it's like to not be able to jump out of a car. With my voice, there are no limits. That is a powerful feeling for someone who lives in a body that has these very concrete limitations.

In memory of discouraging moments:

There were many moments that I remember people saying, “This isn’t going to work, because the stage isn’t accessible,” or “We don’t know how this is going to work.” My mom has been really great about pushing me to advocate for myself, even at a young age. Growing up it was small things like making phone calls to my physical therapist and doctors. In college, this was a moment where I needed to advocate for myself. There was a little piece of me that said, “I’m going to show you all that I can do it.” I just have a genuine love and desire to be the best actor that I can be and the best singer that I can be. There was nothing that would distract me from performing. I just love performing so much.

One time my mom took me to a dance class and the teacher had no idea what to do with me, so I just watched. Those were really painful moments. I think because of how I was raised it created this mechanism in me to always find a way to do it, even if it was different from anyone else. I call it translation. When you have a disability as a performer, your greatest tool is your ability to translate. I’ve never done a show where everyone is in wheelchairs, ever, but when I need to translate the movement or whatever it is we’re doing onstage, it’s so automatic for me. Ultimately in those moments of pain of having to watch others, I realized I can become my greatest ally and figure out how to do it on my body. My dad was a coach, so we were raised with all these mantras. He would say to my brother and I: “You never ever, ever give up, ever.”

On accessibility on Broadway:

For so many performers, there isn’t an opportunity because there are major accessibility issues backstage and offstage. We talk a lot about practicalities, but again, if there is a will, there is a way to create access. I’d like to see the theatre community come together and figure out ways

to create accessibility for performers and crews with disabilities. It continues to blow my mind that all of the houses are accessible, but backstage is not. This is an issue that I want to start working on, especially with a lot of these cabaret clubs. A lot of those clubs are where I was seen for the first time, and at many of those venues, I have been carried on and off the stage. Part of fully embracing the disabled movement and community is saying, “We will create access.” This is a civil rights issue, because when there isn’t accessibility it tells me that I am not welcome for who I am, and it is on me to accommodate the needs of the venue, not the other way around. I now won’t perform anywhere that’s not accessible. If it’s not accessible, we have to come together and figure out a way.

Accessibility looks like a lot of things: there should be captioning everywhere. We live in the digital age; there’s so many ways to do this, creatively, beautifully, and powerfully. The same thing goes for ramps, lifts, and accessibility overall—we shouldn’t hide it. This is a part of our world. To quote my boyfriend, David Perlow: “We, in many ways, are trying to preserve history by not making things accessible. Is that really a part of history we want to hold onto?” We should not tell people with disabilities that they are not welcome in public spaces for the sake of preserving history. That, to me, is incredibly frustrating. That is why I feel a real responsibility to say no to venues that aren’t accessible, because I know it helps all the people coming up behind me. The backstage of these theaters, clubs, and cabarets need to get it together. Not just for their patrons, where they’re making money, but for the people who work to entertain them.

Mara Isaacs

“ WITH A BROADWAY SHOW,
WHAT YOU’RE TRYING TO DO IS FIGURE
OUT WHO’S THE NEXT AUDIENCE,
AND THE NEXT AUDIENCE, AND THE
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COME SEE THIS ONE THING THAT
YOU HAVE ON OFFER? ”

- MARA ISAACS, CREATIVE PRODUCER



/ @OctopusTheatricals



@OTheatricals

Mara Isaacs is the founder and executive/creative producer of Octopus Theatricals and is best known for serving as lead producer on *Hadestown*, for which she won a Tony Award in 2019, and a Grammy Award in 2020 for the Original Broadway Cast Recording. Not bad for her first commercial production. However, Isaacs has been producing in the non-profit world for many years, guiding productions like *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike*, *Anna in the Tropics*, *The Brother/Sister Plays*, *Crowns*, *An Iliad* and *Theatre for One* to national and international stages. She formerly served as Producing Director at the McCarter Theater Center in Princeton, New Jersey, and was Associate Producer for Center Theatre Group in Los Angeles.

She is dedicated to supporting independent producers through the Producer Hub, which she co-founded, and has taught at Princeton University, The New School and CalArts.

On advice that she received when she was learning the ropes:

It's funny, I don't have a specific pearl of wisdom, but there were people who were very influential in my early years. Gordon Davidson, who was the Founding Artistic Director of the Mark Taper Forum, was somebody who demonstrated what vision-oriented and mission-driven leadership was about, and how important it was to make work that was in conversation with the times and with your community. Oskar Eustis, who was Associate Artistic Director at the Taper, taught me a lot about how you build trust with artists and get them to trust you in the service of their story. Corey Madden, who was a Producer there at the time, was probably the person who helped me see, specifically, what being a Creative Producer could be. Emily Mann, Artistic Director at McCarter Theatre, helped me understand that every production needed to be an "event", and that rigor was essential in the artistic process. The greatest lesson I learned early on, when I did not yet have vast experience, was to listen to my gut and trust my instinct.

On what it means to be a Creative Producer:

The term has evolved in response to this perceived division in the way art is made: that there are people who are artists, and there are people who are good with budgets and numbers and being organized. To me, a creative producer is someone who approaches the work more holistically, who has both the business acumen and also understands what creative process is, and how to support artists. Different creative producers are going to have slightly different approaches, but fundamentally, as a producer I am a storyteller. I'm not the one in the room directing the actors, I'm not the one writing the plays, but in the way I assemble artists and the way that I guide projects, I am serving the creative process. It looks different on every project, which is one of the reasons why even I

have a hard time defining it, because the artist I work with on project A is going to describe my work differently than the artist I work with on project B. I shape shift depending on what the need is. For some projects, they don't need that hands-on creative voice, and so I'm a little bit more in the background.

On giving the audience credit and what stories she responds to:

I often hear myself say: "Don't underestimate your audience." Part of the fun of seeing a show is the act of trying to figure something out, and if it's spoon-fed to you, it's not as interesting. I would say I tell stories that matter. What does that mean, right? It doesn't have to be edgy or political to matter; it could be delightful and joyful and matter. I take people's time really seriously, and I don't want to ask somebody to take two hours and however much money out of their day and spend time doing something if it isn't somehow going to be meaningful to them. So, I look for things that are meaningful, however one defines what that is. I look for things that belong in the theater, that can't be told in any other way, or form. I'm not a huge fan of the movie adaptation, but I'd make an exception if somebody made a case for me about why this is a really theatrical idea. I'm a visually oriented person, so I look for people who aren't just writing ideas, but are writing three-dimensionally. I respond to language, but not exclusively, because I also work with a company that makes shows with no text, so anything is possible.

On the non-profit world vs. Broadway:

The similarities probably have to do with organizational size, the number of people. In every other way, it's different. When you're producing a Broadway show, you have a single show, a single cast, everything is about how you keep that thing fresh. I'm really talking about once the show is open and running, the operation—how you keep it alive and

fresh. In all of my years working in the not-for-profit, shows had limited runs rarely longer than six or eight weeks, so it's a completely different mindset. You're playing a show in the same building, for the same audience who's coming back over and over again to see the next thing. As opposed to, with a Broadway show, what you're trying to do is figure out who's the next audience, and the next audience, and the next audience who's going to come see this one thing that you have on offer.

Alan Cumming

“ I’M WILLING TO LOOK
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- ALAN CUMMING,
ACTOR/AUTHOR/DANCER/ARTREPRENEUR

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Alan Cumming has a Tony Award, three Emmy Awards . . . and a soap with his name on it. He has had roles in major Hollywood blockbusters like *Spy Kids*, and on TV shows like *The Good Wife* but is also equally at home DJing at his hot nightclub, Club Cumming. It was his role as the Emcee in *Cabaret* (a role he returned to when it was revived on Broadway 16 years after he originally played it) that open America’s eyes the artist that Alan is. Since then he has appeared on Broadway in a one-man *Macbeth*, *The Three Penny Opera*, and more. Always challenging and reinventing himself, he is working on his first solo dance show and aspires to host a holistic vegan cooking program.

On what allows him to do so many different things so well:

I really believe that what keeps you fresh and makes you interesting as an artist is your ability to understand different forms and connect with different groups and to be eclectic. Even since I was a student at drama school, the course I did was not just acting, it was directing and writing and some teaching, and we did some stage management. I'm just very aware of not wanting to be obsessed with one part of my work. I think everything I do helps the other parts of what I do.

Having my own soap, I think, is good because it shows I am fun and I've got wit, and I suppose I am an entrepreneur, not just because I have soap and Club Cumming but... I also make my own work. I'm an entrepreneur of my own work... I write my own concert shows, books, and all these different things. To me it's all part of the same thing. I'm a storyteller for hire. I feel that each disparate thing comes back to just being fascinated and interested in the world.

On pre-show jitters:

I think it's healthy to be nervous; I think it means you care. Sometimes I get very nervous. I remember performing at the Tonys doing a song from *The Threepenny Opera* and my legs were shaking so badly. You have a thing that you do in the theater, and then when it comes to the Tonys it has to be a truncated version, the choreography is different, suddenly it's all chopped up and changed, and you have so little rehearsal. With this song, normally I could decide when I entered, but on the Tonys it was to a click track. When I walked out the audience started to cheer and I was freaked out that I wasn't going to hear the tape and that I was going to fuck it all up. When I get most nervous it's when I'm ill-prepared because I don't feel confident. I think you're at your best when you feel confident in what you're doing.

On imperfection:

Very early on I did a thing that was very scary. In drama school, my friend and I did a stand-up comedy double act. That was terrifying. We would often walk onstage not knowing what we were going to say. I would often start playing a song on the piano not really knowing if I knew all the chords. I think that was probably the start of it... You have to admit to the audience that you're not confident you're going to be able to do this. I think you need to be vulnerable like that and make a joke of it.

At the end of this *Legal Immigrant* recording, on Audible, I wanted to have a secret track—remember how they did that at the end of CDs?

On the first day of recording *Legal immigrant*, I just decided that's what I wanted to do—but I hadn't really practiced the song very well. So the band started to play it, and I started to sing it and I fucked up. I had to start again. And then I fucked up again... I fucked up three times and then the fourth time, I looked at the words and I finally got it. It's actually really lovely, at the end I go, "Thank you for indulging me." I insisted that we keep that in the recording. I think that's a good metaphor for me. I think that it's really important to not pretend you're perfect, and actually show your imperfections, that makes you a more interesting person.

On vulnerability:

I'm not afraid to look foolish. I'm not vain. I was talking to someone about *Macbeth*, and about how, at the curtain call, I looked like I'd been hit by a truck. It's not an attractive look. When I look back at what I've done, I actually admire myself. I admire the fact that I'm willing to look horrible and damaged. It's a big leap to make, to actually just think, "I am prepared to be very, very vulnerable." That's the thing in life as well,

you know, when you open yourself up to someone, but it's like opening yourself up to a whole audience or a whole experience.

Asmeret Ghebremichael

“ IT WAS THE FASTEST
THING I’VE EVER WRITTEN. I
DIDN’T REALIZE I HAD BEEN
SITTING ON THOSE IDEAS
FOR YEARS. ”

- ASMERET GHEBREMICHAEL, ACTOR

 @asmeretghebremichael /  @asmeretyemane

Asmeret Ghebremichael has been a Broadway actor for 20 years, appearing in shows such as *The Book of Mormon*, *Legally Blonde*, *Spamalot* and *Wicked*. She was last seen playing Lorrell Robinson in the West End production of *Dreamgirls*, and currently stars in the BBC television show *Get Even*.

On first getting bit by the theatre bug and manifesting her goals:

I always loved performing. As a little kid I would make up songs and make my younger sister perform with me. I remember going to NY when I was 11 or 12 years old, with a group from my dance studio. During that trip, we saw a bunch of Broadway shows... One of them was *Kiss of the Spider Woman* starring Vanessa Williams, and we got to meet her afterwards. And I thought: “there is a woman who looks like me, front and center, singing, dancing, acting... I can do that.” I already knew I loved to dance and sing but I remember going home and writing down on paper: “I’m going to go to NYU and be on Broadway.” And that’s exactly what happened!

On the audition process:

I think actually, you can get more in your head the older you get... When I was younger, I had this blind confidence and was so excited. And it’s important to remember why you’re there and why you love what you do so much, and to be yourself. People want to see your personality. With *Footloose*, they saw me coming in three or four times and I always had a smile on my face and worked hard; I was persistent and I was friendly. If it’s clear that you love it, that’s probably the biggest thing you can do.

On sharing her experience as a woman of color in the entertainment industry:

I was approached by a friend of mine on a Wednesday morning with this opportunity to tell my story. So I panicked, first, and then I said, “Yes. I’ll do it.” And I had no idea what I was going to talk about. I was seeing friends of mine speak out and be vulnerable and honest.

I had been ruminating over what to say but I didn't know exactly what I wanted to say so I refrained from saying anything for a while... then it started to come to me: what was my perspective? I've been the "token" all my life. Growing up at my dance studio, amongst my circle of friends, in the theatre community. Then it just started to come together. It was the fastest thing I've ever written. I didn't realize I had been sitting on those ideas and experiences for years. And you know, when you open the door, other ideas just flood through.

On summoning the courage speak up and using the arts to spark conversations:

I think that people as a collective are listening now. People look to the arts for inspiration, and for change to happen in society, it needs to start from the top. For change to be long lasting, conversations are important. This feels different, it feels like people are actively listening, so I'm hopeful.

They say courage is having the fear and doing it anyway. I think that for me, it's always a split-second decision weighing whether the fear is either the vulnerability of being that exposed or something that doesn't feel right. I think that's cultivated over the last few years. I've gotten really good at knowing intuitively if something is going to benefit me or if it could benefit someone else—and in both of those instances, I've felt like if I can inspire at least one other person to speak out, then it's been successful.

Jamil Jude

“ IT’S ABOUT

GIVING YOURSELF

GRACE.”

- JAMIL JUDE, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

www.jamiljude.com

 @mrjdjude

Jamil Jude is a director, producer, playwright, and dramaturg. Self-identifying as an "Artist Plus," Jamil feels most at home bringing socially relevant art to the community. Jamil is the Artistic Director at Kenny Leon's True Colors Theatre in Atlanta, Georgia as well as the Co-Founder of The New Griots Festival. He previously served as associate artistic director at True Colors from 2017-2019. Jamil is former participant in the Leadership U: One-on-One program, funded by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and administered by Theatre Communications Group. The program provided him a residency at Park Square Theatre, in St. Paul, MN, where he worked as the artistic programming associate, and was mentored by Richard Cook, Artistic Director. Prior to that, he served as the National New Play Network (NNPN), Producer in Residence at Mixed Blood Theatre Company for three seasons. His interest in social justice and theatre continues to drive his work, including co-founding a culturally relevant theatre company, Colored People's Theatre, in Washington, DC.

On stepping into a new role while finding his identity in the arts:

Having the opportunity to learn under Kenny [Leon] what Artistic Direction would look like, as well as what Artistic Direction in Atlanta looks like for our specific audience, was a really great introduction to the job. It's the best job I've ever had.

As an Artistic Director, a typical day involves balancing the artistic vision of the organization while also managing the day to day expenses. I would spend mornings meeting with artists—either in current productions or for future production—and then head into finance meetings or staff meetings; end of the day, I'm either in rehearsal or gearing up to watch a show. I've also learned you want to be an ambassador to the community. Because that's what we do as a regional theater: we support our community.

And you need to give yourself grace and be comfortable where you are today. Writing was my first love and that's how I got into theatre. The fact that I haven't written in a while doesn't mean I'm not a writer. Just because I'm directing or producing in this moment doesn't make me less of another thing. I just have to be thankful I can sit where I am in the sort of “slash” or “hyphen” I'm currently existing in and try to do that to the best of my ability.

On his approach to thematic storytelling:

Especially working at a nonprofit organization, you are in service of a mission. For True Colors, our mission is to celebrate the rich tradition of Black storytelling, while giving a voice to bold artists of all cultures. We're looking for plays that fit that description and our vision to thrive at the intersection of artistic excellence and civic engagement. So we're really just trying to look for the artists that are telling those stories. We

listen to what's happening in our community, and then ask how, as artists, we can respond to that.

On the unifying effect of theater:

In times like these, we turn to our artists to answer the questions that often feel too big, too daunting, too heavy; we may not have the words to acknowledge and facilitate the conversation, but our artists do, and always have—they're storytellers. And I'm trying to continue to share stories with our community. You can tell a story and have an immediate impact on somebody, live, in that moment. You can touch someone's life who, before they had entered the theatre, had no idea what connection they would have to someone's story. That first breath when the curtain goes up, and the audience starts to experience a story—that's worth fighting for.

On telling stories that are both timely and timeless:

When I identified that Artistic Direction was a thing that I favored, I wanted to be an AD of a culturally relevant theater company; at the time, I didn't have the vocabulary of what that would look like. After years of traveling and working with different theatre companies, eventually landing in Atlanta, I've learned that it means responding to the moment.

It's difficult because I'm often picking plays 18 months to 2 years in advance, but what you're trying to find, often, is what's an "evergreen topic" or what's a play that has "multiple legs." A play is never about just one thing, plays contain multitudes. So when thinking in advance, you have to understand that the perfect play will speak to a moment, but you need to be nimble enough to shift if you need to.

And when we have a theme each season, it allows us to connect a play to something that's present. I've really enjoyed rooting myself

into the people who are telling stories. There's always someone writing something and if you're listening, you can help them tell their story on a bigger platform.

Paul Tazewell

“
COMMUNICATION
IS VITAL IN
CREATING LIVE
THEATER.”

- PAUL TAZEWELL, COSTUME DESIGNER

www.paultazewelldesign.com

 @ptazewell

Paul Tazewell is the mastermind behind the costume design of several award-winning Broadway productions, including *Hamilton* and *Ain't Too Proud-The Life and Times of the Temptations*, as well as various works for TV, film, and opera. Though he initially had dreams of being a performer, Paul found fulfillment in the limitless creativity and collaborative nature of costume design. He has been able to blend practical and artistic sensibilities to bring characters and stories to life in productions ranging in scale, medium, and genre worldwide.

On striking a balance between consistency and adaptability in his approach to costume design:

For *Hamilton* and any of the other Broadway productions that I've done that have gone on to tour, the design basically stays the same; there's consistency with how we approach what we're doing, but the way that the new actor is in those clothes is custom. We're rebuilding new costumes for all the different productions that we have. It's important for me as a designer to acknowledge and embrace how their own persona marries with the idea of the costume.

From the start, I'm working with the text, meeting with the director to understand their intent and point of view, and researching and defining how we see the world of the show. Once everything is fully designed, then we go into fittings with different shops for different types of clothing. When the actor comes into a fitting they will have a reaction to how they look in the clothes, and it's my job to introduce them into this world, as well as understand how they're interpreting the character; through multiple fittings, we want to troubleshoot and bypass any issues or conflicts in creative vision that might come up later in tech.

On how his love of theater influenced his career path:

My love of theater started probably when I was in middle school or junior high, and at that time I wanted to be a performer and do musicals on Broadway, like Ben Vereen. My love of clothing came just before my love of theater, and carried me through my time at Pratt studying design. Before that I was designing the costumes for the high school productions that I was actually a performer in. I was designing my own clothes, staying up until two or three in the morning working on these designs with the help of my mom and my whole family, taking over the kitchen making the costumes for all the different productions. It wasn't until I

was at the North Carolina School of the Arts completing my undergraduate degree that I really buckled down and committed to my desire to be a costume designer, rather than a performer. Coming to that decision, I had to grapple with questions of longevity in the business, and type-casting, so I made the decision to pursue a profession where I could live vicariously through all the characters, cross gender, and experience creativity in a much broader way than I could as a performer.

On using costume to tell a story:

Communication is vital in creating live theater. You've got experts coming together making decisions about how to best tell the story. Musical theater is so difficult to create as a theatrical expression because you have so many different elements that need to come together in the perfect way to establish a world. The entry into developing costumes, whether it be for the theatre, opera, TV, or film, I'm always referring to a director and their point of view, and making decisions specific to each character so that we understand their place in telling the story. In theatre you're all in the same space making it happen. I love detail, and really pay attention to what you'll see close up as much as making it look right from a distance.

On how to prioritize when juggling multiple projects:

Starting out in this business, you do what you have to do to survive. NYC is a beast of a city to make a living in, especially in theatre. So you're taking on as many shows as you can to be able to pay your rent. You develop skills of multitasking which continue to grow. I've been fortunate to be faced with working on three productions simultaneously, and it's a gift to be able to do that, but you have to manage not being present for a certain director at times and make sure that you have backup with your team if you need to go someplace else, and figure out how to juggle

everything so that you can make a living. It's just part of the job and the longer you do it the more skills you develop. I rely on my ability to multitask as well as my engaged team to be able to manage professionally as a costume designer and in proactively maintaining the creative relationships that I have in place.

Robyn Goodman

“YOU NEVER KNOW
WHERE PEOPLE ARE
GOING TO TURN UP IN
THE FUTURE...BE NICE
TO EVERYBODY.”

- ROBYN GOODMAN, PRODUCER

www.agedinwood.com

After studying theater at Brandeis University, Robyn Goodman moved to New York to live the dream and become an actress, which she was for 8 years, appearing at Lincoln Center and off-Broadway several times at the Public Theater. Goodman's bags were packed for England when she got word that the theater couldn't afford to pay for the company's plane tickets – not to be discouraged, Goodman and company raised \$3,000 for airfare and lodging and made it to London, where the three-play season was a smashing success. With Joseph Papp's encouragement, she shifted to producing and became a co-founding Artistic Director of Second Stage Theater for 13 years, and then a Supervising Producer of ABC's *One Life to Live*. Moving into commercial producing, she developed many shows, from *Altar Boyz* to the Tony Award-winning *Avenue Q*, *In the Heights*, and *Rodger & Hammerstein's Cinderella*. For a decade, Goodman was the Artistic Producer of Roundabout Underground and currently is Executive Producer of Bucks County Playhouse.

On what she looks for in new works:

I look for a fresh voice, someone that writes in a way that is completely individual. I also love to read something I've never seen onstage before, either a whole event, a character, or a way of looking at the world. That's what the Underground [at Roundabout Theatre Company] is for me. The Underground is like a soul-feeder for me, because I love doing it and helping to bring out what people are trying to say and do. If you looked at the list of plays in the Underground, they all have originality to them—something special. You can feel it in writing, it's got a kind of energy and freshness.

On what the theater can learn from television:

As a TV Producer, you get to sit in the writer's room. There's such original writing on television. It's extraordinary, you just don't have enough hours in your day. The great thing about working on an overarching story is that, as a producer, you get to sit in the writers' room and divide it up into days, weeks, and scenes. You work with the writers and the best idea wins. Then, you start to see storytelling in a very incremental way—how you keep the audience interested and how you build an arc over a long period of time. I think doing that job for four and a half years improved my skill of storytelling.

On the producer/writer relationship:

Respect is a given and extremely important. I interviewed Hal Prince once and we discussed how we both give notes to writers and directors. My philosophy was that directors don't hear more than three notes, so I start with larger ones and limit myself. If it's a dramaturgical note, it's got to be the biggest one first. I never say phrases like, "This line doesn't work." I wait and I work my way through my list each time we get to

have a conversation. Hal was very different. He would watch rehearsals, take pages and pages of notes, but wait to give any notes to the director. He would check off the ones that the director was already doing and then begin to deliver the rest in small doses. It was a great idea, because when you start giving people a ton of notes, they just don't hear you. Swing wide, and then if they're not hearing you, each time you can get more and more specific. I can't write the way a writer can and they're going to come up with something better. Have faith in them and they'll have faith in you.

On building relationships:

Relationships are so important. My father told me to always be nice to everybody. It comes naturally, hopefully, but treat people well because that person who's an intern in your office will most likely be someone someday. Before Bernie Telsey was Bernie Telsey, he was a book keeper at Second Stage's casting directors' office. You never know where people are going to turn up in the future, and you could need something from them. Even so, it's a nicer way to go through life, being nice to people.

Mandy Gonzalez

“ FEARLESS DOESN'T
MEAN YOU DON'T
HAVE FEAR. WE FEEL
THE FEAR AND WE
KEEP GOING. ”

- MANDY GONZALEZ, ACTOR

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As talented as she is inspiring, Mandy Gonzalez is a true powerhouse of the Broadway community. A California native, Gonzalez came to New York to pursue a career in theatre. In 2001 she won an Obie for her role in the off-Broadway production of *Eli's Comin'* at the Vineyard Theater, and made her Broadway debut that same year as a standby in *Aida*, before taking over the role of Amneris in 2003. Other Broadway credits include *In the Heights*, *Wicked* (both of which she was involved in from the most early stages of development), and *Hamilton*. Off the stage, Mandy is the creator and leader of the "#FearlessSquad," an online community dedicated to uplifting its members and spreading positivity. Her resilience, optimism, and love for the theater have been especially evident in her recent battle with breast cancer, which she has bravely faced while continuing to perform eight shows a week on Broadway.

On how she discovered her passion for performing:

My love of theater started when I was very young. Both of my parents played a lot of music in the house, from Elvis to the Beatles. They worked all the time, so on weekends we got to stay with my grandma. She used to sing showtunes to me and I'd sing along with her really loud, so she told my mom to put me in voice lessons! Every weekend from when I was seven years old, my grandma would bring me to my singing lessons, which were fabulous, but it was really those drives with my grandmother that made me fall in love with music, and musical theater. My family knew I had a love of singing so any opportunity that came up we would take. I'd sing at family functions, malls, anywhere! When I was 15, I received a scholarship to attend a theater camp in Florida; it was my first time really away from my parents, and all my teachers there were the best in the business, so that was when I really knew that performing was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life, and it became really serious for me.

On auditioning and working in New York:

For a while I thought I'd be a singer in my band, but in my first year of college I went to an open call for a Bette Midler show, and I got the job, which really started me on my journey to New York. I was excited and nervous, but as I always say, "Fearless doesn't mean you don't have fear—we feel the fear and we keep going." That's really been my motto throughout my whole life. Even though I might be nervous waiting in a room with 300 people for 3 hours, it's exciting that maybe there's a chance that somebody will pick me. You just never know what's gonna happen next that could possibly change your life. That's what I love about New York.

On cultivating a strong support system:

I started the Fearless Squad about three years ago, because when you first start on Broadway, or as a performer, people write you letters. Now everything is so immediate with the internet, and I noticed people sending me a lot of direct messages that were so vulnerable, about feeling alone or like they had no place to belong. I always felt very lucky because I had my parents and my family behind me as my “squad.” So, after reading these messages I just felt like I had to do something. If people needed a place to belong and feel supported, I wanted them to know that they could count on me, which is why I created the #FearlessSquad. So many people started to connect to that idea, and in turn started to create their own communities around them on social media and it really promotes positivity, and hope, and strength. We help each other when we fall, embrace differences, look for the good, and dream big. It really has now reached thousands of people all over the world, which I’m very proud of. I never realized while creating this squad that, one day, I would be the one who needed it the most.

On her battle with cancer:

When I was diagnosed with breast cancer, I really didn’t know how I was gonna get through it. But by reaching out to my squad and being honest, they lifted me up and gave me so much confidence to continue to perform while receiving chemotherapy. It wasn’t easy but I was able to do it because I allowed myself to be vulnerable, and to see that not as a weakness, but as a strength. I hope my story inspires others to know that they can do anything. For me it was very important that I let having cancer be a part of me, but not define me; singing is my biggest outlet and a gift that I’ve been given that allows me to connect with people and

connect with myself. It's a healing part of me, and when I'm singing, I can just be free.

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