



Five Views On Collaboration

Introduction by the editor

More than the Celestine Prophecy, more than Dianetics, more than the Forum, EST, Montel or even Gary Null, this anthology of articles, if you take it to heart, will change your life.

Really.

At least it *should* if you write musicals for a living. Or hope to.

Because this one provides keys to the most elusive part of the art: the human factor.

The original notion for the article was Skip Kennon's, but when professional commitments rendered him unable to assemble it or contribute, I asked him if I might shepherd it along, feeling it too valuable a project to go unrealized. And he graciously gave permission. His notion was to collect and assemble, from various members of the Steering Committee, views on the often all-too-needlessly-mysterious process of collaboration.

Ironically, for a manifesto about collaboration, everybody—including myself—wrote their pieces independently, with no clue as to what the others would write. When the various components were solicited, the contributors were informed that there would be no minimum or maximum length, no holds barred, no preference anent approach, or treatment of the subject. Originally, I considered using

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editorial discretion, to abridge and streamline here and there, where advice was repeated (doubtless there would be truisms common to every contributor's segment)...but even *that* intention went by the wayside. The more I thought about the piece, the more it seemed right to let any repetition stand. For it isn't just the *principles* of collaboration that are important. It is, like the very *nature* of collaboration, *the exposure to, and tolerance of, other perspectives*.

And the bald differences are worth noting too...

View #1:

THE SIX COMMANDMENTS

by Richard Engquist

Want to find a good collaborator? Be one!

1. Write terrific material and make friends with others who do likewise.
2. Learn how to listen, take suggestions and absorb criticism without having a breakdown. (This takes time.)
3. Make sure you and your partner share a vision for the show you are writing. The vision may change, but if you *start off* with wildly different goals, the chances for success are few and for conflict many.

4. Keep your promises, meet your deadlines, and don't drag your collaborator down by making him/her wait or by keeping him/her in the dark.

5. Here's the hardest one for me: if you have a tough problem to face, or a harsh criticism, remember to start with praise and affirmation. Accentuate the positive. A fellow writer with hurt feelings won't be a fellow writer for very long.

6. *Never* talk about your partner unless you have something good to say.

View #2:

MY LIFE IN ART...OR SOMETHING

by Frank Evans

Carolyn Leigh, the lyricist responsible for "Little Me" and "Peter Pan" once suggested that the first thing a lyricist should do for a composer is make soup. "Let your composer [she was referring to Cy Coleman] noodle at the piano while you're in the kitchen." She was averse to getting tunes on tape and setting them; she preferred the back and forth, the give and take of two people writing together.

I thought of how comfortable

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Works

In Production:

AT THE WEST CLUB EL FEY

A new musical starring famed female impersonator **Jim Bailey** as Mae West featured music and lyrics by **Ellen M. Schwartz** (Advanced) and **Bonnie Lee Sanders** (non-member) with book and direction by **Joe Brancato** (non-member). At **Penguin Red** ("Off-Broadway with a lawn"), Crickettown Road, Stony Point, NY, April 22 through May 30.

AUDRA McDONALD: WAY BACK TO PARADISE (The Concert)

Produced by **Nonesuch Records** in association with the Public Theatre at Town Hall featured songs written by BMI Workshop writers and alumni. The sold-out evening focused primarily on work by new writers including workshop writers **Jeanine Tesori**, **Brian Crawley**, **Jenny Giering**, **Jeff Blumenkrantz**, **Annie Kessler** and **Libby Saines**. **Michael John LaChiusa** was represented by three songs, including the title number.

BREATHE

An evening of 7 musical stories celebrating gay men and lesbians and their collective spirit and vision, will be produced in Chicago this summer at the **Bailiwick Repertory** as part of their annual **Pride Series**. Music by **Dan Martin** (Advanced), lyrics by **Michael**

Biello (Advanced), book by Biello and Martin. Previews begin June 10th, opens June 13th, runs through July 18th. For tickets and information contact Bailiwick at (773) 883-1090 or www.Culture-Finder.com.

ENERGY HIGH

Music, lyrics and book by **Michael Mulder** (Advanced) will be performed at the **Fashion Institute of Technology** on June 9, 1999. It was commissioned by the Alternative High School District of NYC for the opening ceremony of an education convention.

GOLLY GEE WHIZ

A new musical by **Eric Rockwell** and **Joanne Bogart** will be presented by **The TADA! Theatre** at 120 West 28th Street. The show is an affectionate send-up of all those old Mickey and Judy musicals, in which sooner or later someone is bound to come up with the swell idea of doing a show in a barn. Performances run July 9th through August 1st. For further information call the TADA! Theatre box office at (212) 627-1732.

HIDDEN VOICES

A tribute to vocal doubles and the movie stars they dubbed, this was a revue that played a return engagement at **Don't Tell Mama** in April and will return Monday, May 24 and Monday, June 14 at 6:00 pm. Performed by **Ludmilla**

Ilieva (non-member) with pianist/arranger/musical director **Jeffrey Chappell** (Advanced). Directed by **Margery Beddow**. \$15 cover, 2 drink minimum, no credit cards. Call after 4:00 pm for reservations: (212) 757-0788. 1/2 cover for WGMers, MAC, BMI Workshop. Don't Tell Mama is located at 343 West 46th Street, between 8th and 9th Avenues.

LES MISÉRABLES

Following its sold-out mini-tour (tryout) last March, a completely new YA musical version of the **Victor Hugo** novel, by Theatreworks/USA's "Phantom of the Opera" team, will begin the first year of its national tour in the Fall. Music, lyrics and orchestrations by **David Spencer** (Advanced and Committee); book and direction by **Rob Barron** (non-member). Musical direction by **Jenny Giering** (Advanced). For more information, call (212) 627-7373.

THE KING'S MARE

By **Oscar E. Moore** (Librettists) was produced by the Caldwell Theatre in Boca Raton, FL. The new play, adapted from "**La Jument du Roi**" by **Jean Canolle** was given a staged reading by the Caldwell last season and a full production which ran from April 11 through May 23. Quoting artistic Director of the Caldwell, **Michael Hall**: "'The King's Mare' offers us a wonderfully funny and theatrically exciting story of the courtship, marriage and annulment of Henry VIII and the endearing Anne, who

survived Henry's lusty disposition and roving eye, and literally survived the monarch's wives to keep her head."

LET IT RIDE

A ballet choreographed by **Phil LaDuca** (Librettists) at the Vienna Staatsoper Ballet has been so well received that it is being added to the company's the spring repertoire. It will appear on one of the world's most prestigious stages, the Vienna Opera House, on June 19th.

MY HOMETOWN: GEORGE M. COHAN AND THE CITY OF NEW YORK

A musical for young audiences, with book by **Michael Mulder** (Advanced) and musical arrangements by **Clay Zambo** (Advanced) is currently touring elementary schools throughout NYC. The piece, commissioned by **Inside Broadway**, received its public premiere at the Donnell Library on November 20, 1998.

QUEEN OF HEARTS

Music and lyrics by **Claudia Perry** (Advanced), written and directed by **Stephen Stahl** (non-member), played the Harold Clurman Theatre for a limited engagement from March 26 through April 11. The musical, based on the life of Princess Diana, was a presented by **vinni lu productions**.

THE SAD DANCE

Music by **Michael Mulder** (Advanced) was commissioned by **Housing Works** and ran from March 14-28 at the **Connelly Theatre** in the East Village.

In Progress:

A FEW MILES SHY OF THE MOON

Selections from the musical by composer/lyricist **Davia Sacks** (Second Year) were showcased on May 9th at Theater 22, under the auspices of **Lou Rogers** (alumna) and her “**Square One**” **Concert Series**.

TURN YOUR LIFE AROUND

A reading of the new musical by **Charles Kelman** (Advanced) was held at the **Royal Palm Festival Dinner Theatre Center** on April 6, 1999.

PERSONALS

Composer and lyricist or **composer/lyricist** sought for a musical for which the following thumbnail description is provided: “In a small village by the sea, and [its] surrounding (sic) woods, Tom (15–18) cannot come to terms with love, marriage and sex. He escapes from the reality of a loving but possessive mother and a stern, critical father, into a delightful dream that teaches him the

answers to his dilemma. Though it includes witches, the devil and a mermaid, it is not a children’s show. It is very serious, very funny and wonderfully whimsical.” Ad continues: “We have had several highly successful non-musical readings. However the promise of financial support”—the ad does not make clear whether this means financial support to the songwriter or to the production—“comes with the condition that it become a musical.” Call Maria Greco, (212) 247-2011.

OPENING DOORS

D.C. Anderson is collecting original holiday songs for inclusion in one of two songbooks that will be made available to the organizers of “**A Holiday Cabaret 1999**” in each of the participating cities.

The first songbook will be made up of original holiday songs that have been previously performed; the second of brand new holiday songs that the songwriters would allow us to premiere in one or more of the “A Holiday Cabaret 1999” concerts. The only stipulation for the new songs is that they not be performed publicly anywhere before Friday, December 3, 1999. After that date, the songs may be “released,” to be performed or recorded, etc. at the authors’ discretion.

These songbooks will consist

of copies of the collected songs in a binder—made available to the presenters. However, inclusion in the distributed songbook does not guarantee that the song will be performed in any of the concerts. It is up to the organizers and individual performers to make selections from the songbooks, as well as from the currently available repertoire.

Send submissions to D.C. Anderson, Post Office Box 220328, Newhall, CA 91322, by July 1st of this year. A selection of the collected songs will be distributed to event organizers by September 1.

RICHARD RODGERS AWARDS 2000

Full text of official competition rules reads:

Administered by
The American Academy of Arts
and Letters
633 West 155 Street
New York NY 10032

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

Conditions

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

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

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

Application forms may be obtained by sending a self-addressed, stamped envelope to the above address. Deadline: November 1, 1999.

SHELF LIFE

AUDRA McDONALD: WAY BACK TO PARADISE (The Album)

A bestseller, released by **None-such Records** (79482-2) features songs written by Advanced member **Jenny Giering** (*I Follow*) and alumnus **Michael John LaChiusa** (the title song, *Tom* and *Mistress of the Senator*). Produced by **Tommy Krasker**, musical direction by **Eric Stern**, featuring guest artists **Dawn Upshaw**, **Adam Guettel** and **Theresa McCarthy**.

THE GALLERY

A play by **Loretta Novick** (first year), produced in 1988, will be included in “**Ten-to-TwentyMinute Plays for Mature Actors**” to be published by **Dramatic Publishing** in July, 1999.

AND THE WINNER IS...

Amanda Green won this year's Mac Award for **Musical Comedy Performer** as well as the **Special Musical Material/Comedy Song** Award for her song *Everytime a Friend Succeeds*.

“**Captains Courageous**,” book and lyrics by **Patrick Cook** (Committee), music by **Frederick Freyer**

(alumnus) was nominated for **Distinguished Production of a Musical** by the **Drama League** as well as for **Best Musical** by the **Outer Critics Circle**.

The **American Society of Cataract & Refractive Surgery** is proud to announce that **Dr. Charles D. Kelman** (Advanced) has been selected “**Ophthalmologist of the Twentieth Century**” by 33,000 ophthalmologists from around the world for his innovations and contributions in ophthalmology. The gala award presentation took place on April 12, 1999 in Seattle, Washington.

Composer-Pianist **Randy Klein** (Advanced) was nominated for yet another **Southern Regional Emmy Award** in the “**Collaborative Composer**” category with lyricist **Michael Earl** (non-member) for their work on “**Ticktock Minutes**.” Klein's music has won two previous Southern Regional Emmy Awards, the first in 1966 for “**Richard Wright Black Boy**” (a documentary film co-produced by PBS and the BBC); and the second in 1998 for an earlier season of “**Ticktock Minutes**,” which is produced by Mississippi Educational TV. This is Randy's fifth nomination.

A Reminder

The Newsletter will be on hiatus until the Fall, and there will be no issue published for the July/August period. All new announcements and interim listings will be included in the September/October edition.

“Spotlight” On Hiatus

Due to associate editor Frank Evans’ professional commitments, the regular “Spotlight On” feature is on hiatus for this edition of the Newsletter. It will return in the Fall.

Schedule Change Advisories

The Librettists Workshop will have *two added meetings* this Summer: June 7 and June 14 from 6-8 p.m. in the fourth floor lunchroom.

The first Summer Advanced Workshop session will take place Monday, June 28 at 4 PM (instead of the originally scheduled Monday, June 14). The remaining two Summer Workshop dates will be: Monday, July 12 and Monday, August 16. As usual, all classes will be held at 4PM to 6PM.

Come Back to the Cabaret

The rousing success of the **In-House Cabarets** the last two years has been such that they will, with the coming new BMI year, attain the status of regularly scheduled events, one each for the Fall, Winter and Spring seasons. A second **Alumni Cabaret**, establishing that as an *annual* event, is also planned.

By the Way...

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BMI-Lehman Engel Musical Theatre Workshop

Jean Banks – Senior Director

Steering Committee

Patrick Cook

Richard Engquist

Frank Evans

Nancy Golladay

Walter Edgar (“Skip”) Kennon

Annette Leisten

Alan Menken

Susan H. Schulman, M.F.A.

Jane Smulyan

David Spencer

Maury Yeston, Ph.D.

both Ben Schaechter and Sande Campbell have made work sessions. There's coffee, food and, most importantly, copies of my favorite rhyming dictionary and thesaurus. It's also why I try to keep my piano tuned and keep a syllable-dividing dictionary handy.

When David solicited this article, I started counting collaborators on my fingers and ran out. I've written with fourteen composers, two book writers and one co-lyricist (not all full scores—some were songs for specific venues). Everyone is different. Earl Rose, for instance, is business-like. One hour's work, tops. Then work separately and back together for another hour. Earl would sometimes take a lyric and come up with a splendid melody which incorporated the title but not necessarily the exact rhythmic body of the lyric. For his melodies, it was always well worth the lyric rewrite.

There are times when both Doug Katsaros and Ben Schaechter are able to set the first "A" section, only to find that the prosody of the following "A" won't line up quite the same way. Fine. Now we know where the accents are. I always do the lyric rewrite. That's my job.

I pride myself on being able to work either lyric first or melody first. I believe it can really let a composer's work soar. Even comedy numbers can be melody first. You know where the jokes land; you know where the accents are. Just agree on the title.

Take a look at Lerner and

Lane's upbeat ballad, "What Did I Have I Don't Have Now?" The title could appear in almost every line of the "A" section. Lerner chose to put it up top, but because of Lane's melody he was able to use it again at the end to tie everything up. (Lerner almost always worked music-first except when he recycled lyrics he had written with Richard Rodgers for "I Picked a Daisy," which eventually became "On A Clear Day..." with Lane. Do those Rodgers melodies exist anywhere?)

Before I came into the workshop I wrote with a fellow named Gary Lynes (not the cabaret singer) who had a number of pop hits and wanted to cross over into theatre. We sat at twin pianos and worked - probably the most intense "together in the room" collaboration I've ever had. It was probably the most contentious collaboration I've ever had, too, undoubtedly due to the fact that it was the first time I was not writing my own music. The collaboration eventually dissolved, but I learned a great deal:

Never ask your collaborator "Why didn't you think of that *before*?" If he or she had formulated the idea earlier, they would have told you. Writing is a process of evolution.

Composers: if you are not computer savvy, please don't write in ink. I know there's great pride in beautifully copied charts, but let the copy service do it if it means that two eighth-notes can't substitute for a quarter in the fifth go-round of a comedy number when

we've come up with a nifty joke.

Lyricists: try not to bend the sweeping melody of a ballad...Is there any human way you can find a monosyllable that fits on the quarter note without resorting to two eighth-notes?

This contradicts the "Why didn't you think of this earlier...?" principle but...Composers, if you have a gripe about the lyric, let the lyricist know sooner rather than later, particularly before you sit down to do the final arrangement. Don't start cutting out syllables or changing the meter so that it alters the lyric when you're doing the "final" version. There's important information that we got across in 4/4 that won't fit in 3/4. And if we've set your melody, don't go changing it if it alters the words.

In my first workshop year (it was the beginning of the Reagan era), there was a writing team who asked me for advice. They were in dispute over a line, clearly the music and lyric did not jibe and never would. I told them someone had to give and neither did. The next year, the lyricist went back to advertising and I believe the composer is playing cocktail-piano in Jersey.

It comes down to this: respect and compromise. When you reach an impasse, sleep on it, come back fresh. Try to see why your collaborator feels so strongly and conversely why your point of view may be altered. Can you rewrite so that you do not compromise your original premise, but incorporate your collaborator's view as well?

I believe that a bad lyric is as

much the composer's fault as the lyricist's, and that a weak melody must be addressed by the lyricist. We support each other - we can be each other's somewhat fresh eyes. (One composer I worked with had a horrid time getting back to the final A from the B and I recall sitting with him for hours until the modulation made sense.)

If you can start with a book-writer from the get-go, you are so far ahead. Your best ideas may come from the book. And you shouldn't expect your librettist to be a custom tailor whose job it is to stitch your pre-existing songs together. No good writer will want to. Get someone involved early, shop four songs of your score and your idea. Or shop your previous work and suggest a collaboration.

Be selective when a book is offered to you. I've never regretted one I've bypassed. You must feel a passion—a love for the material—that will sustain you for the years it may take to get your show on. I am particularly wary of books which have dummy lyrics the librettist has fashioned. Yes, the librettists should certainly be involved with song *placement*, but something smells wrong when there are scripts filled with what I call "you see" lyrics. (The second line goes to a feminine "e" rhyme and the fourth line is usually "This is very clear, you see." And if something smells wrong...Run. Be kind. Say something like "this just isn't my cup of tea" in your return envelope, but run.)

Modern communication—faxes, e-mail and even more sophisticat-

ed forms of computer interfacing—are fine; but it is much easier to deal with rough spots in person. In the beginning of my collaboration with Ben Schaechter, I asked that he save his notes for me in person. True, because of impending deadlines, we *do* often work by phone and e-mail, lead sheets coming by fax, onto which I write lyrics by hand, for material going into rehearsal the next day. But we've been at this together for a while, and by now we've established a shorthand.

Co-writing lyrics with Richard Engquist, we divided up the pie. We chose which situations we wanted to write for - then once we were done, looked at each other's words. Doug Katsaros, our mutual composer, set a number of new lyrics and let me have free use of his trunk. Doug has an uncanny sense of structure, moving ends of lyrics to the beginning and vice versa. Some of the great fun of co-writing with Richard has occurred when one of us wrote the initial statement of a song and the other wrote its reprise—and since the reprises were always from a different character's point of view, the diction could "feel" unobtrusively different as well.

The joy, the reason we do this, is the writing. The ecstasy comes when we solve the problems. The danger is when new parties enter the mix: directors, producers and God help me, the actors we so dearly need and love. Do not disagree with your collaborator in front of your director or producer. You may suggest ideas, but do not

agree to anything final until you and your collaborators are alone. Even in rehearsal, find a way to be alone and out of earshot. Don't make a lyric change for an actor without consulting your composer first. This is how shows can go down the tubes. If my word doesn't convince you, read Lehman's words about David Merrick. Merrick's credo was to divide and conquer; and kids, the minute you let the producer or director start splitting the creative team, you will never regain your ground. You must show a united front, even when you are simmering underneath.

For my favorite collaborative story, I shall disguise names and cities and shows. So, to protect the guilty, this all took place in Nebraska: I was recommended to a composer of some renown. At the time, the composer was contemplating writing a revue (which would wind up running off-Omaha). I suggested writing an opening and closing number to use as "bookends." "No," he told me, "this isn't a book show, it's a revue." I should have gotten out then, but stayed in for two songs. One music-first, one lyric-first. On the lyric-first, I thought I had summed up the composer's evening by writing a thank-you number to the audience: "You Make the Songs Come Alive." The composer called me and said "Frank, I really love the lyric, but I don't know how to set it." (I later gave it to Sande Campbell and she wrote a very lovely and lively melody.) For the music-first num-

ber, the composer had an okay melody which I was determined to set. The composer had suggested a rather insipid title, but I figured I would try to please the tunesmith and make use of the title anyway. I remembered Maury's "when-song" exercise and employed the same rhetorical device. (A device, by the way, that I suggest you exploit if you are in a similar jam. If a producer or bullheaded composer insists on a maudlin title like "I've Got the Sun," maneuver it around to "*When* I've Got the Sun," and you will have many more lyric possibilities.) So I wrote a "when" lyric to fit the melody—even after the Nebraska composer refused to alter a musical phrase which was giving me trouble.

I sent a fax of the lyric to the composer, who, off in Nebraska, was in a different time zone - in more ways than one, for the composer called me a few days later and said "Frank, I really love the lyric you wrote but I don't know how to set it."

Collaboration over.

View #3: LOOK FOR THE UNION LABEL

by Patrick Cook

I once called my collaborator Rick Freyer at work and one of his co-workers answered the phone. After hearing it was me, the fellow handed the phone to Rick saying, "It's your other wife."

My advice for long term collaborators? Present a united front. Always. Whether it's a reading, a workshop, or a production. Everyone involved with your piece should know that anything they say to you, they're also saying to your collaborator.

Producers, directors, set designers, choreographers—everyone wants their own way. And if they think they can play one of you off the other, they won't hesitate to do so. Don't let it happen. If you begin to mistrust your partner, you're in for a bumpy ride. Before any production meeting, sit down with your collaborator and decide how you feel about things. Hash it out before you face anyone else. If you're going to argue, do it then.

By presenting a united front you not only double your clout, but you appear more confident and command greater respect. If you're not sure how your collaborator feels about something, find out fast! If you're in a meeting, take five. Call for a bathroom break. But find out.

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In any real production of your show, you're going to need a friend, confidant, and partner. If that can be your collaborator, you're way ahead of the game.

View #4:

THE FIRST FEW HOURS

by Nancy Golladay

Here's a fact of showbiz life: If creative partnerships are going to go wrong, they will very likely start to go wrong at the first meeting. Theater folk are not noted for their reserve. So despite nervousness, inarticulateness, lack of social skills, or other impedimenta, potential collaborators must keep their instincts wide awake and pay close attention to what potential partners are actually putting forth and holding back in the initial discussion.

The exploration process leading toward the choice of a project is not collaboration as such, but early brainstorming sessions set a pattern that may affect how high a new collaboration is going to fly. Let's imagine a common situation—a bookwriter, a lyricist, and a composer are all looking for an existing story to adapt. All three are friendly without being friends, though the lyricist and composer have written a few songs together and are beginning to feel bonded.

The bookwriter is, in theory,

ranking Story Person, so once coffee has been drunk, note pads brought out, telephones put on mute, children displayed, and the onset of any actual work postponed for as long as humanly possible, he opens the discussion: "I had a one-act play produced two years ago that I want to rewrite as a musical. It's about—." Here the composer interrupts and says, "Nothing personal against your script, but since none of us is a 'name' yet, isn't it a more bankable idea to pick a story with title recognition?" The lyricist says, "I read your script and it was great, but we wrote a 10-minute musical already, and we're not looking for another one-act. What else?"

There are several things to be learned from this brief exchange. First, though the composer apparently concedes that he's a peer, he already feels like enough of a star to interrupt another writer in mid-sentence. Second, though the lyricist has the more graceful manner, she doesn't know too much about musical-theater book, or she'd know that since songs eat up stage time, an hour-long play may contain ample raw material for a musical; therefore any future well-intentioned but uninformed opinions from her may prove as irrelevant as her flattery. Third, the lyricist's "*I read your script,*" indicates that she's aware her composer *hasn't* read it and probably never will, but she is nonetheless volunteering for the unenviable job of Collaboration Peacekeeper. And fourth, despite the use of the word "bankable," neither songwriter has

much real business sense, or they would have immediately sat forward and asked, "Produced? Where?"

But the bookwriter wants to show he's a good team player. So instead of confidently continuing to enumerate the virtues of his one-act a bit longer - why not, since he can feel fairly certain the composer hasn't read it and the lyricist doesn't understand where he intends to go with it? - he immediately switches to a different story-pitch. Both songwriters, their characters forged in that branch of the Klingon Empire commonly known as "music school," contentedly think, "What a wimp," and settle back for a nice grazing session. An hour later, the bookwriter has pitched every adaptation idea he has, from venerable public-domain novellas to the boffo movie opening tomorrow at a theater near you, but the songwriters are still saying, "Nope, doesn't sound like us. What else you got?"

Though these folks may eventually agree on a property, the collaboration has already gone lopsided, and their creative process will suffer from here on out. Everyone's attention is now focused on accommodating their individual wants instead of on making choices to serve the future show. What has been spawned here is an ongoing competition, not a collaboration.

What went wrong? The meeting turned into an audition. Two-thirds of the team stopped working and went shopping. Ironically,

they won't find what they're looking for that way. How can any concept "feel like you" until you've tried putting something of yourself into it? (Although for this example I made the bookwriter the odd man out, the same aggravation can of course befall songwriters trying to haul a bookwriter on board to script an idea the songwriters have in mind.)

The thing is: When a major goal of the meeting is to learn if you can all work together, everybody's gotta DO some *work*.

Those truly interested in making a collaboration happen must offer their fair share of ideas; or at least do constructive riffs on the main idea being put forward. How else can anyone expect to infer anything about how the work process might evolve, much less about the suitability of a given project for this set of workers? At the trial-run phase of a collaboration, it's not the primary task of a writer to sell his ideas or himself. People can and should check out the credentials of possible partners reasonably well before a face-to-face confrontation. Instead, writers should offer a practical demonstration of their skills by illustrating to the others how they'd attempt to create the best show possible if they were actually fully committed to work with the proposed material.

Like "I before E except after C" this ideal is far easier to articulate than to put into practice. But writers whose choices are directed by what they think will be best for their *show* obviously have the bet-

ter chance of retaining their sanity through the long haul, as well as of finishing the process with results of which they feel proud. So it's worth making the effort to push meetings forward with "show first"—not book first, lyrics first, or music first—as the underlying mission.

Let's picture the same trio as before. Only in this scenario, the songwriters interrupt only to ascertain that the bookwriter's one-act was produced in Louisville for four weeks and broke even. The composer then goes on to say: "Yeah, we both read your play, that's why we wanted to meet. Problem is, a big reason we loved it is because it reminded us a lot of the 10-minute musical we wrote at about the same time. So maybe we shouldn't go down the same road twice."

The bookwriter thinks, then says, "Damn! You're right. I listened to your demo tape, but I didn't make the connection. Okay. We can always come back to my play if we don't come up with something else." "Preferably public domain," says the lyricist. "Okay," the bookwriter says, "I always wanted to do a Shakespeare play as a musical." The lyricist winces and says, "No way! I don't write that kind of verse!" Then, getting a grip on herself, she remembers to *collaborate*, and adds, "But I write big emotions well, if we could do it in modern language." The composer now wants to tell how he can best serve the show, and adds, "People like my romantic stuff." The

bookwriter goes with this input and says, "Well, you can't get much more romantic than 'Romeo and Juliet.' Whaddaya think?" The composer looks worried, and says, "That could get dreary and slow-paced." The lyricist says, "Not if we keep it violent." Agreeing, the bookwriter says, "I like to write action scenes." The composer perks up, and says, "How violent? You mean like street gangs?" In unison, lyricist and bookwriter warble: "Faaaaaautiful!"

And they're off and running, at least until they remember that "West Side Story" has already been written. Still, it was a good first meeting: Everyone carried his or her weight, everyone learned something about the strengths of the rest of the team, and everyone left the room with a feeling of accomplishment. Most important, no one is dreading the next meeting. So the odds for these partners are promising, despite their shaky knowledge of American musical theater history. Hey, even the best collaborations have problems, right?

View #5:

YOU'RE ONLY AS GOOD AS YOUR PARTNER - AND VICE VERSA

by David Spencer

How About Dinner and a Movie Sometime?

Collaboration, the cliché goes, is like marriage; but I find that to be a misleading homily. The marriage part doesn't come until much later.

At first, collaboration is like dating.

And I mean, *exactly* like dating.

After long, hard experience, and more youthful mistakes than I care to think about (or discuss), I've come to realize that I can determine, after one meeting (usually after a few *minutes* of one meeting), whether or not I want to see the person again in a collaborative context, and indeed whether or not I *should*. It's not always a determination that comes with any facts or objective truths attached. Nor does it matter how talented—or even well-intentioned and pleasant—the other person is; if there's no personal synergy between us, I'm outta there: life's too short, and the work's too hard. Like most experienced people, my antenna is attuned to *obvious* danger signs—manipulative tactics, intellectual laziness, lack of enthusiasm and/or preparation,

grandstanding, false pretensions of intimacy, disingenuousness, etc.—but as often as not, the signals are inexplicable in any rational sense. It's a reading from my intuition...what I call my antenna. Every time I've trusted it, things worked out well. Any time I've tried to resist it, I wound up in trouble. And the same seems to have been true for virtually every other writer I've spoken to on the subject. Which is why I liken the process of seeking a partner to the quest for romance.

That said, there is a practical caveat: Let's say you're a relatively "unknown" writer and you suddenly get the opportunity to test-run a collaboration with someone on the A-list—an experienced, renowned and *universally acknowledged* Broadway veteran. And let's say this guy is more neurotic than you're comfortable with, or doesn't get your sense of humor, or whatever. Obviously, you'd be crazy not to try the collaboration on for size, not to do everything within reason to make it work. But remember, this A-list player is no less human than the unknown writer you rejected for the same reason. Chemistry is chemistry no matter *what* the stakes are; and you must further deal with the political reality: the veteran is higher up on the food chain than you are and there may not be parity where creative power or influence is concerned. There may be other factors at play that mitigate these concerns—perhaps the director brought you into the project, etc.—but if your instinct

says the odds are too heavily stacked against a healthy working environment (not your insecurity or your stage fright or some niggling apprehension that you might not deliver the goods—that’s normal—but your *survival* instinct), save yourself the time and the heartache and *trust the feeling*.

Which brings me to the next hard-won truth...

It’s Never Too Late to Bail—

—not until the contracts are signed and you’re in the land of legal commitments. But until that point, if you find yourself in a dysfunctional relationship, or laboring to make viable a project (or an approach to a project) that you fundamentally don’t believe in, *nothing stops you from jumping ship*. I have heard more writers than I can remember say that they’ll stay with a doomed project or an impossible collaborator because *they’ve invested so much time...they’ve done so much work, some of it really good...maybe there’s a chance...* endless, endless excuses, all boilerplate, and none more valid at rock bottom than those that keep a battered wife going back to an abusive husband—or that keep a strained marriage together “for the sake of the children.” (Again, liken the collaborative paradigm to a life-partner or constant-companion parallel. The truths are *precisely* the same.) Bad situations will only exponentially worsen, and any project that goes into production burdened with dysfunction on the

creative team is finished before it starts. When there’s chronic trouble, follow the advice of that house in *The Amityville Horror* and—hear it in a slow, hushed whisper with added reverb—*get out*.

The dissolution of a collaboration may not always be easy...in many cases, there are questions of project ownership, rights to work that has already been completed, etc. I won’t address those here, for two reasons: (1) Most of the time, the project is so accursed or misconceived that the perceived loss is not worth the battle. (2) I’m not qualified to discuss the legalities of the rare cases where such questions may indeed be legitimate, save to say that Collaboration Agreements—the industry pre-nups—can be very helpful. (Though *personally* I have very mixed feelings about them. Depending upon circumstances, personalities and negotiated issues, such a document can as well be a Faustian bargain whose price is mutual trust. This is an *extremely* tough call, and *I would never advise any writer to eschew protection*. Especially when underlying rights and first dibs on intellectual property are concerned. I can only tell you *I’ve* never had a fruitful collaboration in which the parties felt it necessary to hammer out written rules of the road. It’s only for a few collaborations that *didn’t* work out that Collaboration Agreements were in place. That said, *never refuse a collaborator who asks for one*—for that can engender its own distrust.

A Collaboration Agreement, mixed blessing though it may be, is a legitimate request.)

Remember, what's *really* at stake here is your psychological health. The work we do is *so* personal, and we are *so* exposed while going through the birth process, that we need to be part of a support system that will nourish and encourage our efforts and enthusiasm as much as possible. Very little takes a hit to your self-esteem and creativity as effectively as an oppressive or negative partnership...or an insecure-feeling project.

But let's say you find a collaboration that works.

Lucky you. But don't take it for granted.

Any good collaboration requires mutual...

Maintenance (Internal)

You and your collaborator(s) represent the Primary Creative Team. That's the nucleus. Everybody else is Secondary or Tertiary, with the arguable exception of some directors, but that must be determined on a case-by-case basis. (Someone like Hal Prince, for example, will obviously be counted as a Primary force whether you like it or not, and will be hands-on—and very likely project leader—from the beginning. A director who co-authors is also, clearly, Primary. But in a majority of other cases, directors are *reactive*, they come in *later*. They may be brilliant—in fact, let's *hope* they're brilliant—but you're not

obliged to invite them into the Primary Inner Sanctum. And in some cases you're better off not to; not until you've completed a full draft that you feel has the integrity and solidity to *withstand* a director's input.) This doesn't mean you should keep other personnel remote or at bay...but it's important to have a protected, privileged "space" that is for you and your collaborator(s) alone.

Traditionally—to state the obvious—there are no more than three people in the Primary loop: the composer, the lyricist, the librettist; and no less than two, at least one of whom would be a "hyphenate": a composer-lyricist, a lyricist-librettist, etc. It's important to go over this rudimentary information for the following reason:

Two is easier to maintain than three—or more (for example, when the book is co-written by a fourth party). The more bodies there are in the mix, the harder it is to keep checks and balances in place. But you must.

Since two-person collaborations are the ones with which I've had the most experience and the most success, I'll use that as the template, and touch upon variables introduced by three-or-more later.

Establish early on and with clear, considerate, respectful conversation—and a grace period of trial-and-error—where the comfortable lines of demarcation between your disciplines lie. There are no hard and fast rules here other than the ones you determine

among yourselves.

For example: I've had several collaborations in which I was lyricist to other composers. One composer considered it the height of rudeness for me to suggest a rhythmic scan, and held the primacy of the composer to decide *anything* musical as an inviolate principle. Another composer quickly came to the conclusion that the patterns in which I conceived lyrics—since I am myself a composer—were too idiosyncratic to impose his will upon; he just flat-out asked me what style of music I had in mind and asked me to read the lyric out loud in strict, time-signature-specified rhythm; he had the power of veto and sometimes used it...but not before considering the alternative. (Incidentally, with both of these composers, I also, on occasion, worked music first. Curiously, in this regard, both were equally flexible.)

All librettists are different too. I've worked with one who didn't want me to invent any dialogue at all; another who encouraged me to noodle and rearrange, as music was introduced into the mix, not wanting to second-guess the precise nuances of book-into-song integration; another who was mildly proprietary but never said "no" when I asked, "Do you mind if I sketch something out here, 'cuz I think it'll be clearer than if I try to describe it."

What's important is not a predetermined idea of how the interplay should work—but rather that *both parties feel that they're*

respected partners in the gestation process leading to those work routines.

Having had my share of both amicable and contentious relationships, those that developed over time and those that had immediate rules imposed, I've learned that it's best to *begin* with what I call the "After you, Alphonse" approach. You will certainly cross-pollinate where *ideas* are concerned, but where sheer *nuts-and-bolts* are concerned, respect the totality of your collaborator's domain; don't do any part of his or her job (even if only by way of giving "dummy" examples) until you're invited to participate...or until asking your partner if you might try something feels unforced, unobtrusive and unthreatening. If there's sufficient trust and productivity, the line of demarcation will, in time, naturally soften and yield to a more natural, organic shape.

To be sure, there are gray areas: the aforementioned lyric scansion—neither composer nor lyricist can claim it as exclusive birthright; lead-in dialogue going to song, and internal dialogue *within* a song are likewise negotiable between lyricist and librettist. So *negotiate*. Remember the line Peter Stone wrote for cantankerous old Stephen Hopkins in "1776": "In all my years I never heard, seen nor smelled an issue that was so dangerous it couldn't be *talked* about!"

Collaborations of three or more may not naturally lend themselves to a constant communal atmos-

phere. When “Gypsy” was being written, for example, lyricist Stephen Sondheim was—in a creative sense—an intermediary, much of the time. Knowing that the grunt work of conception, dramaturgy and story structure were not composer Jule Styne’s forte (that, indeed, Styne’s thought process was a little too eccentric and volatile to be helpful when more reasoned analysis was called for), he would work with librettist Arthur Laurents separately. The two wordsmiths would deal with script issues, and then Sondheim would take those solutions to Styne, who required a different collaborative interplay, for development of the score. This is not an uncommon method of working: many composer/lyricist/librettist teams function according to a similar dynamic.

Nonetheless, the lines of communication have to remain open. It’s okay for collaborators to work in discrete combinations. What’s *not* okay is collaborative conspiracy: e.g. the lyricist and composer deciding that the librettist is a liability, and making an end-run around him to the director. (Yes, I know things like this happen—but the truth is, if you examine the history of the shows whose out-of-town tryouts or previews sustained serious creative team rifts or replacements, you’ll find that *most* of them failed.) Disagreements must be aired openly, immediately and—despite passions—reasonably...if not always coolly. Keep in mind, *you all want the same thing*, to make the show

better. And keep in mind, too, that it is *just a show*. I don’t mean to minimize what “a show” means to an artist—certainly mine mean a helluva lot to *me*—I mean merely to encourage a sense of perspective. Nobody will live or die over a musical, no matter what anybody does or says. It’s an *entertainment*. It can be *solved*. Take deep breaths, stay rational, don’t go crazy and—very important—don’t let the craziness of others rattle you. If only *one* person in a fierce disagreement remembers to keep a lid on his temper and keep the discussion focused, that’s *usually* enough to get past the rough spots that inevitably do arise.

And when the rough spots do arise—

Keep them confidential!

The inner workings of the Primary Creative Team are *nobody else’s business*. *Never* expose your disagreements, at least never in *any way* that lets *anyone* think that your interests and loyalties can be divided. If an opportunistic director, producer or star senses that s/he can play one of you off against the other—s/he will, 85% of the time (a *very* conservative estimate). And then you might as well draw your own chalk outline and fit yourself for a toe-tag. Because but for the lying down, you’re already a corpse. And so’s the show.

And speaking of landmines...

While most principles of collaboration can be filed under S.O.P. (standard operating procedure) with applicable variations, there is a more controversial, volatile sce-

nario that must be mentioned, because it describes a reality most of us encounter, at one point or another:

What if you're in a collaboration that's yielding genuinely terrific work—but your collaborator, however artistically capable and diligent, is—let's put this diplomatically—emotionally problematic, beyond any hope of reform or interpersonal negotiation? If the difficult behavior primarily shows up *in private*, the answer depends *entirely* upon your stamina. Assuming you can handle the angst, can understand and be philosophical about your partner's patterns, and honestly believe you can make it through the writing and production of an entire show (two to three years at a *minimum*, folks), then bear up as long as you can—and keep yourself open to other collaborations: you don't want to be joined at the hip to that kind of draining energy, not without some kind of relief or release. (This also includes having someone knowledgeable to talk to, because if you can't periodically vent, and be reassured that *you're* not the nutcase, you'll implode. Since venting *necessitates* a violation of confidentiality, choose your confessors and advisors *carefully*.) If, on the other hand, your partner's behavioral psychoses show up in *public* displays—and clearly demonstrate the potential to sabotage production opportunities and relationships with other industry professionals—then I would say cut your losses and run, run, *runnnn* like a little girl from an

angry bee. *Once the environment becomes poisonous enough to seep beyond collaborative controls, good work is almost never enough to compensate for bad reputations.* (One of the most chilling snatches of conversation I ever overheard happened between a producer and an agent. The Producer: "Why don't we see if [name withheld] is available to direct?" The Agent: "I guess he's okay. I can't tell you he's not still drinking, though." The Producer: "Oh...*Next!*" For the record: this conversation took place in the early '80s. Name Withheld—a competent professional but a verbally vicious alcoholic, whose young work once enjoyed moderate prominence and bright potential—is still, bitterly, around. And his career has never recovered. And never will.)

Which brings us to—

Maintenance (External)

Director Susan Schulman once told the Librettists class a story about her experience directing the vest-pocket revival of "Sweeney Todd." Sondheim had been getting production notes from the producers, and in all cases, he advised them to express their concerns to the director. He confided in Schulman that this was a familiar tactic: producers approaching "the muscle" of a given production (in this case Sondheim) to make their influence felt; specifically, in this case, to sidestep the less politically powerful female director. But, Sondheim

counseled her, long experience had taught him that, *in production, a musical is the director's game*, insofar as the director *must* be perceived as the head of the operation, and *must* be the authority figure from which information is disseminated and to whom all must report. Any other scenario, he asserted, would result in chaos. He assured Schulman that he would never endorse, condone or cooperate with any effort to undermine her position. And, of course, in the way for which he is famous, Sondheim was absolutely as good as his word.

Though the above isn't, strictly speaking, a story about collaborative writers, it is nonetheless a *flawless* model of collaborative etiquette. First and foremost, where "the outside world" is concerned, the members of a collaborative team *must* understand the importance of protecting each other. *Nothing* must be allowed to invade, or compromise the integrity of, the Primary Creative Team. Never let *anyone* in a position of power—director, producer, star, *anyone*—speak to you off the record or confidentially about your partner (at the very least, not about your partner's work on the project). If, for example, you're a lyricist, and you get a late night phone call about the bookwriter's work, you can almost always bet the caller has already *tried* speaking to the bookwriter, or doesn't *want* to talk to the bookwriter directly, and is trying to make a detour past forthright communication. In such an instance, there are

only two acceptable responses (including variations thereof): (1) "That's very interesting. But keep in mind, the libretto is my partner's bailiwick and it's ultimately his decision. I'll tell my collaborator what you called me to say about his work, though." Or, even better: (2) "That's very interesting. I suggest you call my partner and tell him what you think." This cool, reasoned response, if adhered to assiduously, will always frustrate attempts to divide and conquer. Because it tells all would-be intruders, in no uncertain terms, that you and your collaborator(s) have no secrets from each other...that there are no anonymous sources...that duplicity will not be sanctioned...that anything said to one member of the team will be reported to the other(s). Don't be soft-soaped, don't be flattered into submission, don't be bullied, don't be finessed or manipulated, don't be good cop/bad copped. Because you can bet, the boat-rockers will try to *make* you be. Stick to your resolve in this. Politely. But firmly.

Sometimes, happily, you're not dealing with duplicity, but with a more honorable head-on situation, such as a talking heads session with other people on the production team. As many of you know, I've written two shows for Theatreworks USA. That company's artistic director, Jay Harnick, is famously, *obsessively* hands-on (to put it mildly), and calls regular meetings to assess a new show at every phase of its development. If he asks me a question about a

matter that my collaborator, librettist-director Rob Barron, and I are still trying to solve, I don't have any problem saying to Jay, "I really can't discuss that right now. Rob and I need to deal with that in private first." And, to his credit, Jay will always honor the boundary of privilege. Similarly, if it seems that an objective opinion about an unresolved matter might be useful, I'll turn to Rob and ask: "Would you mind if I brought up what we were debating?" Rob is unusually even-handed, and will invariably say "Go ahead." But if he ever expressed ambivalence, I'd back off and table airing those views for another time. (It's perfectly fine to let a director or producer know—via cordial behavior—that you and your partner operate by a protocol that needs to be respected.) A truthful "We [or I] don't know the answer to that yet" is also a perfectly legitimate response that protects your privacy and your work process. (All that said: what if you're in a situation with a director or producer whose impatience, or whose natural energy, doesn't allow you to be as selectively guarded? In that case, take the time with your collaborator to discuss the person in question—his patterns, behaviors, methods, biases, intentions, etc.—and, based on that, devise your "second best" strategies and/or protections. There will *always* be situations in which you'll have to improvise. Just try not to be flying blind when they arise.)

I know of one team of writers who have developed a code

between them: key words that mean one thing to "the outside world" and something entirely different to each other. If they're at a meeting with a dramaturg, say, who makes what seems an alarming suggestion, the concerned member of the team will say, "Hmm. That's possible." Which translates as, "That's the worst idea I've ever heard in my life!" It's a brilliant protective strategy: politically sound yet efficiently communicative *right there in the moment*, where such things can count. Talk about the Buddy System!

Always Ask

A few stray principles:

Never give out any collaborative material (tapes, scores, scripts, etc.) before clearing it with your partner(s).

Never make appointments, arrange meetings, schedule commitments, accept or refuse work, without consulting your partner(s). Similarly, never implement impulsive, eleventh-hour alterations to an understanding (for example—I know of a case where this actually happened—inviting producer X to a presentation that has been primarily assembled for the benefit of producer Y). You're in the game together. You *must* play like you're on the same team.

Never take an outside meeting that doesn't include your partner(s)—unless express permission has been given, with complete understanding of how you are to represent the team's interests, and what the meeting is

meant to accomplish.

Never assume your partner's agreement to, or refusal to accept, any set of working or presentation conditions (e.g. personnel, casting, locale, etc.). In many situations a collaborator will give you a proxy—e.g. often (but not always!) a librettist will trust the music department to cast a demo without his/her formal approval—but remember that each collaboration is unique in this regard; don't assume that procedures taken for granted in one collaboration will perforce apply to another. (Remember dating: you don't want to get caught murmuring *one* person's name while being intimate with someone *else*...)

The Business End

Easy one: *Don't do business...* not with producers and not with each other (and don't be suckered by anyone who tells you differently)! *Business* is what agents and lawyers are for. (If you haven't got formal representation, and money is a problem, The Dramatists Guild gives free legal counseling in certain contractual matters and Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts should be able to advise and assist you on others. I recently won a trademark infringement case with a young VLA attorney.) Prior to getting a commitment for a production, finding a reliable agent to represent you can be something of a challenge...but once producers express interest, it only makes business-sense for agents to be interested, too. Whether one agent

should represent the project, or the collaborators should have individual agents, is a judgment call. Assess the situation on its merits. If a collaborator wants separate representation, that's his/her right—don't make that a personal issue.

Surprisingly, despite the above, the basic formula governing money issues is a standard no-brainer. Where expenses are concerned, each discipline (book, music, lyrics) is responsible for a third. This is true no matter how many people are on the Primary Creative Team. Thus, if you are a composer-lyricist or lyricist-librettist, you cover two thirds of any outgoing cost. What makes this fair is the fact that you *receive* two thirds of the royalties when money starts coming *in*, because each discipline *nets* a third as well. Likewise, if there are two librettists, each is responsible for one sixth of the expenses. (I do know *one* team of two writers—a librettist-lyricist and composer—who split expenses and royalties fifty/fifty...but they're exclusive to each other, a long term "marriage.") The only expense that a team of two *should* split fifty-fifty—or that an oddly numbered team should divide evenly across the board—is the option fee for any property upon which they might base a musical. This is best handled as an even breakdown because, in order for there to be at least a semblance of legal and creative parity, all parties must

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R₁ I₇ C₃ H₄ A₇ R₁ D₂ S₁
A₁ L₁ M₃ A₁ N₁ A₁ C₃

by Richard Engquist

Once upon a time . . .

Is there a more bewitching phrase in any language? Those four little words grab our attention and invite us to flee the mundane and enter the magic world of story.

Let's be grateful for that early ancestor who—beside a clan campfire in a cave somewhere on a winter's evening ages ago—first began to embellish the account of the day's hunting or gathering, with details that may or may not have happened. What stirred in that primitive brain to prompt the notion that straight reportage could be improved upon with some imagination? Whatever it was, how fortunate for humankind that story-telling came to be; and that the factual was transformed into the mythical.

For untold generations, few people could read or write, and story-telling reigned supreme. From *Beowulf* and *The Iliad* to the present, narrative has dazzled, enchanted and illuminated. And recent decades have witnessed a tremendous resurgence of the art of story-telling. Garrison Keillor holds millions enthralled weekly with his tales of Lake Wobegon.

Spalding Gray has perfected the autobiographical narrative in "Swimming to Cambodia" and other theatre pieces that have the weight of novelettes, if not full-scale novels. The one-person show is now ubiquitous, with countless actor/writers mining their life experiences and finding audiences with varying degrees of success.

Stories—usually in the form of monologues—are very useful to dramatists. At some critical point in the plot a character will reveal (in the form of reminiscence) crucial information that supplies backstory and brings the entire dramatic action into focus. A classic example now on view is Hickey's monologue toward the end of "The Iceman Cometh." Or recall the bone-chilling narrative that provides the climax of "Suddenly Last Summer." Planting a story in the middle of a dramatization can be a powerful device if done skillfully. (The current "The Weir" is, in fact, a collection of stories under the umbrella of a play. Whether it adds up to a play is a matter of debate.)

In films, something similar to

dramatic monologue is accomplished with flashback, in which we have a scene played out in retrospect in lieu of linear narrative. Musical theatre too has often made use of interpolated stories in various forms, including flashbacks. I'm not referring to a piece like "Into the Woods," which is entirely made up of folk- or folk-like tales. Nor do I mean "story theater," wherein actors narrate and act out simultaneously.

What I refer to is the case where the action stops and someone tells a story. Opera and operetta are full of such moments, either to supply backstory, to flesh out character, or simply to entertain. Where would Gilbert and Sullivan be without those moments when the comic baritone gives us (in patter) the story of his life? Brecht and Weill frequently have their characters reminisce, or simply tell stories in song form. These moments work because the material itself is dramatic, is used for a dramatic purpose, or comments on the action. For example, the Macheath-Tiger Brown duet in "The Threepenny Opera" clarifies their relationship, gives us information about their past, and serves up also a robust, cynical song that gets our feet tapping and our minds working.

In classic American musicals we find fewer examples of stopping-the-action-for-a-story. Mama Rose does not calm down long enough to favor us with an exquisite folk-song, as the Merry Widow does with *Villia*. Nevertheless, we can still find a multitude of story-

songs which accomplish a multitude of things: *My Mother's Wedding Day* from "Brigadoon" delineates comic character. In "110 in the Shade," Starbuck spins a yarn for Lizzie that changes the way she (and we) feel about him.

Similarly, Tevye and Quixote/Cervantes bring dreams to life in song-story form, as does Nicely-Nicely Johnson with *Sit Down, You're Rocking the Boat* ("Guys and Dolls"). In Bock & Harnick's "Tenderloin" we get the hilarious parody of a Victorian tear-jerker, *Artificial Flowers*, which may not have much to do with the story but certainly perks up the show. In Sondheim's "Follies," Phyllis tells *The Story of Lucy and Jessie* (alternately *Ah, But Underneath!*, depending on which version of the show you listen to) which lays bare her soul and gives her a depth we would not see otherwise. And, of course, in any number of classic shows narrative monologues—both serious and comic—are all over the place. Can we imagine "The Music Man" without the story song *76 Trombones*?

The title song in "Cabaret" is a story song. Kander and Ebb often use the device, as do Comden and Green (remember the witty urban tale, *What a Waste*, in "Wonderful Town"?) and as did Rodgers and Hart (*To Keep My Love Alive*, *Zip*, *Johnny One-Note*, to name just a few).

Story songs are a staple of the musical revue—the form is ideal: a self-contained narrative within a narrow space. Think of *Guess*

Who I Saw Today, Have Some Madeira, M'Dear, The Hippopotamus Song, and hundreds of others. Great revue songs are like great Country-and-Western narrative songs: short-short stories, each with a beginning, a middle and an end. Americans love short takes!

Storytelling is an exquisite art form which should be part of the arsenal of every theatre writer. To do it well, and to use it well—these are consummations devoutly to be wished. But when all is said and done, story-telling is *not* dramatization. By definition it is not “in the moment”—what we *hear about* is not as gripping as what we *see*. Like the flashback, the story song is a bit removed, a bit cool, to be used judiciously and not as a perpetual substitute for the white heat of the dramatic scene.

To me, those musicals which are “framed” by narrative have always been a touch less exciting than those in which I’m persuaded that the action is taking place before my eyes. Which has more juice: the old “Annie Get Your Gun” (however crude) or the new one with its distancing device? Am I alone in imagining that there is a striking difference?

As theatre writers, we’ve got to strive to be dramatists first and foremost. But it won’t hurt if we also know how to tell a good story. Don’t forget, a good story can accomplish everything from putting the kids to sleep to keeping the audience awake. Awake, alert and applauding!

“Five Views on Collaboration” (continued)

control the underlying rights equally. (It’s feasible that you might enter into a collaboration in which someone *already* controls an option on underlying rights—the producer, or a new collaborator—but then you may wish to have a representative negotiate your protections, since, by definition, the possibility exists that you can be removed from the project with no legal claim to “intellectual property” in the earnings from its future development.)

And When in Doubt...

...remember how it all started. With your intuition—your dating-savvy radar. Your antenna’s functionality goes far beyond that first meeting. If a situation niggles at you, feels inherently unbalanced, somehow—whether on your end, the end of a partner, or that of an outside influence—the chances are your instinct is right. Examine the situation, discuss it, don’t be rash, and almost always you’ll find a principle, just under the surface, that will guide you safely. Don’t be intimidated by the complexities and subtleties you encounter, have faith in your moral/professional center...

...and whenever possible, say it with flowers.