



Recorded Events

Behind the Songs with Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty

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[00:00:38] Thank you so much. We are so excited over at the Fifth Avenue to be partnering with The Seattle Public Library and these community conversations and we're so thankful that you all decided to come here on this beautiful Monday sunny night in Seattle. I don't know what you're doing inside it's gorgeous out there. Well we're going to wow you with some songs tonight and a wonderful conversation at the Fifth. We're currently presenting "Marie - Dancing Still", a new musical based on the life of and the world of the young ballet student who inspired the masterpiece by Dagmar. The little dancer. And tonight we have two very special guests with us the writers of Lynn Ahrens who wrote the book and lyrics and Stephen Flaherty who composed the music. Ahrens similarity we're gonna embarrass you a little bit. You are considered the foremost theatrical songwriting team of their generation and that's true. They are. They of course wrote the Tony Award winning score for the musical masterpiece ragtime and began their Broadway career with the irresistible. Yes. Applause applause and they began their career with the irresistible Caribbean flavored songs for once on this island which will be at the Fifth Avenue next season.

[00:01:48] Yes give that a round of applause to applause their ingenious musical based on the works of Dr. Seuss is one of the most frequently produced musicals in America since 1990. They've written a dozen major musicals for Broadway and for Lincoln Center Theater. They're recipients of the Oscar Hammerstein award for lifetime achievement. They got it in 2014. They were inducted into the theater hall of fame. Lynn and Stephen were most recently represent on Broadway by Anastasia which expands their songs from the hit film into a sweeping stage score filled with adventure and intrigue as well as the Tony Award winning revival of ones on this island. We're gonna begin tonight with a song from Anastasia Anya an amnesiac street girl in Paris becomes convinced that she may be the Romanoff Princess Anastasia thought to have been killed during the Russian Revolution. Here we have Sarah Davis one of musical theater and Seattle's favorite stars and she's currently starring in your own town as hope. She's going to sing on the US anthem of hope.

[00:02:46] See what I did there I see. Yes. Journey to the past

[00:03:01] Heart. Don't fail me now. Courage don't tease certainly. Don't turn back now that we're here. People always say life is full of choices no one ever mentions fear or how the world can seem so. Fast. On this journey to

[00:03:43] Somewhere down this road I know some one's waiting years of dreams just can't be right.

[00:03:52] Oh arms will open wide. I'll be safe and wanted. Finally home where I well starting now I'm learning. On this journey. To the. Love. Family there was once a time I must still have them to

[00:04:39] Me. I will never be complete until I find you.

[00:04:49] One step at a time. One hope then another who knows where this road may go.

[00:04:58] Oh. Back to who I was on to find my future things in my heart. Still need to know.

[00:05:09] Yes. Let this be a sign. Let the road be mine. Let it lead me to my. Past. Bring me. Thank you Sarah

[00:05:43] So I could sit here and just rattle on for a while but I think we should bring Lynne and Stephen up to actually talk to them. I think that's what you're here for. Women

[00:05:52] Steven. It's time for the hard hitting questions we're gonna dig deep down. Yes you know I don't want to leave Anastasia quite so quick. It's got me a bunch questions but I want to ask you like what drew you to Anastasia as material to turn into a musical. Well a musical film and then ultimately a Broadway production. Yeah. Well Hollywood called

[00:06:16] And we didn't say no.

[00:06:18] In 1997 I guess it was released till early years to make the movie yet but we've got a telephone call from someone we knew at 20th Century Fox who was the executive on the on the movie and he invited us to audition for it which we did and we won it.

[00:06:36] So we did this wonderful movie and all these years later we thought we kept thinking over the years it would make a great full fledged musical. You know what animated movies usually have about five songs in them space for about five or six songs and we wanted to go deeper and do more and you may or may not know this but when we were writing the score for Anastasia at the very same time you're writing the score for ragtime.

[00:06:59] So this was just get ladies and gentlemen this will give you an I a glimpse into the Hollywood process. Ragtime is a theater piece that has 35 songs in it and it took the same amount of time to get six into the animated thing.

[00:07:14] You know because there are so many chains of command in Hollywood so it's not like you know so clearly it's more of a producer generated field where where you know theater you know we get to be like the Kings Grace and theater and the Queen.

[00:07:28] We own the copyrights in theater if anybody is a writer in theater you own your own copyright in the movies you don't and you are a writer for hire so if they don't like a song you say that's all right. There's more where that came from. And you do another test so we probably wrote 50 songs for a stage to get six you know.

[00:07:44] So it was so funny hearing journey to the past right now because we were actually in Toronto working on ragtime and we had to do remember this we had to do this conference call about about the song and then to get their notes on the song and I was very grumpy because I went to work on Cole House demands you know Cole house is burning down a bunch of buildings and you know I didn't want to split my focus you know and it was interesting that because they loved they loved the song but they felt that the bridge had too many notes to it and they and the head of music he said cannot be like oh oh just an audience wants.

[00:08:22] Yeah exactly. And I said Oh what you're saying is hold notes and all notes down and Hall notes are either got Bill you know Blanche whole notes or hell for lyricists because you have to you have so few choices four whole notes and it turned into home love family.

[00:08:38] Yeah yeah. Listening to the past and there's that few notes that they have to be like really big ideas. Yeah. And oddly you know that became sort of this not only the center of the song to to find that theme. It actually became the building blocks of the entire Broadway stage production because so much of the underscore and the other music is based on that bridge you know.

[00:09:00] So had we not had the gun to our head I think you know we you know we wouldn't have probably come up with that solution. So that was actually really good. It was Hollywood being helpful.

[00:09:09] It was Hollywood being helpful in its own Hollywood way. That's right. And I'm sure that's probably more than enough at this stage.

[00:09:16] But just to just to do a quick thing as it is it was always our dream to do that animated movie as a stage musical because we felt that a lot of the characters didn't get to sing in the in the animated movie the Dowager Empress never really got to sing and Dimitri never really got to sing and so we've had a wonderful time doing the Broadway version.

[00:09:38] Yeah well let's go back a little bit and talk about how did your partnership begin. How did you meet. What led you to write we start writing with each other and it's been a long partnership you've been writing together. How did we don't.

[00:09:48] We wrote our first song in nineteen eighty three in the spring of 83.

[00:09:53] We met in a musical theater songwriting workshop in New York City called the BMI Musical Theater Workshop and we had both joined this in 1982 because while Steven was just out of college and his whole goal in life was to be a musical theater writer and I had had about three careers prior to that I did write songs for children's television Schoolhouse Rock and other things and I did a lot of jingles and that was a whole career but I had never done theatrical writing and it sounded like fun and I joined the workshop and suddenly realized that this is what I should have been doing all along I just fell in love with the form. But for that whole first year Stephen and I never talk to each other. We know he never. He was very shy. He was very talented. He was writing his own lyrics and didn't need a lyricist and I was working with a number of different composers that year. And at the very end of the year he was scurrying by on 57 street as I was talking to some of my fellow classmates and he got all the way to the corner it's a long block and he screamed back.

[00:10:59] Get it. He projected. You know do you want to write a song and I couldn't believe he was even talking to me we'd never even set a low. And he was you know as weird as it was Shah and so we wrote a first song and it's 35 years or more later. Whatever it is now. Yeah.

[00:11:16] And our ways of working were very different. I had never collaborated before first. Firstly you know I was writing book music and lyrics by default you know coming from the Midwest and there was nobody else to do that with me.

[00:11:28] So I just. Okay. All right I'll just do it all myself. You know. But having done all of that I actually learned quite a lot about what it is that a book writer does what a lyricist does you know and.

[00:11:40] And it was it was actually a very good learning thing for me having to do everything myself.

[00:11:44] But you know I thought I should try this collaboration thing I should shake it up. So in a weird way like Linda's was in a weird way sort of my first date and then we just stayed together. You know.

[00:11:55] And we we wrote very differently you know because I came from more I grew up like listening to our and b in that kind of stuff. That's really what I liked you know. But then I had a classical background as well and you know I was used to going and scoring everything out on score paper and you know sort of sequestering myself.

[00:12:14] And Lynn was much more of an improviser tree because I was a songwriter and I was writing my own music but with a vocabulary of about five chords you know I have a whole career on FC G.D. you know maybe in an e minor in there somewhere you know and I but I'm very you know I can write a good melody but I really wasn't I'm not a a composer persay. And I felt I needed to in order to do musical theater I respected it too much to think I could write the music so that's why I thought I should collaborate and write a great melodies.

[00:12:43] You know she really understands like the shape of of the melody and how that supports language you know and that's that's a really important thing a necessary thing to know but Linda's used to like you know making things up in the room and if she denies this but it's totally true she said okay so.

[00:13:00] So make something up. And we were I had never made it right in front of anybody you know before in my life you know.

[00:13:08] And I was like Do you know if it was a good dare or was a good challenge and I think I think was really good for me it shook things up and it took us a while to get to know how to how to write with one another you know because our backgrounds were different.

[00:13:20] But I think that was a lot of the fun and that's what made it very kinetic because we were coming at the same thing from very different ways you know you find over the years that now you do come at things more from the same direction or do you still come from very different points of view and a right way or another.

[00:13:38] I think we're probably at this point where we're much more we feel more confident just making it up together. Yeah we were right together. It's like a ping pong match I'll think of a word or a couple of lines and he'll plunk on the piano first or all right words first you know it's that old what comes first. And it's sort of both together most of the time but I think it's because we've been working together for so long we're comfortable and you're not afraid to do something and have it be horrible. You know the other person is allowed to say you know I don't like that but what about this. And it's it's very non-threatening so yeah.

[00:14:11] And Lynn Linda's one of the few word people that I know that really appreciates music first like like give me a sketch give me a theme give me. And it doesn't necessarily have to be an entirely finished song you know but just something that indicates emotional state mood tone rhythm you know and I think that that's can be really helpful. You know and usually some of the longer sequences in our show and actually married dancing still we have some really elaborate sequences they are there things that we not only had to develop over time but with that we also had to develop with our director and choreographer to talk about you know how the book would interface with what was sung with the dance how the dance told the story you know and how it might be more efficient to tell something through dance as opposed to text you know. So those those kinds of sequences they were things that we all really had to develop with the actors too.

[00:15:06] Well I feel like we breezed past it but I do want to say I understand what an adverb is from Schoolhouse Rock. So I think I need to thank you for that.

[00:15:12] I didn't write that one that I want. Which ones. Which ones did you write. Oh I wrote tons of. Let's see. Well nouns if you know your name I know my nouns. OK. That's right. That was my all of grammar. All right nouns.

[00:15:26] Oh my God. Gravity. The preamble I wrote the preamble ladies and gentlemen to the to the Constitution recognition of applied constitute I wrote the Constitution I was you know unbelievable. It's done lots and lots.

[00:15:42] But also she's being modest she is also the singing voice of nouns and she is and her planet Janet.

[00:15:49] She is a Galaxy Girl. Yes. Am I and Sir you're like royalty. I well in the old days.

[00:15:56] Oh well so you must get suggested ideas all the time for people wanting you to write a musical. How do you decide what material your material you're actually going to invest in and work on. And how do you sort out ideas.

[00:16:12] That's the thing you have to be really passionately involved in in your characters lives and time for a long time. You know because you're gonna you're going to be living and breathing them daily.

[00:16:22] And usually it's if something speaks to me musically then I can almost immediately come up with musical ideas you know. And so if that's happening that's a good sign that if you're trying to come up with three songs or three moments and nothing is coming to mind then chances are either that's not a good idea for a musical or it's not a good idea for you for you to do that particular musical.

[00:16:48] But we. But well from my point of view I mean it's sort of similar. You know it has to speak musically to us but I also look you know they always say in a musical that characters begin to sing on the stage when they're so emotional they can't talk anymore. They just burst into song and that's what makes musicals believable because it's you know it's sort of seamless leaping from passionate speech into singing and you know I look for passionate characters people who are just filled with juice and emotion whether it's comic emotion or tragic emotion whatever it is. Those are the elements in the story that I personally look for you know in a story a wonderful story just a great story that grabs you and wants you wants to you know be read or be fought followed.

[00:17:33] Well speaking of like really great characters Ragtime is full of great characters and great situations and it's fairly sprawling. So how did you go about when you were approached to do it. Figuring out what to musical lives what characters to focus on what to sort of leave behind and leave out of the story.

[00:17:51] But this is another project hot on the heels of Anastasia where we also had to audition there was our period up auditioning. You know we had had at that point two Broadway shows and then some other off Broadway things. But I guess there wasn't anything that indicated that we could do this kind of a show. We had we had not had the chance to do that we had done a farce that had 10 actors we had done once on this island which had 11 and we knew that this was going to be about the you know the Making of America. And so we had the opportunity to get a treatment that was

written by the playwright Terrence McNally and the assignment was to write four songs on spec based on this sixty eight page document.

[00:18:33] And I think we both knew that we had to really show them that we were the people to do this show and so we had to be really really bold in terms of what we would choose to musical eyes and so the four songs that we did were the the opening number ragtime the closing of Act 1 which is Sarah's funeral called till we reach this day till we reach that day a song called gliding which was for the immigrant Tata which would be a very close up song and a song for Adeline that's.

[00:19:05] I think that leave on answer.

[00:19:07] Let me know who it is.

[00:19:10] And actually three of the four wound up staying in the show. Yeah. And yes. So.

[00:19:16] So we we chose those four four moments and that that got us the gig and then we started working with Terrence McNally daily. And the first first meeting we had to decide who are our main characters who are we focusing on.

[00:19:33] Yeah I'll just do a P.S. to that which is that if you've read the novel ragtime they're about a million characters. Everyone has their own chapter. Everyone is equally weighted from. JP Morgan is equal to mother and she's equal to coal house and he's equal to you know every character it has an importance. And so what we did with Terrence McNally was we decided that the main characters would be the fictional ones and the secondary characters would be the famous historical characters like Evelyn Nesbit and Harry Houdini and Booker T Washington and J.P. Morgan those people and Henry Ford and they would each revolve like satellites around our main characters so mother is being revolved by Emma Goldman who is you know the a woman on of the new century. And Evelyn Nesbit who is kind of a woman of the past century who's you know the creation of men and younger brother is energized by Emma Goldman's political aspirations coal houses influenced by Booker T Washington and so on so forth so that that made our lives easier in writing three interlocking stories. But it's it was a challenge. It was quite a challenge.

[00:20:45] And also we we we wrote chronologically so we literally started with the opening number which you know was revised you know endlessly but then we went to scene to and we wrote journey on that we went to scene three and and the way it would work is Terrence would write he'd be one scene ahead of us. So he would write a scene and we would get together at one of our apartments and he would read the scene and give it to us and then we would write present the song that we had just written. And then next week we would write the song for the scene he had just given us you know so a lot of the way the score evolved.

[00:21:19] It was really interesting because working chronologically you could set up these individual stories knowing that in act two that you would have all your materials and they would start colliding and being combined and it was really interesting.

[00:21:32] Typically you don't people don't write chronologically. That's a very unique process to go through. You usually know where you want songs and you work sort of at what inspires you first and we I think we're we start with a sort of a structured sort of a structure.

[00:21:48] We know what the beginning of the show is going to be. We know what the end of Act 1 is going to be. We know what we call it the technical act too which is sort of the curtain comes up on act 2 but there's another lyricist crisis in there crisis point. So that's technical Act 2 and then act 3 is when the curtain comes down at the end and we know those dramatic points most of the time so it makes it a little easier to structure it and to write chronologically which also helps in terms of logic of the story.

[00:22:17] So we knew like the larger tent poles but getting from place to place. That's something that totally revealed itself as we wrote which was which was exciting you know because we didn't always know where we were going to go next.

[00:22:30] You know musically speaking of music when we hear a song from ragtime. Yeah we have. We have ragtime fans. We're to hear our daddies your daddy son in a moment of heartbreak fear and despair. Sarah a young African-American woman has buried alive her newborn baby in the garden of a prosperous white woman. The woman rescues the baby and in a moment of compassion takes responsibility for the baby and his mother. Sarah since this child. This song to her child in the attic of their new home. Here tonight we have MS gonna take Lou. She is currently a senior I wouldn't know high school and we'll be attending the NYU Tisch School of the arts next fall but before she does she'll be performing on stage in the fifth Avenue's rising star project student production of West Side Story in July. Please welcome Ms Ghana to sing your daddy song. Boo. He played

[00:23:56] Played it very well. Music from those hands. Cool catch you like spill. He could make you love him for the

[00:24:30] Who. He never knew that you were on your way. He had other ladies and other tunes to play when he

[00:24:44] Left me. Just

[00:25:02] Couldn't hear no music.

[00:25:06] Couldn't see. No

[00:25:10] Momma she was crazy. Tunes without no comfort. Screams. Darkness. And pain. They. Gain. Group

[00:25:52] Daddy played. Oh Dad he's playing steam.

[00:25:59] Who can forget him. Don't suppose I do. God wants no excuses. Hi

[00:26:37] Thank you so much. I think you're a star in the making.

[00:26:42] That was amazing. High school high school.

[00:26:46] Now I know why you got into NYU.

[00:26:50] That song is so hard to sing and you can tell if a person is gonna be able to sing it or not by those just by the by the you know separates the women from the girls. You are officially a woman.

[00:27:02] We should we should talk a little bit about the song because it's an interesting way. Yeah it's an interesting story.

[00:27:08] Tell us about how how that song came to exist.

[00:27:11] Well it actually started because Lin had had some.

[00:27:16] I was the woman on the team yokes of the team of guy and the character of Sarah and in the novel bear does this terrible thing she gives birth all by herself.

[00:27:25] You know she's frightened she's angry she's abandoned and she takes the baby and buries it in the garden of this character and a mother and mother rescues the baby and actually takes Sarah under her wing which is an extraordinary act for a white woman at the turn of the century to do. And you know so I love my fellow collaborators and I've been the woman in the room for many years you know. But in this particular case this this character in the novel is a mute character she never speaks she never explains herself. She has no dialogue. And I kept thinking why did she do that. Why did she do that. How could a woman do that to her child. And I felt it was something that was so important to articulate in the in the show and for the character to tell us. Because if she didn't we would just never accept that character we would never care about her. We would hate her.

[00:28:16] And there is no there's not a clue in the novel. And there is no back story about how she and Cole has met. What drove her to this act. It's the same thing in the film to its Debbie Allen is Sarah. And she has no dialogue no you know virtually no dialogue and nothing to explain that. So we we basically talked about it this one afternoon about what the song would be and I couldn't figure out yet she never speaks to any other character in the show and I couldn't figure out well who's her singing partner who she's singing to. And then it dawned on us that it was the baby the baby if she had to sing.

[00:28:49] She had to sing an apology to that child that thank God you know lived so and outhouses and that was it.

[00:28:56] That was a song that we were writing together in the room because once we knew as the baby I knew it had to be a lullaby and the further we would get into it she gets in deeper than I think

she intends to at the beginning of the song and the fruit the forgive me line was so startling because I don't think either of us saw that coming. And I think it's the most powerful line and it's really the only line that doesn't have accompaniment. You know it's just naked it's it's on its own it's you know just in the air.

[00:29:25] And we wrote the song for Audra McDonald. She was doing our reading. She was in the other room and she had nothing to sing. She sang half of a song called wheels of the dream. She sang a little thing called President before she's murder like we had the end of Act One and then she had nothing on McDonald's is nothing like song and she's not singing. And so that so that was sort of an interesting thing because we knew was going to be addressed singing this this lullaby in that really informed the kind of singing and the approach to it.

[00:29:53] And it also made it so hard for. For future Sara's for future series because we right writing sorry for director for legendary singer.

[00:30:00] Yeah. And our producer had heard that we had written a new song that afternoon and you know I wanted to finesse it a little bit and he came in and it was it was the day of the company barbecue.

[00:30:11] And so basically he said he would not feed us. Let's play it for you unless you've played this song and the producers are very me.

[00:30:19] There yeah very mean and Audra can sight sing so is one of those scenes from a movie where she's just looking at what you've written down and she's singing it back to you. A sort of perfect and I just watched her face and that's how the accompaniment and the entire arrangement came out of that. Oh my gosh.

[00:30:36] And then we got to eat barbecue so it was a good day and he liked it.

[00:30:40] He said you can. He did. He could. Yeah. Well let's turn towards Marie which of course is still dancing which is still over at those at the Fifth Avenue for two more weeks. Can you talk a little bit about where the idea for Marie came from and maybe give us a synopsis of what the story is as well. Sure.

[00:30:56] I was up at a museum in upstate an upstate area Upstate New York Massachusetts area. It's called the Clark Institute of Art in Williamstown Massachusetts. And they happened to have one of the bronze sculptures of the little dancer the original one is made of wax and it's in the Washington National Gallery. But this is one of the I think 20 or so replicas or bronze casts from that original.

[00:31:24] And it's in the museum and I always look at her I've seen her a million times in a million places and I love the sculpture so much but for the first time I wondered who the girl was who posed for that sculpture. There she is. And I just kept looking at her face and she her eyes are half closed and there's so many she she has these skinny legs and I thought I wonder who she was what who

she inspired a masterpiece Who was she started doing research and I found out about this girl named Marie Von get'em who danced for the Paris Opera Ballet in 1881 and finding out about her led me into this whole amazing and fascinating beautiful and scary world of the ballet and of young dancers at that time who were treated terribly paid so little and yet it was a chance for them to pull their families out of poverty and they went through really excruciating conditions and and a lot of deprivation in order to dance and to try and save their families and she was one of those those girls.

[00:32:24] And so that happens to be Tyler Peck who is the ballerina star of New York City Ballet one of the now one of the great stars of American ballet right now. She is extraordinary and she's a force of nature. I keep saying a work of art a force of nature. You know that's that's what sums this show up and our story is how Marie met the guy and and what ensued and so much of the show is based on research in fact but it is a fiction because Marie vanished from the records and from history nobody knows what happened to her what she became she was dismissed from the opera they see you can see her name crossed out in the ledger but no one knows what really happened to her so we've constructed a story to imagine how she met Tigar how he became inspired by her and what might have happened to her after that and that's the story of me it's kind of a mystery and kind of a drama and kind of a just a gorgeous story set in the ballet. We brought the idea Stephen and I worked on it together for a bit and when then we brought it to Susan Stroman who is our brilliant brilliant director choreographer and she sparked to the idea immediately and and has just somehow created this visual feast for the eyes of dance and of movement and colour and it's extraordinary to look at. So I hope you get to see it. It's great really beautiful production.

[00:33:47] So when you wrote it there was not a book that just recently came up with this book came out the little dancer aged 14. I think it's yellow. Yes. When the book did come out were you terrified it was going to honor your story.

[00:33:58] I was so terrified I couldn't even read the last three pages I just I kept going Oh maybe they know what happened to her. Maybe they found out that she you know got married had three children and died a happy death. You know I don't know and I couldn't turn the pages at the end. And finally I did and we were right. Nobody knows.

[00:34:16] It was so good because in our research we could we found a lot about to God. And one of the really interesting and clever things that that Lynn has done in the script is a lot of the things that God says in the play are things he actually said in life. And it's so so.

[00:34:33] And he gets laughs You know and this guy was very witty very guy. You know riding on his coattails It was great.

[00:34:40] But we knew very little about Marie. And so that you know that was really sort of the fictionalized part how we wove in how they met how they might have collaborated what those sessions were like.

[00:34:53] What he got out of her what she got out of the situation and and it actually wound up coming a lot about what inspires what inspires you inspires art and also it's a lot about somebody two people really two artists having a goal and a dream and being frustrated in life by by those aspirations and yet somehow overcoming them and ultimately triumphing and it's just you know Tyler Peck There she is she's not just a beautiful dancer dancer she's a hilarious actress and filled with juice filled with spunk and we we we think that young Marie who was a street urchin who danced you know so hard to to save her family we think she must have been that way so we've given Tyler great scenes with lots of language she's she stands up for herself she talks back and she's funny and just she and Terrence man who is playing a guy who is hilarious and they're a brilliant actor and singer they're they're like the Dynamic Duo and earlier they were great and Tyler also demystified the world of ballet for us.

[00:36:01] She she literally allowed us to come you know behind the scenes and we got to see how how dancers really live what their lives are really like with their daily grind is like you know the repetition there's a moment that that speaks about repetition.

[00:36:16] And she she really let us in on all of that and I think it just enriched the work all the more I think it did too because I think one of the things watching it having seen it several times as you really get a sense of what it is like to be a dancer. Yes.

[00:36:29] Which I don't think I understood until I was your show and Terry man is married to one of the great Broadway dancers Charlotte and was his father in law's shop that was whose famous famous famous and his daughter is a star at the School of American Ballet. She's a young girl who very dance centric family so.

[00:36:46] So he was so excited just getting to play the God that it was about the world of dance and what dancers go through.

[00:36:54] Can you share in the writing of Marie still dancing what was one of the challenges that you encountered that you've been trying to work on and and make work. I mean has there been something that you've hit upon that's like Oh this is a challenge you talked about bringing the character in Ragtime and finding a musical voice for them. Has there been a challenge in Meridian something like that.

[00:37:18] Well I think we had previously done an earlier version at the Kennedy Center and I think the thing the lesson that we learned down there was there were so many interesting characters and interesting moments and interesting subplots and oddly like ragtime you know and it and ultimately I think the audience really cared about the central relationship of the guy. Anne Marie the the little dancer and so we began to refocus it on them mainly and paired a lot of the secondary secondary material allowed. And also we we really worked a lot on the guys score with the exception of one song it's virtually a new score of the production that we're doing here in Seattle and there was one major statement that he needed in an act two and that was the last song we wrote and again we wrote it for Terry Mann you know because we knew the performer we knew this is what he does well

this is the kind of thing that he that he does and I could just hear him in my ear as I was writing it so well.

[00:38:18] So you're writing for Terry as to guys opposed to just some character floating in the ether.

[00:38:24] Do you find it's easier once you know who's who's playing a role to write material.

[00:38:28] Yes. You know you have been Roger's voice in your ear or you have you know Terry Mann or whoever and you know what they're good at and you try to tailor it like a beautiful suit of clothes for the actor that you have. You know it's it's a joy to do that's really fun and they appreciate it too you know. Yeah.

[00:38:45] Who doesn't want to have a song written by these two.

[00:38:49] You know it's interesting try to make the movie look as great as they are. You know you don't want them to. You don't want to ask an actor to be hitting a high note when they can't.

[00:38:56] And it forces you to be really specific to with the kind of vocal writing that you're doing.

[00:39:01] There's one Broadway actress who's a friend of ours and she's done three different shows of ours she has never reached the stage with any of them yet just because of various still your friend she's still after she's won a Tony Award. So you'd like you. You got to like figure out the math that but she's she's wonderful.

[00:39:20] And the thing is she enriches the show even though she's never appeared in one of her musicals but you know that's what you count on her are smart actors and people that bring their own ideas to the room.

[00:39:31] Well your musicals have been embraced on Broadway and throughout professional theatre world but they also have unique residents for young people and in schools where they're frequent performed and of course I'm talking in particular about Susan call and it must be have been daunting to approach that whole world of Dr. Seuss and create a vocabulary to bring what already is its own unique vocabulary to life. There's a song book for I love that. Tell us about what that process was. Was that hard to do.

[00:40:00] I assume it was maybe you're going to tell me was easy know that the hard part was was that having that show produced that once the show got produced that's when it started to get hard. It was so fraught. When we got to play with it it was joyful Yeah. We both grew up knowing Dr. Seuss. My parents read me Dr. Seuss I had every Dr. Seuss book and stuff. And we started out reading them out loud to each other like kids you know just let's read them and they're so brilliant and so delightful that really the only challenge was they're all in Oh here I'll tell you a story and they're meant to be read aloud they're meant to be I read something about the books stock Dr. Seuss His name was Theodore Geisel here's how he came up with his style if you will he was on it apparently on a cruise

with his wife and their state room or whatever you know their cabin was too close to the engine and the engine kept him up all night to pocket a pocket a pocket of pocket pocket a pocket of pocket a pocket of that at it that it it edited and it turned into the rhythm to escape and to think that I saw it on Mulberry Street you know so. So our challenge was to change the rhythms here and there so that we didn't have a lot of songs you know every song would be just nothing the trip down that's it that's it but it was so delirious and delightful to write that show and you know it's a long story we don't have time for it here but we you know we had a travails on the road to Broadway as as Horton has Horton died during.

[00:41:24] We were kind of like the Horton twins you know going on a terrible terrible journey but ending up just fine at the end at the end and that the show has since since Broadway we took it back into our own care and feeding and we we made it better we we honed it a we made a version for young audiences we made a version for young performers and it now gets done everywhere and it's so wonderful because you know you two share theater with young people and to have them immersed in it and to know how to do it and tell stories and work together in collaboration it's just it's a wonderful way. It's wonderful for us to know that that's what happens and we just spoke to a group of Seattle teens the other day who were coming to see Marie and who were building wire sculptures of the little dancer and stuff and it was just a thrill to see how they embraced theater. It's wonderful.

[00:42:21] Well there's a song I think we'll sing it we'll do a song and dance tonight. That young audition is often saying it seems to touch something very deep in the hearts of young people at the beginning of their lives.

[00:42:29] We're gonna hear it sung by some of our favorite Fifth Avenue stars or one of our favorite stars Eric Ingram along with ninth grader a ninth grader at Decatur High School. Trenton Walker who is a future star I think and he's currently in Seattle's Langston Hughes teen summer musical program. And Eric in Trenton. You wanna come up and sing alone in the universe. As

[00:43:00] I've been guarding this clover for over a week getting laughed at for thinking a dust speck can speak well.

[00:43:10] Let them all laugh I'll try not to mind. For I have found something that they will never find. There are secrets on a leaf. In the water

[00:43:24] In the air. Hidden planets tiny worlds all invisible.

[00:43:30] Not a person seems to know not a person seems to care. There is no one who believes a thing I'd say. Well I'm fairly certain. At one time or other. Great thinkers all feel. This

[00:44:06] I'm alone in the universe so alone in the universe. I found magic. But they won't see

[00:44:20] They'll call me a lunatic. Okay. Call me a lunatic. They don't know but I will be.

[00:44:33] Because I have we. Yeah.

[00:44:37] Sy can fly round the moon and far beyond the sky.

[00:44:47] And one day soon I know there you'll be.

[00:44:54] One small voice in the universe. One true friend in the universe. Who believes in me

[00:45:10] Alone in the universe. So and they you know first my own planets and stars glow away.

[00:45:23] No one notices anything. Not one person is listening. They don't have any way.

[00:45:33] No way anybody that I have.

[00:45:38] I have my hands full. I can be the sky.

[00:45:49] Well some day soon you will hear my.

[00:45:57] One small voice in the universe. One true friend in the universe.

[00:46:06] Please believe in me.

[00:46:18] It's me. Jo Jo the man's son. Well well I'm Horton the Elephant.

[00:46:25] Are you real or are you a very large thing. Oh I'm real all right.

[00:46:30] I would state that in ink in my things. I think of a lot of strange things. And I go to a lot of strange places as if I had wings.

[00:46:41] I love a good think. Oh well for me that goes double sometimes. My things are what get me in trouble. And when you think. Do you dream. In bright colors. Me too. And I go to strange places like soulless saloon when you dream do you think you could fly to the sky.

[00:47:02] A little friend no one else could have things such as ours. Yes I have.

[00:47:08] We have names I can be on the sky high.

[00:47:19] You call my name and to set me free one small voice in the universe. One true friend in the universe. Who believes in me

[00:47:45] Good night Joe Joe. Good. Night Horton. See you and solace a little

[00:48:03] Thank you Eric and Trenton.

[00:48:07] That was a gorgeous performance of one of my favorite songs.

[00:48:11] It may inspire young people who inspires me to you know it just occurred to me that reminded me of the first song that we read and I wrote. I knew he was going to be the last to sign me. I felt the same way that that first siren which set something up to people in different places singing the same song singing a duet endure.

[00:48:30] And that was our first assignment as songwriters the first thing we ever wrote together and lo and behold it turned into that.

[00:48:35] All those years later I thought Oh my God this is the classic sign that we're writing I should say one thing. Thank you singers also to all of you all. All of you all of you wonder really.

[00:48:46] Thank you so when you and I touched on this a few weeks ago in the theater we were sitting and talking and could you share a little bit about what it's like knowing that your work has had an impact on young people in the way that it has you've written shows that are now performed by high schools all over the country. What is that like.

[00:49:08] Well it's so it's an honor you know and it's it's sort of awe inspiring to think about it we went to a theater conference called Junior at the junior theatrical and they hold it every year different places. And we went to Atlanta and there were six thousand children there all ages from fairly young to high school doing all sorts of musicals 15 minute excerpts that they would present and we were the guests of honor I guess and so we were led around to you know these various rehearsal rooms where we would get to see 15 minute segments and as you walk through the halls you saw the groups going by block those.

[00:49:47] Those are the ones on this island kids. Oh there go the super cycle. There go the ragtime kids. It was unbelievable.

[00:49:53] And at one point we were up on stage being like a panel panel. And the moderator said to the 6000 children in the audience how many of you have ever done Sue tickle at your school stand up and raise your hands. So the whole entire six thousand room virtually every guy was screaming and it was.

[00:50:13] And he said I'm sorry. Just standard stay right there. I had to take a picture. It took us. So it was like the most amazing thing I'd ever seen picture.

[00:50:23] It was so amazing and we were so truly honored. I mean truly awestruck it's it's just to think that you know the shows go out there and seem to the wonderful thing is like we get so many letters you know from people who say my school just did once on this island.

[00:50:40] It was the most joyous experience with the kids loved it. It was unbelievable and they're all best friends now and it bonded. It just so it means a lot. And and the coolest most recent thing I'll just tell the story really quickly get it. We got a letter beautiful articulate long letter from a high school junior in Houston and he said that his school was going to be doing had been scheduled to do ragtime and then the hurricane blew through town and wrecked the school and wrecked the homes of the students and they had to cancel the performance and everybody was or the whole show and everybody was devastated including him. He said it was just they all were just so so so terribly upset by having to cancel the performance but he had been cast as younger brother. And he said you know he said P.S. to the story is that the spirit of younger brother entered me and I have since that time I have marched in and then he named all these demons the me too and Students Against Guns and Black Lives Matter and this and that. And he had acted it made him an activist and he his picture was seen on the front page of The Houston Chronicle marching in a demonstration for students against guns and he's holding a sign over his head and his mouth is wide open and the sign says Make them hear you which is so it just killed me and you know when you realize that you are a show that you wrote as an entertainment and something that you liked has gone out into the world and even one change one heart like that is very moving.

[00:52:16] So it's in for four for me I I was that that theater kid you know and we we did school shows together. I wrote my first musical when I was your age when I was 14 you know and it was so meaningful to me and it was and to be able to give back in that way I just find it incredibly touching and in fact a show of ours that we had written called My Favorite Year which is about a young person who dreams of being a writer one day my high school did it and I got to see it in the auditorium where I wrote my first musical played by a 17 year old kid who wants to be a writer and it was like mindblowing on so many and oddly there are scenes in it that were better directed than the Broadway version which was also a bit of a surprise get out there like that. But it's it's it's something a lot of times whenever I'm writing I always imagined this person that I will never meet and he's in the audience you know and he's sort of like the the me because I learned about theater through record albums through studying scores. I actually saw very literal theater growing up you know I saw like what sort of drizzled down to Pittsburgh in those days. But it was really about responding to recordings and to scores and you know I'd like to I take it very seriously and we want to give back to yeah.

[00:53:40] We also if anybody is interested I don't know but the Dramatists Guild of America we highly recommend you join it if you're a writer.

[00:53:48] We started a program there probably 50 teen years ago called the drama skilled fellows program for emerging writers and it's four and we go and we mentor still we ran the program for eleven years I think and now we go back and do masterclasses I'm doing one the night I get back from your wonderful city the next night I figured I'm gonna be jet lagged but in a good way you know it'll be early for me.

[00:54:09] So I agreed to do the do the class and you know we do care a lot about passing on you know the wisdom of musical theater.

[00:54:18] Well it's a good segue way to my one of my final questions. What advice do you have for young black writers and songwriters like what what do you think people need to know if they want to do this Oh I have strength.

[00:54:31] For me it's the most collaborative of all art forms and because it's about storytelling but visual storytelling dance theatrical craft music orchestration. So I would say study everything that you possibly can. You know fi find out how dancers work.

[00:54:50] I sit in on a dance class take an art class really understand all of the different art forms that go into creating this thing that we call musical theater.

[00:55:01] And also if you're I don't know if anybody's who's a writer anybody writer here. Oh great. Good good good. Well you know if you find other writers start a little homework shop you know do it in your living room bring your work in and critique one another and be loving about it and always be supportive of fellow writers and fellow performers and and meet actors and get them to sing your work because you know speaking for her for us we don't sleep very well and we get we get great singers to present our work and that's you know but but just the the sense that everybody is a collaborator in musical theater everybody's trying to do it just make friends try and get your work out there and you know get good feedback and important and have friends that are honest with you.

[00:55:50] You know it's so easy to say oh that was the best thing I've ever heard. You know and the truth of the matter is as you know you should surround yourself with people that want you to be the best version of you that you can be. You know that's key.

[00:56:03] You do want them to say it's the best thing I ever heard on your opening night. That's their job. That is a good tip. Maybe we should put that in the little envelopes any other time that got memorable not on opening night. It's the best thing I've ever seen. That's a good line.

[00:56:22] Well I think we have time for questions from the audience so questions.

[00:56:25] Yeah right up there. Do you have a Marin Maisy story for us

[00:56:33] So many. Oh well I know if I can tell it in this company or. Gambaro involves a bad word but that's.

[00:56:42] Marin when Marin was a force of nature and one of the most beautiful people I've been wearing her bracelet every single day since she passed away and particularly to our show for good luck as she is she. She was an extraordinary person. I mean there were so many stories that I could tell on or on our opening night of ragtime. Mother made an entrance in her mother's house came out. It was a you know a house that in perspective a small house but a fairly large piece of moving scenery and her microphone was on and she was ready to make her entrance and the house went down. And from the wings you heard a bad word.

[00:57:22] Oh that's a bad word. She was just the salt of the earth and the spirit of joy. I just loved it.

[00:57:29] Love it when we first met her. It was around the time of ragtime and I was expecting her to be soprano girl you know because she had just an passion you know and I thought she was gonna be this ethereal soprano girl and man she could cast like a sailor you know.

[00:57:43] And she was so real and so could drink you under the table. She said she had we are neck and neck. Yeah OK. I wasn't she.

[00:57:53] She was she was the most fun and. And every single day we actually married and I arrived to New York City in the same month day and year and it was September 15th 1982. And so we would call one other and I say Happy first day that you or I arrived in New York and you know and she was she was the most trusting person she was loyal. She was a great friend a great great maybe activists to her for her own disease.

[00:58:24] And yeah she's she's she will live forever yeah right here. So much for your work. And. Your. Character. Is that. Right. It's a little bit of both. I think I mean I. We're you know many of our shows most of our shows have been adapted from source material right. So we you know from novels from movies and it's the story that attracts me as a book writer the musical milieu that attracts Stephen as a composer. And I think you know we tend toward even an even ensues sickle or even in my favorite ear. I think we're attracted to stories that have an element of seriousness to them that have something to say to us. That's where it starts and if we're moved by it if we're interested in it if it's historically intriguing you know it sort of speaks to us in that way. Little Dan is still calling it Little Dancer for him. Marie previously dancing still is based you know it's an original idea and that's most musicals are adapted because most most writing teams most songwriting teams are not playwrights. And I am exploring and you know getting better and better at being a book writer I've written about seven of books for about seven of our musicals now and this is I think the one I'm most proud of in a way because there's more scene work in it. And and part of that is because I was so intrigued by the history and by the research which is always a big element in shows that we do anyway. You don't we don't just write them we learn about the people in them you know so I don't know if that answers your question but kind of.

[01:00:11] And also I think one of the things that's if you look at all of our shows back to back and I don't think that this is by accident it's they're all about community they're all about a group of people right whether they're the WHO's or whether they're the people of New Rochelle or Harlem or you know the people who put together the ballets you know in Marie it's always about the community and and for me is that as a composer I don't think that there's anything more beautiful than group singing than it can be than the sound of a Kim community and not only singing the words but I get choked up and I just hear them breathing before they even saying you know what you hear this like collective breath of air. I get very emotional I just think it's the most profound sound I think that we that we have and so in and Anastasia My favorite moment is as they're leaving Russia and there's a song called Stay I'll pray you and it's there's not even an orchestra for half of the song you know I thought let's

just hear that naked human voice Let's hear them breathing and there's something about the community aspect and how it's put forth in an choral singing that I just find it's my favorite thing in the world we sold the key we sold the kids we sold them.

[01:01:31] So that made things easier were so once we add now we don't have we don't have kids we have shows and actors that say oh that's the actors count his kids do they tell they do yeah are a typical workday is what we discovered early on that I tend to be more of a morning person and Stephen is more of an F.. An evening person. So I'm all energized and ready to go and he's half asleep. But so if we meet at around eleven or twelve o'clock we have about four good hours before I start to pass out.

[01:02:01] So it's always like in the middle of the day.

[01:02:04] But when we first were we're working together I was a working musician in New York you know and I would be playing shows and that sort of thing.

[01:02:11] And so you're shooting out the highest point of your energy peaks of like 11:00 p.m. you know. So there's no way that I'm going to like be in bed by midnight. It just wasn't going to work. And and also I was a child insomniac and I think that sort of concerned my parents because I thought what possible kind of job can this kid ever get or hold down. And I think working in the theater that's the perfect job for them. You know worked out well.

[01:02:37] So and you know we just we just set out to write something we get together we talk we have coffee we have food whatever and we end it and we know what we're working on and if we get one idea in an afternoon of about four hours it's that's a good day.

[01:02:52] You know that's a good day although we're then we will write it. And usually the next day we'll have something to play for one another read to one another so yes it's.

[01:03:00] Yeah yeah. Every every day is different. And you have to be ready to grab the idea when it comes because it's not like a boss said like doesn't come every 15 minutes. You know you have to be ready for the idea. So the Fifth Avenue folks are so kind to help me get a piano for the hotel room so we're right next door to one another it's great. We share a wall and we have that piano. I'm like shy and that's it comes in handy because you know because you have to grab the idea when it's when it pops up.

[01:03:28] I would just add just apropos of nothing. But we're so happy to be in Seattle city so well we've never I've never been here and it's just it's such a nice city and these guys are so supportive and it just it's been fabulous.

[01:03:43] What did everybody at the theater. And that's been wonderful amazing even like the people at the stage door.

[01:03:49] They're incredibly well it's you know we're glad to meet you.

[01:03:53] So thank Seattle right. Read up here. Tonight talking about. Sort of your

[01:04:03] Big hits. I was wondering if the big bombs. Not always getting productions like. The ones in the silent musical Ragtime if you. That really means a lot to you that you wish. Yes.

[01:04:22] Yes there are there. There are three shows for my mind. Three of them. One of them one of them is Dessa Rose which is set in the antebellum South is based on a very well-known book called Dessa Rose about two women one white and one black who find each other the what these were is based on real people the the slave of the what black woman was a slave who was pregnant and in real life took part in a slave uprising was captured and they kept her alive until she gave birth because her child was property the white woman actually lived in the south on a plantation her husband was was missing or absent and she took in runaway slaves. So the novelist Shirley N. Jones Shirley Ann Williams excuse me put these two historical characters together and gave them a different ending. And it is such a powerful story and I love that musical and it's a tough one to get produced because you know it's not a blithe entertainment it's one of those shows that we care passionately about but so that's one. The second one is a man of no importance which does get yes I mean people do know it. And I think again it's about community about outsiders from society to an outsider. In that case a gay man in 1964 Dublin who you know learns the value of friendship and how friends can become your family. And that's a beautiful show that I think should be done everywhere all the time.

[01:05:55] I won't even take a boy I take it it should be done like Terrence and I you know it's so close to who we are.

[01:06:02] And Terrence actually had has has a dear friend who runs an amateur theater in Brooklyn called the gallery players and he just kept invoking them every day that we were working on that show and I think he was thinking about Let's make this a tribute for two people that do something just for the love of it because they love one another they love the community they love creating art and and and.

[01:06:27] And for me I really wanted to get the song that said in a confessional right because I spent so much of my youth in there you know and I was trying to explain to Lynn what that meant and I said it is now dark and it's you know you have all sorts of crazy thoughts and it's funny and it's you know terrifying.

[01:06:44] But that's another show that I'm so proud of and you know and the last one is called The Glorious one's which is set in the one person see the sound of one hand clapping there.

[01:06:56] It's about theater and it's about theater people and it's set in these 15 hundreds ish in Italy about this roving band of Canadian dell'Arte performers and it's a it's was one of the most delightful shows to that we had the experience of doing it was unbelievable.

[01:07:15] But the thing I love about it is it is about the changing guard of actors as the origin new ages into the into the role of the second banana woman and how they leader of the troupe who is the the leading man suddenly becomes the clown. And and how theater evolves from ragtag improvised theater to you know sort of a hardier more written down for minutes. It's about aging and I love that show and trend and trend and and style and and all that stuff.

[01:07:47] It took us so long. Oh by the way all three of these shows that Linds mentioned that they were all produced by Lincoln Center Theater in the smaller space of midseason new house theater and the glorious ones was one of the I think believe it was the took us the most amount of time of any of our shows to to finish. So so whenever I started I totally related to the young turk you know who is like ready to change the system and you know break it down from the previous generation and then 13 years later you're still working on the glorious runs.

[01:08:19] I so related to the middle aged character because in fact in that amount of time I had become the middle the middle aged character. So in a strange way it the fact that it took so long to create was actually an asset because I think we've we were able to really relate to every single character and I should say that the the mysterious Broadway actress that I had mentioned earlier okay. She she played that this will give you an idea of how long ago and how long this took. It was Donna Murphy and she played the UN Janu Sarah

[01:08:53] Some of you got that joke because Donna is not an engineer now that that that that's one of the shows that she she helped helped us within.

[01:09:03] And she Yeah and there's so much of her I think in there.

[01:09:07] Do you have time for like two more questions all right right here. Yeah.

[01:09:11] That's for children about a dog and a little down. And that was my only experience. About. Their relationship and I got the idea that she was very. Grumpy and. Not very nice proper and I. Got a lot more research to. Find out. Why.

[01:09:40] Well he was grumpy. He was he was a very complicated individual. And yet there's so much written about him. And there are also books of quotes from him and his poetry and all sorts of things. He he was basically a cranky witty curmudgeon who had very very close friendships for much of his life. And you could say he was he could be charming and he could be cruel and he could be a subject and he could be kind. He was a mixed bag as we all are you know. But he was known most of all for being very very grumpy. It's true. Very cantankerous and so we've I think Terence Mann captures that so well. But also you know brings to it the fact that yes he had a heart. Yes he he he tried to create that sculpture. He had to have had a heart and you know it's funny because people there's lots written about him and some people say Oh he hated women. He always showed when he was a misogynist he showed women in these awkward poses you know with the ugly bending and awkward looking poses. But in fact he you could also say that he. He showed women in their real

state their truthful state so that you could feel something for their plight and something for their struggle. And you know so he he's you you interpret him how you like and I think our show interprets him the way we would like him to see him you know.

[01:11:06] And I also love the scenes where Marie has an impact on him. And I think that that's there. There's some my favorite scenes I just I just love it because you know technically he's the guy with the power and she has none. And in fact she had this relationship actually empowers her and he actually learned something you know which I which I love.

[01:11:30] Yes yes that yes there's that but also it brings up the idea of like if you found your body changing and you were no longer able to see or hear. How would that affect your work how would you adjust how would that change your world. You know I grew up with perfect pitch and I found in my early 50s. Well I mean I would always somebody would come in and sing a song and I would always know it was in a like oh great you got the A. And one day I said oh great you got the A. And somebody said actually it's a flat and I. And then I went Oh it's great you got the g oh no it's actually a G flat. And I realized that my ears had shifted and then I got freaked out. Yeah but then I did it. I read an article by Oliver Sacks and it's about how in certain people it. Passed 50 you're hearing shifts you know. So I mean I was hearing everything but up a half step you know so it's almost as if somebody had moved every single doorknob in my house you know so I would go to open the door and then I would go and I know and I would know it would be you know and it was very strange and you know time is odd what it does to us and married Maisie over the course of time. But she I wrote back to before for her and the key of G. And after a while she could only sing it in G flat and what it was.

[01:12:49] And I said Marin this is so great it's just like old times you're singing it down a half step and I'm hearing it up a half step.

[01:12:55] So it is exactly exactly where we were you know.

[01:12:59] So there you go get one more question.

[01:13:03] I think right there in the middle you want to take one and I'll take the other I don't take. Which one you'd like. Okay well I'll take Germany on that was not elaboration right there. We saw it happen. Journey on is a song in case you don't know it. Which you know like the like. Alone in the universe where these two people are and like our first songwriting assignment to people in different places singing the same thing. Journey on is that only it's three people. Mother is putting her son to bed. Her husband is sailing out of New York Harbor off to the North Pole and coming into New York Harbor is an immigrant named Tata.

[01:13:42] And their fates will be entwined and each of them is singing a different idea related to journey taking a journey. I particularly love mother's journey that she's singing about what of the people who stay where they're put planted like flowers with roots underfoot. She is trying to journey in her own way while staying home while her husband goes off to the North Pole and Tata is coming in wondering why that. Guy on the other ship is going out. He must be a fool to leave this country. This

is an immigrant man coming in who is about to experience what it is like to be an immigrant coming to America. And as we all know it is not a bowl of cherries then or now. And father is leaving a wealthy man going off on adventure to you know maybe kill a couple of seals and you know bring home a bearskin rug and and he's singing his version of of you know travel and glory and journeying and so there are these three psychological states and three physical journeys or non journey in the case of mother.

[01:14:47] And it was it was it does kind of encapsulate all of the themes of the show America on the move the Industrial Revolution the women stepping into the 20th century immigrants making it clear that they are arriving you know with purpose. And the white privileged class kind of sailing off into the sunset you know. And I think that that song is wonderfully thematic for the show. And we used it you know that that the motif later on in the score. So I don't know if that answers your question.

[01:15:22] But Terence had presented us with that scene and in fact it was three separate scenes and I I thought whoa wait a second this could be a trio. And so I I started like free associating it at the piano and I thought what would be the common denominator that could you know hold all of them together and I started realizing it's the water you know it's the water so I started writing this doo doo doo doo doo doo this like this ebb and flow piece of music that then I realized you could put all of these stories over it and let the audience you know draw that triangle which becomes so central to act to just so that you know when you know we say we write in order but really what you do is you just keep writing and then suddenly you go oh this could be reprieves didn't act to or you go oh we should include this theme in the opening number.

[01:16:16] And you know and so it's really it you know musicals don't just shape themselves and sit there they're very fluid until you finally figured out but so much of that particular one that was really from Terence is seen Yeah I do.

[01:16:28] I mean yeah bye my love. God bless you. And I suppose yeah. And I just started setting music. Yeah I mean Lynn crafted the lyric you know and mothers bridge became the center of journey.

[01:16:39] That was the first actually that was the first scene that Terrence ever gave us. Goodbye my love. God bless you and I split I suppose Bless America too. Those were the lines and I remember opening his page this page that he had written is seen in a taxi and was the first thing he'd handed us and I burst into tears because I thought we can do this as a musical this is gonna work. And that became that so I really was so relieved you know.

[01:17:04] And so what I'm so happy you like that song because it was almost cut. I also have to add that oh yes.

[01:17:10] Everything was almost cut though you know I had to go and I said I because everybody kept saying When's the plot going to kick in which was mother finding a baby. And and it was you know it was hard keeping that in there but we did and I'm glad we did because it's it's you know it's

good. And then our children were it was a very easy song to write. That was a song that was lyrics first Berlin wrote The Complete lyric and didn't change a word and and I pretty much just said it there's a real simplicity to it. It was also the favorite song of our producer out of the entire score that was his favorite song right there and there was something about watching two people fall in love as they sing about their children and how that moment. That's that's the seeds of what becomes a family in the last scene. And I think and I think we knew that's where we were going to go and and that's I think that someone with a fallen love Well thank you.

[01:18:07] I'd love to ask our performance to come up one more time and take a bow.

[01:18:10] And Matt Perry who is at the piano as Adam called I so Grace.

[01:18:20] Of course I thank you to the Seattle Public Library for hosting us tonight and to our guests Lynne and Steve.

[01:18:24] Thank you for sharing some insights into your house.

[01:18:26] Thank you for having us here. Thank you everybody.

[01:18:34] This podcast was presented by the Seattle Public Library and Foundation and made possible by your contributions to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. Thanks for listening.