

The Magic Show

The hit musical *The Magic Show* musical, with music and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz and book by Bob Randall, ran on Broadway from May 16, 1974 to Dec 31, 1978, a total of 1920 performances. It featured magic by Doug Henning and some of Stephen Schwartz's most enduring songs, "Lion Tamer," "West End Avenue," and "Two's Company." An altered version was filmed for Canadian television in 1981 and is available on DVD.

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Magic Show Song "West End Avenue"

Context for West End Avenue

Question:

I have been asked to sing "West End Ave" at a fundraising concert and have been searching for a synopsis of the Magic show but don't see to be able to find one (I do get a link in google search but it's dead). I'm not sure what the deal is with the character singing it, does she hate NY in general? or just The West Side? Please any help any of you can offer would be most appreciated
Thanks Rebecca (Australia)

Answer from Forum visitor:

Though I'm not officially on the Schwartz Team, I'll pretend I am for a moment and give you the plot line of the MAGIC SHOW as outlined in the now-out-of-print vocal selection book: "The entire evening takes place in a third rate night club in Passaic, New Jersey called The Top Hat, where a local magician, Feldman, and two singers, Donna and Dina, are hoping to make it to the big time. The dizzy chorines imagine themselves 'the rock 'n roll explosion,' and the only things the old boy in a top hat can make disappear are the whiskey bottles. A quick substitute, Doug Henning, is called for, and not a moment too soon. The drunken old magic man and the tacky singers embark on a plot to sabotage the newcomer's act so that a big agent from New York will recognize their talents instead. The romantic involvement appears in the form of Henning's sometimes unwelcome apprentice, Cal, who finds double competition in the prestidigitator and the conjured up glamorous new assistant, Charmin." It's the character of Cal, by the way, who sings "West End Avenue." Hope that this has helped. Shawn McCarthy

Answer from Michael Cole:

I know Shawn has already responded to this, but I thought I'd add this. It was written by Jim Morris who took over for me (as Stephen's assistant) while I was doing Dream True. Hope it helps.

It takes place in this dumpy little club in New Jersey. The magician that normally performs there is a drunk. His name is Feldman. Because he is drunk all the time, the owner of the club brings in Doug Henning's character, also named Doug. Well, he is very unconventional as far as magicians go. Feldman points this out in "Style". Doug has this assistant who is quite a chatterbox, named Cal. She is in love with Doug, but he doesn't notice her. Which is why she sings "Lion Tamer". Donna and Dina are the rock act in the club. One of them dates the nephew of some big agent named Goldfarb. Goldfarb is coming to the club to check out Donna and Dina as a favor to the nephew. Everyone is excited, especially Feldman.

Meanwhile, Doug realizes he needs a beautiful assistant. Cal gets mad, as if to say "what am I, chopped liver?". She tells him she's just going to go back to West End Avenue. Meanwhile, Doug conjures up the beautiful Charmin. Who says that when Goldfarb gets a look at her, it's Doug's act that he will love. Donna and Dina get worried, and along with Feldman, plot to expose the secrets to Doug's tricks during the show. They, of course fail. Doug realizes he loves Cal, and gets to her before she leaves. Charmin is sent back to wherever she came from. Feldman tries to do an act with Donna and Dina. etc.etc. Happy ending! This was the Readers Digest version. Hope it works for you. Best, Jim Morris

West End Avenue Song continued

Thanks very much Shawn. It does help. But I am still a bit confused. You see I am from Melbourne in Australia and although I would love to be able to say I had been to New York, I have not, therefore I don't really understand the New York references. Is West End Avenue a lower, middle or upper class area? I take it she is having to return home because her relationship with Doug didn't work out, professionally or romantically? Please help. I can't sing the song if I don't understand it. Thank you in advance. Rebecca (Australia)

Answer from Shawn:

Rebecca, I think, in a nutshell, (and this is just my interpretation of it, which by the way, is one of my favorite Stephen Schwartz compositions) West End Avenue is about Cal coming to the conclusion that both her career goals (being a lion tamer) and romantic aspirations (Doug) are not going to materialize the way she's hoped they would. Therefore she must return home to her roots, West End Avenue, a place that she doesn't want to become a part of again because she doesn't relate to the neighborhood, the people there i.e. the lawyers and the shrinks, the surly doorman etc. or what they represent. By the end of the song she's convinced that there's no point fighting the inevitable, thus the lyric, "West End Avenue, you win again." Hope this helps... Best, Shawn

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear Rebecca: West End Avenue is basically a middle to upper-middle class neighborhood. It is the type of neighborhood from which rebellious teenagers flee, swearing not to grow up to be their parents, only to return (in many instances) some years later and grow up to be precisely their parents. Does that help? Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

Answer from Carol:

I'm new to New York City but one thing I wanted to see when I got here was West End Avenue because of the song. It's just a long street with nice brick and modern buildings that runs parallel to Broadway on the West Side, mostly Upper West Side parallel also to Central Park. I like the Upper West Side because it has a high concentration of good health food stores. The other day I went down to the historic district on the Lower East Side where I believe some of the character for the musical RAGS would have lived. Completely different story, with the metal fire escapes criss crossing the fronts of the buildings down relatively narrow streets (though not as narrow as some in the Village). By the way your question is a really good one because it is hard to understand and the song is left out of the DVD/Video of the show made for Canadian television for this very reason. They didn't think the audience would grasp the New York City references. You can stop by my website for more Magic Show information if you want.

Warmly, Carol de Giere Webmaster for the independent Schwartz fan site

<http://www.musicalschwartz.com/magicshow.htm> and

<http://www.musicalschwartz.com/west-end-avenue.htm>

West End Avenue

Question:

My voice teacher chose West End Avenue for me to perform at her next student recital. In rehearsal, when I performed the song, she said I was too angry. I think the singer is angry and maybe disappointed that she is back where she didn't want to be. My voice teacher says she thinks it is just an energetic picture of life in the city and I should "act" more positive. She is the boss- so I am changing my approach. Still, what was the tone meant to be? I saw the show when I was 10 years old (the first Broadway show I ever saw) but I don't really remember this part. Thanks

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear Barb: I agree with you that the character is disappointed and bitter about having to go back where she started from. That feeling certainly should be contained in the performance, and given the lyrics and character of the music, I think it's unavoidable. Perhaps your teacher was trying to encourage you to find other colors in the performance -- irony, humor, wistfulness, determination, etc., all of which can be found in different lines and sections of the song. Also, sometimes a performance is more interesting if some of the emotion is subtextual, and this may be what your teacher meant in suggesting you "act" as if you are positive, at least at some points in the song. To do the entire song angrily would I think be too one-note, and this may be what your teacher was objecting to. But I would agree that it is certainly not a positive song celebrating the energy of the City, that it is essentially an angry and ironic song. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

West End Avenue: Radar Ranges?

Question:

Hi Stephen. I recently took the plunge and turned my Stephen Schwartz songbook to -- gasp -- West End Avenue. The first few times through reminded me very much of my experience in high school playing piano for "Godspell," a traumatic but exhilarating experience that introduced me to your unmatched lifework. In any event, I am very curious about the alternate lyric for "Delis and laundromats and gay bars . . . only a block away from Zabar's." Specifically, it is "Cable TV's and radar ranges . . . everything moves, but nothing changes." I have asked everyone I know what a radar range is, and they don't know, so I'm turning to the author himself. I'm assuming that these alternate lyrics were written to combat out-of-towners' unfamiliarity with the sights and sounds of West End Avenue circa 1975, though I suppose they might have been written as an alternate lyric for singers who would be performing to, say, a cabaret or pop audience who wouldn't understand how the sardonic reference to gay bars was germane to Dale Soules' character in the show. Any insight you can shed on what a "radar range" is ... and the birth of alternate lyrics there ... would be much appreciated. Great song!

By the way, it was so nice speaking to you after your concert in mid-August in Marlton. The concert -- and especially the Stephen Schwartz part of Stephen Schwartz and friends -- was breathtaking. Congrats! Michael Dube

Answer from Michael Cole:

I'm taking this opportunity to let forum visitors know that Stephen is currently under a couple of writing deadlines. "Radar Range" was a term used for early microwaves. I'm still going to forward your question on to Stephen, as I'm sure he'll have some other insights, but here is a blurb from a site I found on the internet explaining the history of the microwave oven: By 1975 Sales of Microwave Ovens Exceeded that of Gas Ranges. Technological advances and further developments led to a microwave oven that was polished and priced for the consumer kitchen. However, there were many myths and fears surrounding these mysterious new electronic "radar ranges." By the seventies, more and more people were finding the benefits of microwave cooking to outweigh the possible risks, and none of them were dying of

radiation poisoning, going blind, sterile, or becoming impotent (at least not from using microwave ovens). As fears faded, a swelling wave of acceptance began filtering into the kitchens of America and other countries. Myths were melting away, and doubt was turning into demand.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz: Hey Michael: A radar range was a frequent consolation prize on quiz shows, as in "and an Amana Radar Range." It's the kind of thing upper-class Westsiders might have in their kitchens. The alternate line is offered for those whose audience is not familiar with Zabar's. Best, Stephen

Did He Really Slap You?

Question:

I was listening to "The Stephen Schwartz Album" today and thinking about your comment in the booklet that when you met a certain arranger, he slapped you across the face for "making him" play all the time changes in "West End Avenue". That's so unbelievable! I'm assuming it was a playful slap and not a real slap of anger. But I liked your comment to him that the meter is natural and conversational if one just follows the lyric. I don't read music, but could tell this was true just by listening. On songs like this with the varied rhythms and time signatures, do you write the lyrics first and then fit the music to them?

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear Peggy: Yes, don't worry, it was certainly a playful slap, and we both laughed and became friends thereafter. As to writing songs like this: it's not so much writing all the lyrics first as it is getting an idea for a line like "All of your life you wake up to the blank and the blank" and having that suggest a tune and rhythm; then thinking of what specifics might fill in those "blanks", while the music and rhythm of the line begin to suggest the rest of the verse. And so on. Of course the process is much more unconscious and automatic than this, but the point I wanted to make is that it's not as cut-and-dried as sitting down and writing a lyric like a poem and then setting the music or vice-versa, it's sort of a back-and-forth process. Of course, when I am functioning just as lyricist and not writing both, the process is somewhat different; in that case, I will usually have all or most of the music first. Thanks as always for your interesting question. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

Question re Time Signatures

Question:

I loved in West End Avenue and Lion Tamer in The Magic Show how the music flowed in 7/4 and/or 9/4 time. Wonderful. I wanted to know if that was a deliberate choice, or was the melody or words just taking you there? It feels so normal hearing it that way, but it is so inventive. Btw - I finally got to visit West End Avenue in NYC on a recent visit and couldn't resist bursting into song. Fortunately, it was New Year's day and there weren't many people in that particular block at that moment! ;-)

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear WickedLover: In a song like "West End Avenue", the lyrics and music more or less came together, and so the rhythms were determined by the natural flow of the words. I tend to write at the piano and then write the music out later. I was quite surprised when I wrote out "West End Avenue" by all the changing time signatures! But since that was what I felt the lyrics demanded, I didn't try to "neaten them up". I don't really think about time signatures per se when I'm writing, except to be aware of something like: "Well, every other song in this show has been in 4/4 so far, so maybe I ought to do something in 6/8". Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

Two's Company

Question:

Hi! I'm doing a duet of "Two's Company" for an acting class. I have found out what the show is about, a little. I was wondering if someone could tell me which two girls sing that song, and what, exactly, they're fighting about?? I need to know my characters better (since we haven't settled on who has what part yet) I GREATLY appreciate any help anyone can give me! THANK SO MUCH!!

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

In THE MAGIC SHOW, the song is sung by the two "backstage" girls, Dina and Donna, as a sardonic send-off to Cal, the girl who is secretly pining for Doug's affection and whom Doug makes disappear during the song. Out of context, the song is usually sung as a sort of rivalry between the two singers, somewhat like the "Jealousy Duet" from THREEPENNY OPERA.

The Magic Show DVD

[Question about MS DVD]

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

The DVD of THE MAGIC SHOW was made from a production that was done for Canadian television back in the late 70's. Many of the changes were adjustments made for a Canadian audience (for instance, the substitution of "Where Did the Magic Go?" for the more geographically specific "West End Avenue".) If I remember correctly, "Solid Silver Platform Shoes" was changed because platform shoes had gone completely out-of-style at that point and the references felt dated. The plot of the show, however, is pretty much identical to the original. I know many who get the DVD now are somewhat disappointed that it is not the same as the Broadway production, but the Canadian movie wasn't attempting to be a historical record at the time. I hope you can enjoy the DVD all the same. Thanks for writing and best wishes, Stephen Schwartz

Rights?

Question:

Stephen, i am enquiring about your musical The Magic Show. We don't hear alot about it. Are the rights available to perform. I heard that you are reworking this show and then preparing it for Broadway. Is this true? I would love to hear some news. Mostly if the rights are available, if not when? Because this also an amazing show. I look forward to hearing from you in the near future. Kindest regards and much love, TJ OX

Answer from Michael Cole:

From the Frequently Requested Information Section of Stephen's site: Currently, the stock and amateur rights to THE MAGIC SHOW are unavailable. It is uncertain when the rights to this show will become available again as Stephen feels the book of the show needs to be re-written. Unless and until a major production happens - affording the opportunity to rewrite the book - he will not allow the show to be performed. So we can only hope one day someone will decide to mount a full-scale production. There has been some noise about possible productions here and there, but I haven't heard anything in some time.

Cut Songs from The Magic Show

Question:

I was just visiting with a friend who had a copy of MAGIC SHOW on video. It was with Didi Conn and Anita Morris. I think he got it when he lived in Toronto.....anyway I LOVE LOVE LOVE this score and play the CD over and over. BUT How come so many of the songs were gone in this tv version? I was too young to see the show on Bway years ago and hoped this tv version would be the same....And why were so

many of them rewritten for this tv presentation? Even Anita Morris had a different number and Didi Conn didn't sing LIONTAMER (which might have been a good thing!) Did the musical change when it toured or is the cast album not the right version? I was just curious. I watched waiting to hear LIONTAMER and WEST END AVE and was disappointed. Thanks!

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Thanks for your message and for your enthusiasm for THE MAGICSHOW. Several changes were made in the score for the Canadian television version, some at my instigation and some at the suggestion of the producers. It was decided to replace "West End Avenue" because the producers felt Canadian audiences would not be familiar enough with the locations. Similarly, the producers asked me to replace "Solid Silver Platform Shoes" because they felt the number seemed dated at the time (platform shoes were out.) I chose to replace "Charmin's Lament" with "Admired from Afar" because I felt the lyric was a little ... well, smutty for an audience that was going to consist largely of children, and I replaced "A Bit of Villainy" with "A Round for the Bad Guys" just because I thought I could write a better song for that spot (and believe I did.) In terms of "Lion Tamer" -- in my memory, Didi does sing it (during the water illusion), so maybe you have an incomplete copy; check it again -- it should be the third song. Thanks again for your interest and for taking the time to write. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

Lion Tamer for Men

Question:

I have a question about "Lion Tamer," my favorite song of yours. Recently, as a sort of break from the rigors of law school exams, I was coaching Musical Theater undergraduates preparing for "juries" (you surely remember) at a local university. Upon the completion of the formal rehearsal, the singer I was accompanying asked, rather surprisingly, "Do you know Lion Tamer?" And fortunately I did, because he delivered a fantastic rendition! Now, as my newfound friend is gay, he had no lyric problems, as the lyric genuinely reflected his emotion and wasn't awkward in spots like "maybe I could work up to men." The fact that he was able to perform it so well (he had me play it in D) led me to think, I wonder if any male performers who do not happen to be gay, or who in any event want to get into a character that is singing about a woman, have ever found a satisfactory way to perform the song. Have you personally ever written alternate lyrics to the song? Of course, I could see how it wouldn't work, as every lion tamer I've ever seen is a girl, but the song can work on a second, metaphorical level. Surely over the past twenty-five years some male has wanted to sing it with changed lyrics. And if they haven't, I will be the first to ask (although, I assure you, it is hardly "false modesty" to say that I am not a vocalist by any stretch of the imagination), as I'd like to sing it, at least in the shower, to a girl. (Who, with any luck, will be in the shower as well!) In any event, do you have any lyrical suggestions?

Thanks for your reply! I hope you are well, and I look forward to seeing "Pippin" (with real vocalists!) and attending your lecture in New York on the 11th. Yours, Michael Dube

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear Michael: I have heard "Lion Tamer" performed and even recorded by guys occasionally over the years, but they were generally gay and didn't change the words. (Recently, a wonderful singer named David Burnham performed it at a big "tribute" benefit concert they do every year in LA and that this year featured my music along with Charles Strouse and Arthur Schwartz. But to tell you the truth, I can't remember if or how David changed the words.) The problem is that aside from the fact that "maybe I could work up to men" is a line that rhymes (with "move on to tiger cubs and then") and therefore is difficult to change simply by substituting a noun of a different gender, the whole song is feminine in

orientation ("I couldn't be a ballerina" etc.) Sorry about depriving you of a song for the shower -- maybe you could sing "Proud Lady". Best, Stephen

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

<http://www.musicalschwartz.com/magicshow.htm> for DVD and other info.

The Stephen Schwartz Songbook includes sheet music for "Lion Tamer" and "West End Avenue" c
<http://www.musicalschwartz.com/schwartzsongbook.htm>

For Broadway show data including length of run and cast, see
<http://www.ibdb.com/production.php?id=3468>